

“APARTHEID” IN FRANCE:
GALVANIZATION OF POLITICAL CONCERN FOR THE ROLE OF
ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN FRENCH SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

“Apartheid” in France:
Galvanization of Political Concern for the Role of Ethnic Identities in French Society

The French state’s colorblind policy prescription is the base of a contentious, current debate over whether or not the government should acknowledge ethnic and racial components of its citizens and collect such data from minority groups. An increasingly colorful population presents new questions to the framework of French identity, legally blind to ethnicity, and tests the durability of the French model. Has the role of ethnic identity in France become a legitimate political concern under President Hollande’s administration despite legislation that outlaws ethnic data collection? Is the illegality of ethnic statistics detrimental to combatting discrimination and social fragmentation in France? Could the potential achievement of social stability outweigh the costs of straying from French values of a colorblind State? This thesis examines the support for and against the official collection of ethnic and racial statistics through the census, and considers why the need for discussion of multicultural identities has become imperative to maintaining social stability in the French Republic. In addition, this thesis questions if and how the practice of ignoring such data as a component of identity has been consequently detrimental to the formulation of public policies aimed at discouraging discriminatory practices and protecting the status of racially and ethnically diverse citizens in France. The issue of ethnicity has been embodied by current political discourse in President Hollande’s government, galvanizing an urgent call-to-arms to combat ethnic discrimination and social fragmentation.

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

“It is prohibited to collect or process data of a personal nature that reveal, directly or indirectly, the racial or ethnic origins, the political, philosophical, or religious opinions, the union membership, the health or the sexual life of persons.”

-Loi Informatique et Libertés, Act No 78-17 of 6 January 1978

According to the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (Insee) population projections, there are 66,317,994 inhabitants in France as of 2015.¹ The institute further breaks down the headcount into two *indicateurs démographiques*²: age and gender. The population consists of over thirty-four million women total. There are currently 801,799 people of the age 29 in France. Over eight million males are under the age of 20. Based upon definitive numbers from the 2012 census, Insee gives specific predictions of the French population by age group and gender as of January 1, 2015. The two chosen demographic indicators indicate factors of identity rendered inherent by the French government. While population statistics also consider differences in the populace’s nation of birth and immigration status, they lack ethnic or racial categories to calculate the existing diversity of modern French citizens. By strictly dividing population

¹“Population totale par sexes et âge ai 1er janvier 2015, France,” Insee (2015).
http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/detail.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=bilan-demo&page=donnees-detaillees/bilan-demo/pop_age2b.htm

² “demographic indicators” used to measure the population as designated by Insee.

data into age, gender, and citizenship status, the state adheres to its Republican promise to ignore ethnicity as a distinction in French identity and as a political influence.

The ideologies upon which the first French Republic was founded are deeply rooted in the revolutionary slogan “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*,”³ intended to protect the French people within one, indivisible state. The goal of this abstract paradigm entrenched in the French subconscious is to provide freedom from oppression to ensure equality amongst a brotherhood of French citizens—a goal pursued by the illegality of official ethnic statistics but ultimately compromised by purposeful ignorance of diversity. The second line of Article 1er in *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789 further states that “Social distinctions may be founded only on considerations of the common good.”⁴ Though this article was conceived in the context of the Old Regime, in which privilege ensured distinction and constituted the foundation of society, its engrained principle has maintained relevance and been protected well into the 21st century. Among the seventeen articles establishing the universal rights endowed to man, the founders of the French Republic designated the first to devaluing the usefulness of social distinctions in order to assign precedence to man’s uniform identity as a French citizen. If social distinctions, such as ethnicity and race, do not contribute to the “common good,” then the merit of civic identity is held in higher esteem to the Republic than societal classifications. Civic identity attributes identity to one’s role as a citizen in contrast to an identity based on social constructions and cultural differentiations. This notion renders factors of race, ethnicity, and religion politically irrelevant within a homogenous body of citizens united under the Republic. It can be argued that it is because of its Revolutionary

³ “liberty, equality, fraternity”

⁴ “Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l’utilité commune.”

and Republican principles that France “simply cannot think in terms of racial groups,” but analysts and historians “frequently overlook or soft-pedal race-conscious elements” of French history that prove that racial and ethnic divides infiltrated the legacy of colonialism and post-colonial relations.⁵

Because the French government outlaws state-initiated collection of data regarding racial and ethnic demographics, non-recognition of racial and ethnic minorities as an existing social group has become an institutionalized practice. French national narrative reveals a history of a culture valuing identity as a citizen over alternative social distinctions deemed irrelevant—a principle clearly defined in the Constitution. The result is a rigid social framework that only offers foreigners the opportunity to assimilate into a predetermined French identity rather than integrate into society under proposals of multiculturalism. Distraught by rabid tensions between the *Français de souche* and the *Français de papier*⁶, the French government is confined by its founding principles that restrict the political sphere from using ethnic discourse as a tool to discuss discrimination nationwide. While defenders of Republicanism laud ethnic non-recognition as a means of preventing discrimination, the evident marginalization of minority groups in France cannot be ignored. In fact, Prime Minister Manuel Valls warned, “It is necessary to regard the reality of our country,”⁷ followed by a bold accusation that his country has become a “territorial, social, and ethnic apartheid”⁸ in his January 20 *voeux à la presse*

⁵ Erik Bleich, “Antiracism with Races,” *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2000), 53-54.

⁶ “Souche” translates as descent, thus the *Français de souche* refers to an exclusive group of those who are of French descent. In contrast, “papier” translates as paper and refers to those who immigrated and are merely French by documentation.

⁷ “Il faut aussi regarder la réalité de notre pays,” translation mine.

⁸ “apartheid territorial, social, ethnique,” translation mine.

speech.⁹ The Prime Minister's use of polemical discourse such as "ethnic apartheid" in a public political sphere accustomed to silently overlooking such minority conflicts suggests the rising need to address the ethnic and racial components of society that interfere with social cohesion as a result of their invisibility.

The French state's colorblind policy prescription is the base of a contentious ongoing debate over whether or not the government should acknowledge ethnic components of its citizenship and collect such data from minority groups. The Republican strategy of "equality through invisibility,"¹⁰ as described by French demographer Patrick Simon and explored in a later chapter, has grown more and more contested in recent decades marked by an influx of ethnically diverse (and predominantly North African) immigrants, who vary from the initial waves of immigrants in the early 20th century arriving from other European countries. An increasingly colorful population presents new questions about the concept of identity in a colorblind French state that is not yet capable of providing answers. As the debate escalates and social tensions require more and more attention, discussions of ethnicity have migrated from the streets of France to the lips of President François Hollande's government. This brings me to my thesis question.

Has the role of ethnic identity in France become a legitimate political concern under President Hollande's administration despite legislation that outlaws ethnic data collection? This question is followed with sub questions. Is the illegality of ethnic statistics detrimental to combatting discrimination and social fragmentation in France? Could the potential achievement of social stability outweigh the costs of straying from

⁹ Sylvia Zappi, "Manuel Valls, l'apartheid et les banlieues," *Le Monde* (2015), http://www.lemonde.fr/banlieues/article/2015/01/26/manuel-valls-l-apartheid-et-les-banlieues_4563754_1653530.html

¹⁰ Patrick Simon, "The Choice of Ignorance: The Debate on Ethnic and Racial Statistics in France," *French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (2008), 7-31.

French values of a colorblind State? This thesis will first explain ethnicity and its significance as a component of identity to provide context for my thesis question. The introductory chapter will conclude with background of the census in France and context for the establishment of categories used by the census. In the second chapter I shall examine the current debate for and against the official collection of ethnic statistics through the census and consider if the need for discussion of ethnic identities has become imperative to maintaining social stability in the French Republic. In addition to consideration of the role of ethnic statistics, I shall question if and how the practice of ignoring such data as a component of identity has been consequently detrimental to the formulation of public policies designed to discourage discriminatory practices and protect the status of ethnically different citizens in France. The third chapter will discuss the ways in which ethnocentric issues appear to have obtained legitimacy in the political sphere under President Hollande's government. Ethnic issues that were previously masked as geographic or socio-economic concerns in need of policy reform are now accepted for their ethnic dimension in political discourse. In the fourth chapter I plan to compare and contrast the role of ethnic identities in the very different approaches to diversity employed by France and the United States. I will employ qualitative research methods to draw data from an analysis of primary and secondary sources in English and French. I aim to understand the role of ethnicity in French current events in correlation with a history of contrasting cultural values to reach my conclusion.

1.1 WHY IS ETHNICITY IMPORTANT?

What is it that advocates for ethnic statistics want to be measured? What is really being discussed in reference to ethnicity as a quantifiable category? The concept of

ethnicity and race are complex and must be clarified before continuing to ascribe them with significance as a component of identity. Ethnicity and race, as they will be further discussed throughout this thesis, are two distinct concepts that are neither synonymous nor unrelated. They exist as social constructs filling the intrinsic human need to stratify those who are different. Neither notion preceded the man-made desire to differentiate between social groups, and their perpetuated existence relies on society's consent in acknowledging separate social groups. Ethnicity acts as an umbrella term encompassing race, culture, language, and religion, while race refers to perceived biologically attained traits. While "racial identity refers to an individual's awareness of himself or herself as a member of a particular, socially defined group...the term *ethnic* or *ethnic identity* is a broader category that may refer to racial classification and/or cultural factors."¹¹ Thus I shall henceforth only mention ethnicity because its more general nature is meant to include the dimension of race, rather than refer to both ethnicity and race as sister constructions. One's ethnic identity describes how his or her cultural attributes are perceived by both the individual and society. In highlighting variation through the construction of ethnicity, comparisons are inevitably made and social hierarchies are imagined. To say two people are identified by separate ethnicities is to say they are not the same. If they are not the same, then how and why are they dissimilar? Does dissimilarity warrant dissimilar merit or establish a hierarchy of ethnicities?

French policy and legislation adhere to a colorblind approach to citizenship—by which French citizens are identical in the eyes of the State and indistinguishable by perceived ethnic or racial differences—to endorse "equality through invisibility."

¹¹ Joseph F. Aponte and Laura R. Johnson, "The Impact of Culture on Intervention and Treatment of Ethnic Populations," *Psychological Intervention and Cultural Diversity* 2nd edition (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 22.

However, supporters of collecting ethnic statistics critique the paradox of this slogan. Endorsing invisibility by the eye of the state means that France is blind to its ethnic populations. The ethnic groups implied to be protected by such a colorblind method are not represented in statistical data. Instead they are forcibly unseen by the State in an attempt to eliminate discrimination by eliminating basis for discrimination. In theory it would seem that discrimination could not be planted in homogenous ground; however France's identical criteria of citizenship does not translate into the reality of a homogenous society. While a colorblind approach may not differentiate between black and white, it only leaves a nation in a shade of gray that is a bleak misrepresentation of its demographic composition. The debate whether the state should officially collect ethnic statistics as an effective means of recognizing minority populations will be discussed in the following chapter.

Following the assumption that ethnicity exists as a social construction, it is crucial to interpret its role as an influential social and political factor in contemporary society. If citizenship were truly homogenous, then the need to quantify ethnic groups would have no clout in the debate because ethnic demographics would fail to present a valuable perspective to policy implementation. Regardless of the State's volition to maintain colorblind civic identity, French society faces the challenges presented by inevitable ethnic consciousness. Studies in cross-cultural psychology offer insight into the impact that bicultural confrontation has on individuals and how such acculturation processes pervade at the group level. Psychologist John W. Berry examines the changes that occur when two cultures come into contact—a study that explicitly legitimizes the need to understand and recognize ethnicity as a critical dynamic in shaping social cohesion.

Berry's studies revolve around the consequences of acculturation, a term that refers to "the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures."¹² For the purpose of this thesis, I am solely addressing the cultural implications at the group level rather the psychological implications at the individual level. Acculturation occurs between a dominant receiving social group and a non-dominant group that introduces its foreign cultural characteristics. This conjunction provides a format for observing how an ethnic minority adapts within the structure of a pre-existing dominant ethnic group. Berry explains that a society composed of multiple cultural backgrounds or ethnicities, such as France, inevitably falls victim to social hierarchy of groups.

"As a result of immigration, many societies become *culturally plural*. That is, people of many cultural backgrounds come to live together in a diverse society. In many cases they form cultural groups that are not equal in power (numerical, economic, or political). These power differences have given rise to popular and social science terms such as 'mainstream', 'minority', 'ethnic group', etc."¹³

Such discourse emerges as the division of groups via ethnic identity becomes weighted with status. The citation above already begins to fragment France's defense of upholding republican values to ensure equality and freedom from discrimination by not recognizing ethnicity as Berry asserts the natural tendency of social groups not to hold equal power within a culturally plural state. The power differences Berry alludes to are enacted by the 'ethnic majority' and the 'ethnic minorities.' Because the ethnic majority in France is white European and French perception of identity has become accustomed

¹² David L. Sam and John W. Berry, "Acculturation: When Individuals and Groups of Different Cultural Backgrounds Meet," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (2010), 1.

¹³ John W. Berry. "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation," *Applied Psychology: an International Review*, 1997, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1997), 8.

over the centuries to identifying itself as such, ethnic minority refers to French citizens who are not white European.

Acculturative developments are applied to various stages of adaptation success through four strategies according to Berry: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. These four possible outcomes of cross-cultural encounters represent a range of acculturation outcomes as non-dominant ‘ethnic minority’ groups struggle with various degrees of difficulty adapting and coexisting amongst the dominant ‘ethnic majority’ group. Acculturation theory indicates a challenge that immigrants and their descendants face and the social disadvantage they immediately inherit upon entering a community or state where they are not the ethnic majority. The manner in which the host community receives an ethnic minority is a significant factor in determining which of Berry’s four fates it will endure. Likewise the public’s attitude towards accepting increasing diversity shapes and is shaped by immigration and anti-discrimination policies. France has customarily taken an assimilationist approach to integrating immigrants, according to which individuals settling into French culture are expected to adapt its values and assume French identity¹⁴.

So why do ethnic statistics matter? How does the French Republic benefit from addressing the acculturation process of its immigrant population? Ethnic attributes are essential components of one’s identity; they are not the only descriptors of identity, but they are inevitably significant in the extent of their religious, racial, cultural, and linguistic influences. However, there is a reoccurring power struggle between the diversity of ethnic identities and a singular civic identity, that of a predefined French

¹⁴ Driss Maghraoui, “French Identity, Islam, and North Africans,” *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, and Race* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003), 214.

citizen. It is this struggle that has become the subject of the political spotlight amongst the left and right as the role of immigrants and their descendants is questioned in the face of social cohesion. Berry's explanation of acculturation and its various outcomes (i.e. assimilation, integration, etc.) provides insight into which type of society is most conducive to the adaptation of newly immigrated citizens and to the maintenance of social cohesion. The necessary socio-political environment is determined by policy and public opinion, thus social cohesion depends upon their response to immigrants and ethnic diversity. However, the French do not know the ethnic composition of their country. Private institutions speculate a range of numbers of various ethnic and religious groups, but there is little official data offering information on ethnic demographics within France.

While the universalist principle upon which the French refuse to collect ethnic data is an honorable tribute to true democracy, ethnic minorities are disregarded by the lack of explicit ethnic information and disadvantaged by a democracy that is blind to their demographic presence. The very notion of France's assimilationist integration policy reveals a relationship of power between "those who assimilate and the ones who are being assimilated...Assimilation is hence a kind of cultural passport that right-wing political parties require in order to obtain citizenship rights."¹⁵ The disjunction between ethnic and civic identity and the subsequent tensions that arise from the conflict suggest a need for a revision of policy based on analysis of acculturation. Ethnicity, though socially constructed, is a distinction widely accepted and noted by society as a possible source of social, political, and economic division. Rather than ignore outcomes of social

¹⁵ Maghraoui, "French Identity, Islam, and North Africans," 220.

fragmentation, policy could incorporate ethnic data to broaden understanding of if and how ethnic minorities are affected or disadvantaged during acculturation. Hafid Gafaiti suggests in his article “The Construction of French Identity” that “the ideas of assimilation, uniformity, and universality of the French model of the nation—‘*la République une et indivisible*’—have been crucial in masking ethnic, regional, and other differences.”¹⁶ The contradictory nature of this model lends itself to marginalizing those citizens who fall into a series of categories of perceived differences, whether they are ethnic, racial, religious, or otherwise. Unfortunately, evaluation relies upon the judgment of evidence, of which there is conveniently little. I do not mean to suggest that ethnic statistics are the panacea for social cohesion, but a legitimate assessment of ethnic presence in France could reflect the state’s legitimate interest in tensions caused by the existing French model of assimilation. This inflexible model, created by the Third Republic with the purpose of assimilating various regions of France with strong linguistic and cultural identities, is inherently incapable of socially adopting citizens who have religious and cultural backgrounds that deviate from the French standard.¹⁷ As an advocate of multiculturalism, I do not accept assimilation as a viable approach to immigration policy. To eliminate difference is not to eliminate discrimination, thus the most realistic option for French policy pursuing equality amongst citizens would be to abandon assimilation and recognize that ethnic plurality has become an unavoidable, or even positive, dimension of society.

1.2 CENSUS BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS OF THE DEBATE

¹⁶ Hafid Gafaiti, “The Construction of French Identity,” *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, and Race*, 190.

¹⁷ Maghraoui, “French Identity, Islam, and North Africans,” 220.

Before discussing the current debate over the potential benefits and consequences of state-collected ethnic and racial statistics, it is necessary to track the history of the census for a contextual background of the debate. The notion of France as a nation that does not acknowledge its citizen children as distinct members of different social groups is one that is inscribed in French national narrative and a source of immense pride for its people. The fact that France has strictly upheld such institutionalized blindness to race and ethnicity, while other countries like the United States actively address such categorical differences, is considered testimony to a true democratic Republic. Though the State may not officially recognize ethnic labels, many different terms have emerged in French society to describe immigrants and minority groups.

The development of rhetoric used to describe various social groups reflects a dichotomy between “French” and “Non-French” that does not correspond to the state’s dedication to an indivisible Republic. The earliest censuses in France collected rudimentary information on household facts and national origin. Starting in 1891, the census categorized citizenship under three labels: “French,” “French by acquisition,” and “foreigners.”¹⁸ Though this chosen nomenclature did not address distinction by ethnicity or race, it did distinguish different levels of citizenship and suggested that the label “French” was a higher citizenship status of birthright that could never be attained by “French by acquisition.” It was not until 1999 that the category *immigré*, meaning immigrant, appeared in the census and became a source of much controversy between those perceived as “French” and “Non-French.” The introduction of the ethnically charged category brought forth the debate over ethnic statistics that would permeate

¹⁸ Simon, “The Choice of Ignorance,” 10.

France's political sphere into the 21st century. The term *immigré* was perceived with a negative connotation of being less assimilated into French culture than "French by acquisition."

In addition to the census' official categories, colloquial jargon ascribed to various ethnic groups emerged and changed over time to reflect these minorities' position in French society. The end of France's colonial presence in Northern Africa was followed by a heavy flow of North African immigrants into France during the 1960s. The singular term *Maghrébin* was coined in the 1970s to refer collectively to those who originated from the Maghreb region, western North Africa, and were predominantly Muslim Arabs. Eventually *immigré* "came to identify essentially the members of the North African community" regardless of whether they had emigrated or were descendants of immigrants.¹⁹ The term did not extend to immigrants from other European countries because their ethnic likeness allowed them to assimilate easily and invisibly.

The cultural collectivization of North Africans under a single title caused automatic exclusion from French natives. Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the far right National Front, saw France's rigid assimilationist model as unable to accept *Maghrébins* because "ethnically, culturally, and religiously, the North African cannot be integrated in French society."²⁰ French-born descendants of *immigrés* were given a new title, *beur*, that granted them status of a French national but not access to French citizenship, according to French pundit Hafid Gafaiti's theory of the construction of French identity. The name *beur* came from verlan, a form of slang consisting of inverted syllables, for describing Arabs. Amongst the slang variations of ethnic identity placed upon descendants of

¹⁹ Gafaiti, "The Construction of French Identity," 204.

²⁰ Ibid.

immigrants, civic identity remained binary with a clear divide between citizens accepted as “French” and those deemed otherwise.

CHAPTER 2

The Debate: French Arguments For and Against the Official Collection of Ethnic and Racial Data

“[1] Statistics by ethnic categories are dangerous because they stigmatize people and are likely to support xenophobic or racist behavior. [2] Statistics by ethnic categories are necessary to fight against discrimination.”

-Laurent Thévenot²¹

For over a century and a half, state-funded institutions in France have complied with the Constitution in disregarding ethnic statistics as a quantifiable demographic. The census has collected and stored information on nationality and country of birth of immigrants, but such categorization fails to acknowledge second and third generations descending from immigrants who remain in limbo between French citizenship and ethnic identity that is not specified in the census. Information on ethnic background was deemed extraneous to the Republic’s goal of sustaining an integration model that would cause immigrants to “gradually lose their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness as they progressed on the path to citizenship.”²² While French policy commitment to an assimilationist model has maintained widespread support from the public sphere and high approval of citizens who wish to preserve pride in a strict French civic identity, there has been a spike in criticism on the statistics ban.

²¹ Laurent Thévenot, *Droit et Bonnes Pratiques Statistiques en Matière de Discrimination, Jalons historiques d'un questionnement sur les origines* (INSEE 15-16 2006). "[1] Les statistiques par catégories ethniques sont douteuses et dangereuses parce qu'elles stigmatisent les personnes et risquent de favoriser des comportements xénophobes ou racistes. [2] Les statistiques par catégories ethniques sont nécessaires pour lutter contre les discriminations."

²² Patrick Simon, “The Choice of Ignorance: The Debate on Ethnic and Racial Statistics in France,” 1.

A virulent discussion of the potential role that state-acknowledged ethnic demographics could play in addressing social cohesion is in discordance with the historical preference to uphold democratic values of citizenship equality. However, increasing social fragmentation between populations considered ethnically French (European Caucasian) and ethnically “other” is evident in employment, housing, and education sectors as a result of an inefficient immigrant integration model.²³ The current debate over the benefits and effectiveness of state-sponsored ethnic data collection is contested by two sides, universalist Republicans who denounce the danger of ethnicizing or racializing society by expanding civic identity to include cultural components and, alternatively, the supporters of ethnic statistics as a means of addressing diversity and publicly discussing existing issues of discrimination. In this chapter I shall present the various arguments for and against incorporating ethnic statistics into the political consciousness of the French Republic.

2.1 SUPPORT FOR THE COLLECTION OF ETHNIC STATISTICS

A reoccurring argument from supporters of quantifying ethnic presence within the population revolves around a desire to legitimize discussion of the issue of discrimination and prejudice within France. Just because the state does not publicly categorize its citizens through the lens of ethnicity does not mean that conflicts of ethnicity are not prevalent in French media and quotidian encounters. Conversations aimed at dissipating discriminatory undertones noticeable in daily life are thwarted by legislative restrictions that limit official data availability. It is apparent that the implementation of colorblind legislation has left the descendants of immigrants invisible and unheard in flagrant

²³ Cédric Audebert, “The Social Geography of Ethnic Minorities in Metropolitan Paris: A Challenge to the French Model of Social Cohesion?” *Patterns of Prejudice* Vol. 47, No. 3 (2013), 323.

contrast with the political credo of protecting individual civic liberties for which it was intended.

Patrick Simon of the Institut National d'Études Démographiques provides a scathing critique of the French policy in his 2008 article "The Choice of Ignorance: The Debate of Ethnic and Racial Statistics." He points to the limits of the existing "equality through invisibility" strategy in enforcing assimilation and states:

"Such invisibility therefore occupies a central position in the French political and legal framework, since it is supposed to ensure equality of all before the law and, consequently in social life... The credo of indifference to differences—the French colorblind approach—leads to promoting what I would call the *choice of ignorance* by removing any reference to ethnic of racial origin from policies or laws (in compliance with the Constitution) as well as from statistics."²⁴

A substantial ethnic presence of immigrants and their descendants exists in France, yet Simon accuses the state of pursuing the so-called "choice of ignorance" in overlooking the political and societal needs of this demographic. Simon employs the slogan "equality through invisibility" to emphasize the hypocritical nature of protecting the liberties of a group by eradicating diversity and forging sameness amongst all French citizens. It is possible that there is a correlation between growing social fragmentation as ethnic minority groups grow in the midst of an environment that demands assimilation into a finite French civic identity, but Simon boldly hints that the illegality of ethnic statistics may be purposefully maintained by the State to conceal the existence discrimination and its magnitude.²⁵ Discussions of discrimination and criminality associated with the *banlieues* (metropolitan extremities classified by residents who are predominantly Maghreb immigrants or descendants of North African origin and are socially

²⁴ Ibid., 8.

²⁵ Ibid.

immobilized by low socio-economic standing) have dominated political agenda in the 21st century, particularly since the riots of November 2005 throughout Parisian *banlieues*. The statistics debate has emerged to challenge French strategy of ignoring differences and the colorblind character of the Republic itself, to crystallize conflict and bring it to the political forefront through the fight for quantitative data.

Simon recalls previous censuses spanning from 1891 to 1999 in which assigning nation of origin was accomplished by dividing the population into three statuses: “French,” “French by acquisition,” “foreigners.”²⁶ Though these categories oblige legal ethnic avoidance within the framework of nationality, they differentiate in how one has become French, either by birth or by acquisition. Becoming a French citizen through naturalization still leaves an immigrant short of becoming purely “French” as deemed by the state. According to Simon, “statistics are not simply a reflection of self-evident administrative categories but are constructed in response to issues of public policy.”²⁷ If categories reflect policy issues, then it appears that new ethnic categories could be implemented to support policy directed towards endorsing integration and anti-discrimination.

As nomenclature dictates how society identifies itself and how legislative representation responds to society’s needs, advocates of ethnic statistics rarely explain their support as emphasizing the value of scientific data as such, but as a means of providing evidence for an unrepresented body of social minorities in a discussion about social cohesion in France. Their position relies on the assumption that more data will provide measurements of discrimination and disadvantage linked to ethnicity and enable

²⁶ Ibid., 9.

²⁷ Ibid., 10.

public understanding of the extent of these problems. David Oppenheimer claims that, “In the absence of state-generated data, it seems clear that there are important questions about the wealth, income, opportunities and social status of French citizens that we cannot fully answer. As a result, those who wish to address the problem are left without an important tool, while those who do not regard discrimination and inequality as an issue in French life are permitted to hide behind this lack of data.”²⁸ Policy may be colorblind towards data, but French citizens and leaders are far from blind to the challenges presented by diversity. Advocates of improving social and economic standing of disadvantaged minority groups are thus thwarted by the state’s silence and left without the tools needed for combat, according to Oppenheimer.

The conviction that statistics of various French ethnic groups could contribute to and scientifically legitimize the fight against perception of discrimination is further upheld by the Association Nationale des Elus Locaux pour la diversité (ANELD).²⁹ This political organization, which harnesses support for diversity within France in regards issues related to ethnicity such as employment and civil rights, conducted a study of how the United States handles ethnicity during a trip to Washington D.C. in 2011. Over the course of a week ANELD representatives met with “members of civil rights organizations like the National Urban League and Rev. Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow PUSH Coalition, as well as numerous other representatives from both public and private

²⁸ David B. Oppenheimer, “Why France Needs to Collect Data on Racial Identity... In a French Way,” *Hastings Int’l & Comp. L. Rev.* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2008), 743.
<http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/facpubs/740>

²⁹ ANELD is an association that lobbies for greater representation of minority groups within the political arena while promoting understanding and appreciation of diversity, according to its slogan “liberté, égalité, diversité.” The association’s political leaning counters the anti-immigration objectives of the National Front.

sectors”³⁰ to observe how the United States responds to its growing ethnic populations and to the challenging issues that arise in response to such diversity. Representatives returned home to France with the impression that the U.S. was years ahead of France in mediating issues resulting from diversity and asserting that the debate on a national identity that excludes ethnic and cultural components contribute to social fragmentation. ANELD’s positive review of American handlings of diversity through understanding brought forward by ethnic statistics can be summed up by two quotes from representatives sent on the trip: “If we want to improve the situation of minorities in France, we have to be able to evaluate it...One way to create awareness is to show people the numbers” and “How can we correct or improve the situation if we have no picture of it?”³¹

The study conducted by ANELD took place after the debate was sparked by Sarkozy’s political investigation of ethnicity’s role in social cohesion that commenced in 2009. The President, who created the Committee for the Measurement of Diversity in 2009, suggested that French policymakers inquire as to how “American-style equal opportunity, quotas and the use of ethnic data within official statistics to get a more accurate picture of the nation’s face.” A 2009 TIME article by Bruce Crumley titled “Should France Count Its Minority Population?” provides an American interpretation of the debate that predictably swings towards the need to collect ethnic data and acknowledge the existing role of ethnic identity complimentary to civic identity. Crumley acknowledges that the notion of an indivisible France is noble in theory but often mocked

³⁰ Rachel Holman, “French minority advocates call for statistic on diversity,” *France 24*, 2011. <http://www.france24.com/en/20110724-france-minority-leaders-advocate-statistics-ethnic-diversity-discrimination-aneld/>

³¹ Ibid.

by reality and contradicted by action. Yazid Sabeg, diversity commissioner who launched Sarkozy's Committee for the Measurement of Diversity, is quoted in the article as saying "There are two Frances. One wants to look things in the face—meaning the way demographics in this country have changed. The other is conservative France, which is prone to immobility in the name of largely artificial equality." This description of a two-faced France suggests a divide between those who want to see ethnic diversity and those who do not. Likewise, Manuel Valls' speech, mentioned earlier in the introduction, declared that France was comparable to apartheid because of its ethnic divisions. Fragmentation of political ideals is represented as occurring within the group classified as ethnically French ("two Frances") as well as between the ethnically French and ethnic minorities ("ethnic apartheid"). The consistent assertion of a socially divided France across the political spectrum³² validates the State's need—political interests aside—to combat social instability wrought with ethnic tensions.

In fact, political interests have come to play a significant role in the backing of ethnic statistics. French colorblind policy has labored to assure its citizens freedom from the persecution of differences to counter threats from the Far Right since the National Front's emergence and growth in the 1970s. While initiated by a history of Revolutionary declarations, nation-state ideals, and regrets of the Vichy era, the colorblind republican flag became antiracist leaders' most promising approach to facing the challenges posed by the Far Right's radical anti-immigration proposals.³³ Ethnic discourse and the ambiguity of its role transformed into a sharp political tool for the Left in the 1980s and 1990s as antiracists rallied around the colorblind method to fight the National Front's

³² Yazid Sabeg, appointed by Sarkozy, represents opinions of the political Right, while Manuel Valls of the Socialist Party represents the political Left.

³³ Bleich, "Antiracism Without Races," 64.

opposition towards multiculturalism and diversity.³⁴ In continuing to officially recognize French citizens solely on their citizenship status, the French method has attempted to lessen discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and affiliated socio-economic status.

Finally, the call for ethnic statistic collection and addressing disadvantaged populations is heard from French immigrants and their descendants. Though many dispute it as advantageous to their interests, there exist ethnic minorities who agree that their invisibility in the eyes of state policy corresponds with assimilation struggles and receiving civil equality. Senegalese-born Rama Yade³⁵, author of *Blacks of France*, writes “one sometimes has the strange impression of upsetting others by being black in a country that thinks of itself as white.” Yade gives insight into the notion that France perceives itself as a white nation—a belief that is hardly hindered or question by non-existent state records of the country’s colorful ethnic makeup. It is hoped that black-and-white quantitative data would provide a stepping-stone in the direction of addressing the equality gap, considering that the discussion of black and white (and all colors in between) issues currently has little institutional foundation to stand upon other than societal evidence. For France to correct ingrained discriminatory practices, rather than quietly acknowledge them as commonplace, it must have the “courage” to name the victims who bear the brunt of discrimination.³⁶ Results of a 2007 poll by the European Commission show that 78% of French respondents would not object to answering anonymous questions about their racial identity if it would aid in combatting

³⁴ Ibid., 65.

³⁵ Rama Yade served under Sarkozy’s Union for a Popular Movement Party (UMP). A member of Sarkozy’s administration, she was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights from 2007-2009 and was later “demoted” to Secretary of State for Sports from 2009 to 2010.

³⁶ “France’s Ethnic Minorities: To Count or Not to Count,” *The Economist*. 2009.

discrimination.³⁷ If this majority opinion is still held today, why are ethnic statistics still contested as a threat to equality? In the following section I shall present the French ideology behind denouncing ethnic identity as a state-officiated census category.

2.2 OPPOSITION TO THE COLLECTION OF ETHNIC STATISTICS

Since World War II, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the United States have received a proportionately similar influx of immigrants. These nations are comparable in that they have all made a high percentage of first- and second-generation immigrants into citizens.³⁸ These four countries quickly became diversified and have responded with a variety of immigration and integration policies of varying success. Of these examples, France is the only to deny race-consciousness a place in the public sphere. The United States, Britain, and the Netherlands all collect ethnic data in order to create awareness of its demographic range, while the French state holds steadfast to its colorblind policy founded upon principles of *égalité*. While Patrick Simon calls this mentality a “choice of ignorance” on behalf of the state, many French citizens know equal opportunity protected by non-recognition of ethnic differentiation as a fundamental principle upon which the nation was established. France has not hesitated in continuing to implement its core values as endowed by the Constitution, even as Britain and the Netherlands have adapted broader multiculturalist policies in response to changing demographics. Those who oppose the collection of ethnic statistics do not base their decision on an ignorance of or lack of interest in ethnicity, intent to exclude non-white French citizens, or will to mask

³⁷ Discrimination in The European Union – Special EuroBarometer (2007), 7.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_263_en.pdf

³⁸ Erik Bleich, “The French Model: Color-Blind Integration,” *Color Lines: Affirmative Action, Immigration and Civil Rights Options for America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2000), 270.

evidence of discrimination; rather, they condone ethnic data as a threat to the democratic Republic they take such pride in.

In describing the French model of colorblind integration, political scientist Erik Bleich argues that “there is a normative consensus in France that affirmative action or any race-conscious policy is anathema to French values.”³⁹ Given perspective dictated by the French national narrative, the opposition is not attacking diversity or ethnic inclusion but merely defending national ideals. In some sense, collecting ethnic statistics is a betrayal to the French promise to value all citizens as such without regard for cultural distinctions. Memories of the Revolution and Republican traditions are called upon to support a history of colorblind policy ingrained in the country based on the mother ideas of the “French state” founded during the Enlightenment.⁴⁰ In contrast, the evil of straying from strict observance of the Constitution is remembered with the haunting recollection of the Vichy era during which ethnic and racial distinctions were used to target the Jewish population. Lingering memories of Holocaust horror and the dark days of German occupation that stripped France of its *liberté, égalité, fraternité* mantra provide opposition with historical justification for refusing to return to ethnicization policies reminiscent of the Nazi party. Fadela Amara, former Secretary of State for Urban Affairs who served in Sarkozy’s government from 2007 to 2010, used this painful memory to deem ethnic statistics dangerous in stating: “Our republic must not become a mosaic of communities...No one should again have to wear a yellow star.”⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid, 271.

⁴⁰ The construction of the idea of a nation and its people were studied by philosophes such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, according to Gafaiti, “The Construction of French Identity,” 195.

⁴¹ Bruce Crumley, “Should France Count Its Minority Population?” *TIME* (2009).
<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1887106,00.html>

While supporters of ethnic data collection view the data as a tool for responding to the problem of discrimination against disadvantaged ethnic minorities, the opposition considers the statistics the problem themselves. Seeing as ethnic and racial identities are social constructions created and empowered by societal consent to acknowledge difference, French legislation abstains from commenting on any perceived differences outside of the framework of French civic identity. Thus the opposition views state-officiated ethnic statistics as a promotion and legitimization of labels that divide French citizens among discriminatory lines that are irrelevant to the criteria of citizenship. Bleich describes the 1978 law against storing ethnic data as being aimed “to punish racists committing bigoted acts motivated by racist intent, not to foster numerical racial inequality nor to compensate a class of victims defined by race.”⁴² It can be understood that recognizing difference and naming it as such is an act of bigotry itself, one that would be committed with state authority if ethnic data were collected as respected scientific data.

The existence of discrimination amongst social divides in France is undisputed, but the efficacy of ethnicity-based data as a necessary contribution for mediation is doubted. The opposition fears that encouraging citizens to identify themselves by ethnic attributes would only reiterate division and reinforce social discrimination in a legal format. “Even if it’s out to do the right thing, positive discrimination remains discrimination, and classifying people by race and ethnicity is in a manner racism itself,” explains Malek Boutih, who was leader of S.O.S. Racisme,⁴³ an antiracism civil rights

⁴² Bleich, “The French Model: Color-Blind Integration,” 274.

⁴³ S.O.S. Racisme, founded in 1984, was the first national group dedicated to fighting racism. With the support of the Socialist Party during the 1980s and early 1990s, it played a significant role in lobbying for

group that vehemently opposes ethnic statistics.⁴⁴ Despite existing in a race-neutral paradigm, the antiracist movement has established a notable presence in commenting on discrimination in the public sphere.⁴⁵

The efficacy of quantifiable ethnic categories in combating racism is not proven. However, opposition actors see the colorblind policy as the direct means of eliminating racism and discrimination within France. The logic follows the fact that there cannot be racism if there are no races. While this seems counterintuitive to American doctrine, colorblind policy has been the cornerstone for avoiding ethnic dilemmas and resisting natural tendencies to exclude social minorities. Political Scientist Erik Bleich argues policies create politics and policies that recognize race create race politics, thus French colorblind policy prescription may “demonstrate a way to fight racism without reifying the concept of race.”⁴⁶ It is inaccurate to say that French avoidance of race as a political subject translates into political passivity towards racism. Active antiracism has indeed been the political objective of colorblind measures in France. While historical references are always made towards the Revolution and Republican values as the simple reasoning behind national blindness to ethnicity, Bleich argues that selective memory is used to emphasize the founding principles of the state as justification for the continued used of contemporary policies.⁴⁷ Such justification overlooks the period in between of colonialist imperialism that dominated the 19th century and the decades up until the World Wars. Legal opposition of ethnic categorization and active antiracism legislation was not

reforms made to urban planning, education, and integration to mitigate discrimination and bring the issue to the forefront of French public life.

⁴⁴ Crumley, “Should France Count Its Minority Population?”.

⁴⁵ Bleich, “Antiracism Without Races,” 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

revamped until the regrets of Vichy era persecution surfaced. Colorblindness was thenceforth seen as a political necessity for protection of ethnicity groups. Though it's attacked by supporters of ethnic statistics as a means of socially disenfranchising minority groups, the state strived to undermine social prejudices through a series of laws against discrimination, most notably those in 1972, 1978, and 1990.⁴⁸

The rise of the far-right political party, the National Front or *Front National*, over the course of the 1970s and 1980s acted as a catalyst in crystallizing French fervent dedication to colorblindness to counter the radical party's anti-immigration (and often anti-diversity) stance. The party's dissent towards the growing multiculturalist dimension in France was responded to by assurance that ethnic groups would be protected by disallowing them to be targeted as such, as some fear could happen through the legalization of ethnic data collection. Bleich explains French rationale behind developing avid colorblindness as a tool for crippling racism:

“France fights racism through its laws, but it does so in a particular fashion. As with the core of the 1972 law, the 1990 Gayssot law attacked a certain kind of racism. It strengthened penalties against hate speech by the far Right organizations. Although the FN (Front National) provided the immediate incentives for action in the late 1980s and 1990s, it did not restructure French thinking about racism or races. If anything, it reinforced the notion that identifying individuals by their group attributes and counting or targeting policies at races, ethnic groups, or identity-based communities was playing into the hands of the far right. Leading French antiracists have not always been of one mind in this conclusion. But the brief window of opportunity for a multicultural approach to problems of ethnic diversity all but closed with the rise of the National Front in the mid-1980s. Since that time, most antiracist leaders have rallied around the color-blind republican flag as the most promising approach to the challenges posed by the Far Right.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., 60-63.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 64.

Colorblind policy has been a crucial political tool in hampering the far right from mobilizing legitimate backing of discriminatory policies. However, Bleich acknowledges that the state's efforts have only succeeded in preventing a certain kind of racism. Intentional racism on a legal level has been blocked—like that supported by the National Front—but “indirect or unintentional racism” is still prevalent on a social level that affects housing, employment, and education on a daily basis for minority ethnic groups. Supporters of ethnic statistics worry that quantifiable data is necessary to measure the extent to which racism and discrimination may affect the standard of living for some of France's population, but this addresses the social realm that is less easily controlled than the judicial realm of legislation. The opposition may be correct that the colorblind strategy of the French state establishes a political agenda that should dismantle discriminatory practices, but France can no longer afford to be blind to the challenges presented by ethnic diversity that compromise social cohesion. The following chapter will examine the debate in current events as evidence that the questionable status of ethnic minorities is becoming ever more political, regardless of whether the state chooses to acknowledge data of their presence in the country or not.

CHAPTER 3

Breaking the Silence: Legitimizing Ethnicity in the Political Sphere

On January 7, 2015, two armed men entered the Parisian headquarters of France's most renowned satirical publication, *Charlie Hebdo*, and killed eleven employees in cold blood and later executed a police officer as they fled from the scene. The assailants, who

cried “Allahu Akbar” and identified themselves as members of Al-Qaeda, massacred cartoonists of the controversial magazine. *Charlie Hebdo* fully exhibits its freedom of speech and has no boundaries in its willingness to brutally mock cultures and religions. The barbaric effort of the assassins to silence the freedom of speech by silencing the bodies that depicted satirical illustrations was made in vain; neither *Charlie Hebdo*, the French media, nor France cowered. The nation united in combative response to the attack, galvanizing a fearless front of rallies across France in support of free speech. The attack—religiously motivated and carried out by two jihadists who acted independently—was a singular event and does not play a role in the discussion of officially recognizing ethnic and racial groups. However in the aftermath of a shocking tragedy that temporarily unified a nation, it became clear to public consciousness that preexisting social fragmentation needed to be addressed and remedied.

The attempt to silence one tenet of democracy ultimately began a dialogue about ensuring the fortification of all democratic elements in the French Republic as exemplified by Manuel Valls’s *voeux à la presse*⁵⁰ speech less than two weeks after the shootings. Valls commenced such a discussion by bluntly stating, “Citizenship needs to be restructured, reinforced, relegitimized. We must combat this terrible sentiment according to which there are second class citizens, or voices that count more than others.”⁵¹ Even without official record of ethnic minorities, it is understood by the government that marginalized groups exist in France as second-class citizens with a lesser voice. Valls curtly acknowledges this division, which could have referred to a

⁵⁰ Meaning “wish to the press,” speeches are given by the Prime Minister and President at the beginning of each year and are somewhat comparable to American State of the Union speeches.

⁵¹ “La citoyenneté a besoin d’être refondée, renforcée, relégitimée. Nous devons combattre ce sentiment terrible selon lequel il y aurait des citoyens de seconde zone, ou des voix qui compteraient plus que d’autres” translation mine.

series of social groups struggling in France, but he then followed this statement by denouncing the French Republic as a territorial, social, and ethnic apartheid. In a country that does not publicly recognize hyphenated identities (Franco-Algerian, French African, etc.) that include a “non-French” cultural component, it is significant for the Prime Minister to address ethnicity as a factor in social fragmentation. A century of French policy and discourse has been purposeful in perpetuating a singular French civic identity, but Vall’s intentionally crafted speech is a prime example of treating the disadvantage of an unrepresented group by recognizing its presence. Should the French talk about ethnicity and race? A historically contentious topic deemed irrelevant within the political arena and justified by democratic principles, the current state of a failed immigration model that has left the *Français de papier*, unable to thrive as either fully French or as culturally distinguished, thrusts the subject into the public spotlight and desperately begs to be discussed. Policies meant to address immigrant integration have carefully approached the problem through the lens of social divides associated with culture, class, geography, and citizenship status rather than with ethnicity or race.⁵² It is through these alternative means that the discussion has been skewed in order to retain a politically correct observance of French colorblind society.

Christophe Guilluy, French geographer and author, writes in his 2014 book *Fractures Françaises* of how the ethnicity discussion has been inadvertently addressed through territorialization. He claims, “With the crisis of the banlieues, the ‘ethnic question’ was associated with a ‘territorial question,’ that of the sensitive zones,”⁵³ That is to say that

⁵² Bleich, “Antiracism Without Races,” 52.

⁵³ “Avec la crise des banlieues, la «question ethnique» a été associée à une «question territoriale», celle des quartiers sensibles” translation mine. Christophe Guilluy. *Fractures Françaises*, (Paris: François Burin, 2010), 65.

rather than describe a metropolitan quarter by its demographic composition (Arabs for example) the territory will be described as economically sensitive because that is the politically correct and socially acceptable discourse. To speak of the *banlieues* is to imply an understood profile of low-income immigrants and their descendants. In an April, 2015 interview about his books, Guilluy was asked to comment on Valls' apartheid condemnation. He responded that his works and the Prime Minister's speech were essentially speaking of the same issues in pointing out the territorial divides that physically embody ethnic divides along with the political fractures that represent social fractures.⁵⁴

In *Fractures Françaises*, Guilluy tells a short anecdote of Manuel Valls in 2009 when he (*député-maire* of Évry at the time) visited a second-hand store with a film crew for a publicity stunt. The store was most frequented by Arab and African customers, and Valls was heard whispering sarcastically "Beautiful image of the town Évry," knowing that viewers would understand that too many Arabs or Africans give a bad image to the town. This was supplemented by the comment "Give me some Blancs, some Whites, some Blancos."⁵⁵ Guilluy describes that:

"At no moment is the mayor talking about social diversity or citizenship, but rather of the ethnic origin of the population. In doing so, he confirms what all elected officials know: that the question of the banlieues is not limited to a social and urban dimension but it also has an ethnocultural extension."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Le guichet de l'information. (April 16, 2015). *L'APARTHEID FRANCAIS? Banlieues, campagnes... Complément d'enquête avril 2015* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=1384&v=ZRgG45bFDWQ>

⁵⁵ Guilluy, *Fractures Françaises*, 66.

⁵⁶ À aucun moment, le maire ne parle de mixité sociale ou de nationalité, mais bien de l'origine ethnique de la population. Ce faisant, il confirme ce que tous les élus savent: que la question des banlieues ne se résume pas à une dimension sociale et urbaine mais qu'elle a aussi un prolongement «ethnoculturel» translation mine. Ibid.

Differences in ethnic and racial identities cannot be concealed and, though they have remained officially unseen by the state, they are very much recognized and stigmatized within the French population and even by elected officials. However, the six-year transition from Valls' underhanded, racially loaded comments to his call-to-arms in restructuring citizenship and combating apartheid suggest a constructive movement of the topic from taboo to legally legitimate.

3.1 CODIFICATION OF ETHNIC DISCOURSE

Geographer Guilluy is not the only scholar to indicate that territory has been used as code for the state to form policies implicitly addressing ethnicity and race. Related scholarship has seen repeated use of territories as a means of referencing specific social groups. Discussion of space and race has been an effective method for the French to manage ethnic conflict within the immigration debate by correlating people with places. Cédric Audebert's article "The social geography of ethnic minorities in metropolitan Paris: a challenge to the French model of social cohesion?" asserts that recent social cohesion policies have focused on territory and place of residents rather than on ethnic classification or national origin.⁵⁷ As a result of the state's color-blind agenda, the dialogue meant to address integration issues has shifted towards much more cautious and socially acceptable discourse of socio-economic status within specific geographic territories in order to avoid ethnically and racially charged elements of the problem.

The French state will not supply statistical information on its population's ethnic demographics, yet it publicly recognizes stigmatized regions associated with high concentrations of immigrant residents known as *zones urbaines sensibles* (ZUS), *zones de*

⁵⁷ Audebert, "The Social Geography of Ethnic Minorities in Metropolitan Paris," 323.

redynamisation urbaine (ZRU), *zones franches urbaines* (ZFU). The introduction of territorialized social cohesion policies have been used to target their disadvantaged populations, typically not of native French descent, without acknowledging the relevant factor of ethnic and racial identities. Easy internet access to maps of each of the 751 ZUS inform French citizens of socio-geographic sensitive zones where the formation of foreign communities contained in impoverished *banlieues* as consequence of social immobility are instead seen by the French as separate societies threatening the status quo and operating without regard for the laws or the Republic. These cryptic zone euphemisms and programs of territorialized social cohesion have been introduced “as a way to address the ethnic question without directly institutionalizing it.”⁵⁸

In the midst of the controversy over collecting ethnic statistics, policy has targeted the ZUS to aid minority groups suffering from high levels of unemployment. Audebert explains:

“Following a highly polarized debate on the relevance of institutionalizing ethnic and racial issues (through ethnic statistics and affirmative action), the French state has been confronted with an unprecedented challenge: to acknowledge and deal with the specific problems of ethnic minorities without calling into question the postulate of republican universalism.”⁵⁹

The author refers to social inequality in France as a territorial issue due to factors such as limited socio-economic mobility, but similar dialogue in the United States discusses inequality as having a racial or ethnic component. The following chapter will examine how the United States uses complete transparency in discussing race and ethnicity to combat discrimination in comparison to France’s opposite strategy.

3.2 AMPLIFYING THE NOISE OF ETHNIC DISCOURSE

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 326.

The New York Times article “Quantifying Social Division in France,” written in response to Valls’ apartheid speech, describes his words “as a shock for a country that, a little more than a week earlier, had rallied by the millions in a show of solidarity after a rampage by Islamic extremists.”⁶⁰ The author Bohlen draws attention to Valls’ admission that sparking a poisonous debate had been his intention all along. The Prime Minister’s condemnation of France as a divided nation can be interpreted as a shock to its people, but Valls’ speech is only controversial because of the brutal truth it dares to acknowledge under the spotlight. According to Bohlen, “nobody denies that discrimination in France exists anyway: Racial or religious profiling as practiced by the police, housing agents and employers has been well documented. Now even Mr. Valls is talking about ‘two Frances.’”⁶¹ It seems that rather than breaking the silence about France’s issue handling ethnic diversity, Valls instead amplified the political noise already surrounding the controversial debate.

Regardless of where one stands on the debate’s spectrum of whether ethnic statistics could provide useful information, the presence of ethnic discrimination in France is pronounced past the point of deserving legislative attention. A 2012 Report by the European Union measured discrimination within its member nations and found that “of the eight grounds of discrimination examined in the survey, discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin is seen as the most widespread” by 56% of Europeans.⁶² The seven other grounds of discrimination include gender, sexual orientation, discrimination against older people, age discrimination against younger people, religion/beliefs,

⁶⁰ Celestine Bohlen, “Quantifying Social Division in France,” *New York Times* (2015). http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/27/world/europe/quantifying-social-division-in-france.html?_r=0

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Special Eurobarometer 393: Discrimination in the EU in 2012” European Commission Report (2012), 28. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_393_en.pdf

disability, and gender identity. Seventy-six percent of French respondents classified ethnic discrimination as widespread, the highest proportion of any EU country and 20% higher than the average. By contrast, only 17% of EU citizens living in Lithuania and 26% in Poland and Latvia saw ethnic discrimination as a widespread problem.⁶³ Even though France's demographics are far less homogenous than those of other EU nations who claim ethnic discrimination is less widespread, the deviation in public opinions clearly highlights the need to effectively address ethnic, among all, discrimination in France.

On April 17, 2015, Valls announced a €100 million mobilization plan to combat “unbearable racism,” just three months after he dared to declare France an apartheid. The Prime Minister confronted the public with more words of brutal honesty stating, “Racism, anti-Semitism, hatred of Muslims, of foreigners, and homophobia are increasing in an unbearable manner.”⁶⁴ A drastic spike has been seen in discrimination against both Muslims and Jews in the past year. *Le Monde*, one of France's most widely read news sources, published that acts of anti-Semitic discrimination have double in the past year and acts of anti-Muslim discrimination have increased by six times in the same period.⁶⁵ It is important to remember that ethnic minorities can be the perpetrators in addition to the victims; discrimination endured by Muslims and Jews is often carried out by each other. President François Hollande described the struggle against racism as a national

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “France to Spend €100 Million Tackling ‘Unbearable’ Racism,” *France24* (2015). http://www.france24.com/en/20150417-france-racism-anti-Semitism-valls/?ns_campaign=reseaux_sociaux&ns_source=FB&ns_mchannel=social&ns_linkname=editorial&aef_campaign_ref=partage_aef&aef_campaign_date=2015-04-17

⁶⁵ Cécile Chambraud and Bastien Bonnefous, “Que contient le plan de lutte contre le racisme et l’antisémitisme du gouvernement?” *Le Monde* (2015).

priority⁶⁶, and the State's €100 million allotment of funds promises to deliver actions along with the President and his government's words. Hollande's government has publicly committed to a war to end discrimination and establish social stability amongst society's demographics of ethnic diversity. These actions come at a time of widespread national disapproval of Hollande's leftist government and coincide with the rise of support for Marine Le Pen's right-wing National Front party. The political dimension of the State's response to diversity and the ethnicity debate is unique to France. A range of party leaders and their policy proposals reflect a balancing act within the French political climate. In the following chapter I will discuss France's uniqueness in fighting antiracism without races.

CHAPTER 4

The Choice of Ignorance?: The Role of Ethnicity in France and the United States

In addition to criticism on the home front, the efficacy of France's colorblind approach is questioned abroad, particularly by American skeptics. Criticism from the United States stems from the stark difference in its hyper-racialized method of addressing the disadvantages of ethnic minorities. Both France and the United States are ethnically diverse countries that aim to mitigate discrimination and achieve social cohesion through very different policies. Patrick Simon, the policy critic who coined the term "choice of ignorance," asserts that the colorblind paradigm once meant to defend ethnic minorities "no longer protects the populations exposed to discrimination; on the contrary, it

⁶⁶ Ibid.

reinforces the system that puts them at an unfair disadvantage.”⁶⁷ Whether the avoidance of ethnic data collection is a choice of ignorance or an assurance of equality is a matter of opinion derived from a nation’s concept of citizenship. Criticisms towards each other’s management of ethnic issues cannot be qualified by merit, but they can be analyzed for a great understanding of why France and the United States have chosen their respective policies.

In describing France’s model of colorblind integration Erik Bleich explains “the French approach is rooted in an understanding of identity differences that diverges substantially from that which prevails in the United States.”⁶⁸ The American mentality of integration strives to achieve equality through social inclusiveness of ethnic diversity. When I consider France’s current method to ensure equality through invisibility, I recall the controversial slogan “Separate but Equal” that provoked the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The French equivalent “Invisible but Equal” seems to resonate all too well with the American legacy of discrimination. Though it is not always an exemplary model of antiracism, the United States openly collects ethnic data in order to quantify its social tensions. Like the French, Americans are committed to their republican principles of personal liberties and are often unable to see the French approach as equally democratic. The fracture in democratic ideals rests in the way the two countries recognize social tensions. According the Bleich, “Social tensions or problems that are associated with [ethnic] populations are typically interpreted as problems of immigrant integration rather than as ethnic or ‘race’ relations problems, the lens through which much American

⁶⁷ Simon, “The Choice of Ignorance,” 26.

⁶⁸ Bleich, “The French Model: Color-Blind Integration,” 271.

social policy is viewed.”⁶⁹ The two countries’ histories also contribute to their different understandings of ethnic issues. The United States is rooted in a terrible legacy of slavery and segregation, while France has suffered from heinous crimes and genocide under the Vichy regime during World War II. French collective memory has not been quick to forget the evils that can come of ethnic labeling.

The role of ethnicity can be construed in many ways, and in France it exists as political cleavage for opposing parties just as it does in the United States. As an issue of immigrant acculturation, managing ethnic tensions is a crucial political objective across party lines. It is essential to understand the political maneuvering that lies behind French colorblind policy, a context often overlooked by critics who are eager to force policies that have succeeded in their countries upon France. For example, the United States has had “long-term confrontation with issues of ethnic/immigrant group identification in official statistics”, an “extensive history of immigration from diverse countries of origin”, and “the political salience of ‘origins’ in multiple dimensions of social life.”⁷⁰ Diversity in America never had to be introduced by comprehensive policy to an existing notion of citizenship because it was upon a “melting pot” attitude of ethnic inclusiveness (in theory) that the country was built. On the contrary, “the nature of states in Europe, with its longer tradition of nationalism and nation-building, makes it difficult in the political sense to refer to recent [immigrants]”⁷¹ with a hyphenated dual identity that encompasses ethnicity within a civic identity framework, as demonstrated in France. Historian Calvin Goldscheider comes to the conclusion that American acknowledgement of multiple

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Calvin Goldscheider, “Ethnic Categorization in Censuses,” *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 73.

⁷¹ Ibid.

ethnic identities is peculiar when perceived from a European context. It is important to understand the differences in national mindsets in order to recognize that there is not a blanket policy prescription that addresses the unique needs of individual countries' ethnic compositions. If the American ideal of ethnic statistics proves beneficial in the future in alleviating tensions and hindering discrimination based on ethnic identity, then France must tailor its colorblind policy in a French way that continues to uphold its values.

It is no surprise that American ideology counters that of the French Republic in regards to collecting ethnic data. Both nations aim to achieve an egalitarian, equal opportunity state but through opposite means of addressing diverse demographics. American acknowledgment of its ethnic makeup and the use of data to protect minority groups are thus employed as positive examples by French advocates who wish for American policy to translate into a familiar French version. Race relations in the United States are far from an exceptional example to be followed by France, but our nation's ability to measure issues of discrimination and openly discuss it is worthy of examination by French policymakers. While an American approach accepts multiple ethnic identities and thus protects ethnic groups through recognition of their cultural differences, the French State carries out policies that aim to protect liberties endowed to citizens by civic identity because it is regarded above ethnic identity within the Republic. Both countries deliver in protecting their citizens in the eyes of the State: the United States by assuring the freedom *to* difference and France by assuring the freedom *from* difference. Rather than choices of ignorance, both countries seem to altruistically pursue endeavors of equality.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion: The French Puzzle

“Census constructions of ethnic groups may best be considered evidence of the discourse about ethnicity rather than ethnicity per se. Perhaps the construction of these categories are valuable not only as pieces of the ethnic puzzle but also as reflections of the puzzle itself.”⁷²

The puzzling French “ethnic dilemma” has captured the media’s attention and caused the nation to reconsider the lifespan of its colorblind policy prescription. The issue of ethnicity has been emboldened by current political discourse under President Hollande’s government, galvanizing an urgent call-to-arms to combat discrimination and social fragmentation. The recent heavy-handed words of the President and Prime Minister reflect a need for policy reform to combat discrimination in a more direct manner. This thesis analyzed the statistics debate to evaluate whether the implementation of ethnic recognition through a reformed model could generate social cohesion for France in the future. While there is clearly a political demand for an understanding of ethnicity as a component of identity, it is not clear that the formulation of ethnic categories in the census would be necessary or beneficial in resolving solving tensions. My findings in reviewing recent political discourse suggest that there is a practical need for ethnic data that is opposed by a theoretical framework of French citizenship and republicanism. If the official collection of ethnic data is of interest to the State in the future, France can pursue an individualized method in order to continue to uphold its republican values. It may be possible for France to combat racism without recognizing ethnicity or race, but the cost of national commitment to equality through colorblindness may soon be higher than the price of social stability.

⁷² Calvin Goldscheider, “Ethnic Categorization in Censuses,” 88.

In evaluating the ideological, political, and social reasoning behind the debate over ethnic data collection, I found a history of French commitment to *liberté, égalité, fraternité* that justifies opposition as well as supporting evidence that suggests France’s colorblind approach in the face of ethnic diversity is not conducive to social cohesion. Since the turn of the 21st century, the durability of the colorblind model has been questioned in the face of heightened social fragmentation that has divided France into what some may call an “apartheid,” indicating that the time has come for the French approach to be restructured. Regardless of French public opinion over the debate, the Hollande administration’s recent allocation of €100 million to address intolerable racial and ethnic discrimination gives legitimacy to the political concern of ethnic identity. “Hidden” ethnic data—gathered in various roundabout forms such as urban geographic territorialization or counting incarcerated Muslims by the number of inmates who request Ramadan meals⁷³—previously existed as a mechanism for quantifying ethnic groups in France, but the Constitutional taboo that has surrounded ethnic identities is being shadowed by a political agenda that acknowledges the role of ethnicity in society. Recent movements toward the French State’s recognition of the political role of ethnicity have the potential to reconstruct France’s colorblind policies so that they cultivate social stability for the future.

⁷³ Antoine Krempf, “60% des détenus français sont musulmans?” *France Info* (2015). <http://www.franceinfo.fr/emission/le-vrai-du-faux/2014-2015/60-des-detenus-francais-sont-musulmans-25-01-2015-15-46>

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