The Geopolitics of *Laïcité* in a Multicultural Age: French Secularism, Educational Policy and the Spatial Management of Difference

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Abstract

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I examine a package of educational reforms enacted following the January 2015 attacks in and around Paris, most notably directed at the offices of the satirical publication *Charlie Hebdo*. These interventions, known collectively as the "Great Mobilization for the Republic's Values", represent the latest in a string of educational attempts meant to reinvigorate a sense of national pride among immigrant-descended youth – especially Muslim – in France's unique form of state secularism, *laïcité*. While ostensibly meant to apply equally across the nationalized French school system, in practice *La Grande Mobilisation* has been largely enacted in schools located in urban spaces of racialized difference thought to be "at risk" of anti-republican behavior. Through my work, I show that practitioners exercise their own power by subverting and adapting geopolitical discourses running through educational *laïcité* – notably global security, women's rights, and communalism – are nuanced by school-based practitioners, who interpret state directives in the light of their institutional knowledge and responsiveness to the social and economic profiles of their student populations. What emerges from my inquiry is the operation of a subtle form of power that is steeped in, but also subtly reworks, hegemonic narratives of national identity, state authority, and culture.

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Dedications

To Jean, Paul, and Catherine: I love you all and will never be able to express what your support has meant to me.

To Julia and Cynthia: I'm so glad you came into my life, which is infinitely richer for your presence.

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Introduction – the question of *laïcité* at the heart of French identity

This dissertation is about the particularly French concept of state secularism – *laïcité* (phonetically pronounced *la-ee-cee-tay*) – and how it is and has been a longstanding geopolitical technology of managing difference. I argue that through policies meant to enforce students' adherence to this form of secularism in their dress and behavior, France's public school system receives and reworks a series of hegemonic geopolitical discourses that characterize the contemporary understanding of *laïcité*. By prescribing an apparently religiously neutral, unaffiliated form of cultural belonging to the French nation-state, *laïcité* has, for at least two centuries, marked those who will not conform as backward and pre-modern. Over at least the past twenty years, however, *laïcité*'s precepts – or at least those precepts that it is assumed to rest on – have been critiqued and challenged by a small but growing Muslim minority in France that contests the distinctly European, Enlightenment-derived values implicit within the concept.

In early 2015, *laïcité* appeared in the worldwide consciousness in the aftermath of the January 7 – 9 terrorist attacks in the Parisian metropolitan region. The highest-profile of these was the murder of twelve people in and outside the Paris offices of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. The perpetrators, the Kouachi brothers, confirmed that they had targeted the publication for its history of depicting the prophet Muhammad in caricature.[1] Their accomplice, Ahmed Couliaby, underscored the Islamist motives behind the attack by taking hostages at a *Hyper Casher* Kosher supermarket on the outskirts of Paris and killing four, in addition to two

[1] Islamic doctrine is not unequivocal on the subject, but generally (based on several *hadith*, or sayings of Muhammad not appearing in the Qur'an) frowns upon iconism, including depictions of Muhammad, the final prophet of *Allah* (God). Distinctions exist between Muslim sects, with Sunni Islam – especially the Wahhabi theocracy of Saudi Arabia – generally taking a harder line against any depiction of Muhammad in the contemporary period. See Gruber, C. and Shalem, A. (2014) *The Image of the Prophet Between Ideal and Imagery: A Scholarly Investigation*. It should be noted that while *Charlie Hebdo* had provocatively represented Muhammad several times, it also has a history of portraying holy figures from all major world religions in very unflattering ways.

victims he had claimed in the days prior. In the midst of these events, the slain cartoonists and their "peculiarly French and savage tradition" of political satire (Gopnik 2015) were held up as exemplars of free speech and a free press bravely resisting radical Islamist tyranny. Even before the Kouachi brothers died in a shootout with police in Dammartin-en-Goële near Paris on January 9, this lionization culminated in a peculiar personification of the magazine itself as a synecdoche for the virtues of liberal democracy with the viral Twitter hashtag #*JeSuisCharlie* ("I am Charlie [Hebdo]").

In terms of the current state of laïcité as a core value of the French republic, the response to the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks is revealing in its massive scale both in France as well as across the globe. Rallies held across the country on January 10 and 11, dubbed *marches republicaines* (republican marches), were estimated to have drawn the largest crowds since the liberation of Paris during World War II.[2] In Paris alone, an estimated 1.5 – 2 million people marched from the Place de la République to the Place de la Nation, with 40 world leaders at the head of the file (Faiola and Witte 2015; figure 1). As many commentators pointed out, the presence of some of these leaders as self-styled champions of free speech and free press was ironic, given their own checkered reputations on the subject (e.g. lepoint.fr January 11, 2015; figure 2). Nevertheless, the marches were impressive displays of cross-cultural and interfaith diversity. In addition to their huge crowds, the events drew leaders of the major religious organizations in France, particularly Islam, which in the wake of the attacks found itself once again scrutinized as a potentially subversive element within republican France. In participating in the marches, representatives of French Islam placed themselves in the delicate position of publicly defending *laïcité's* imperative that religious belief be excluded from the public sphere while expressing

[2] Hinnant, L. and Adamson, T. Officials: Paris unity rally largest in French history. Associated Press January 11, 2015.

their contempt for the blasphemous content allowed by that very principle.

Much has been made of the rigid bifurcation of opinion demanded by the #JeSuisCharlie hashtag and the implication that to reject *Charlie* is ipso facto to be mired in a reactionary rejection of Western Enlightenment values (e.g. Klug 2016; Hamid 2016). To me, it appears that this supposed bifurcation has geographic in addition to cultural and political implications. Like many Western reactions to contemporary Islamist[3] violence, implicit in the apparently solidarity presented by #JeSuisCharlie is a geopolitical positioning of the modern, secular West locked in unending struggle with a backwards Islamist enemy determined to destroy the very foundations of Western civilization. In France, *laïcité* has long been implicated among the values that position the territory of the French state as a place of tolerance and openness in distinction to backwards theocratic lands: historically, those were identified at the time of the French Revolution as the so-called "Catholic" countries under papal rule. Over time, though, the geographic foil of French *laïcité* has shifted to encompass places under Islamic control.

This change over the past several decades in the French cultural consciousness has evolved alongside the rise of Islamist movements and the perceived challenge they present to the Enlightenment values that France prides itself on having brought to the world. This shift in *laïcité*'s status as a litmus test of civilization is a geopolitical one, marking non-compliers to its standards as not only culturally deficient, but also as potential security threats. As a result, French society struggles to reconcile its security fears through different geopolitical prescriptions for its Muslim population: some, inscribed in the overall tenor of the post-9/11 political mainstream, accept French Islam as long as it repudiates global Islamist movements that use

[3] Often conflated with *Islamic*, which is simply the adjective form of the word *Islam, Islamist* specifically refers to extreme political forms of Islam that envision the establishment, by conquest and subjugation, of non-Muslim peoples, of a pan-Muslim society (the "umma") across the world.

violence as a means of struggle in other places (e.g. Valls 2016; cf. Selby 2011). Others, taking advantage of the European far-right's recent electoral successes,[4] argue that the only viable guarantee of safety and order is the complete spatial exclusion of Islam from French territory achieved through the expulsion of "immigrants." [5]

Amidst such debate, French policymakers wrestle with how to manage the challenge posed by extreme Islam in the present. As many scholars have noted, measures taken by contemporary states in the name of preserving modern liberal values of individual determination, secularism, and free market economics tend to be, ironically, decidedly illiberal and even authoritarian (e.g. F. Adamson et al. 2011; Orgad 2010) The same could be said of policies and laws meant to combat Islamist extremism that have emerged in France in the past decade and particularly since 2012: an increased criminalization of anti-Semitic speech,[6] increased state surveillance of individuals' Internet usage, and, following a set of fear deadlier attacks across Paris in November 2015, the invocation of a state of emergency last used during a series of urban uprisings across France in 2005 that grants the government broad powers to impose curfews, block internet sites suspected of spreading terrorist propaganda, forbid public gatherings, and search residences without warrants.[7]

Alongside these extraordinary measures, a 2004 law concerning student dress in public schools[8] is often cited as one of the primary tools in the French government's toolkit for

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[4] E.g. Weider, T. "Le tripartisme s'installe en France" (Tripartisanism comes to France), *Le Monde* March 23 2015.
[5] Lost on many proponents of this notion, as well as opportunist candidates for the American Republican presidential nomination, was the fact that all the perpetrators of the January (and later, November 2015) attacks were EU-born citizens.
[6] Anti-Semitic, along with other kinds of hate speech, has long been legally defined in France, beginning with a 1972 law that gave the government and NGOs broad powers to prosecute perpetrators of defamatory speech in civil and criminal court. In 1991 the so-called "loi Gayssot" made public denial of the Holocaust a criminal offense and gave judges wide latitude to deprive parties convicted under hate speech provisions of their civil rights (see Bleich 2001a).
[7] Loi nº. 55 – 385 du 3 avril 1955 relative à l'état d'urgence. Text available: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/.
[8] Article L141-5-1 du code de l'éducation. Text Available: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/

combatting ideological extremism. In particular, it stands out for its utter banality: all ostensible signs (*signes ostensibles*) of religious belonging – including (though not limited to) the Muslim headscarf, or *hijab* (French: *foulard*) – are forbidden within the space of the school.[9] The ban on ostensible religious symbols worn by students is just one in a series of measures that has precipitated ongoing debate about French political culture and its insistence on a republican model in which a just and equitable society is achieved by a collective agreement to adhere to a uniform set of social norms and values. Prominent among these values is *laïcité*, which prescribes a muscular separation of private religious faith from an ostensibly neutral sphere of public exchange between rational individuals. While its proponents insist that leaving behind one's identity is the only way to achieve harmony among diversity (e.g. Vianès 2004;), critics point to the ways in which laicite's boisterous secularism obfuscates its silent prejudices (e.g. Baubérot 2016).

Indeed, the shape of the threat to laïcité as interpreted by the French political elite is one that is embodied by Muslims and – in particular – Muslim youth. Following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, a scattering of children across the country who refused to observe the national moment of silence in their schools led observers to strike an alarmist tone about potential young Islamists lurking in classrooms.[10] Despite the number of documented incidents of this type barely numbering more than two hundred by the Ministry of Education's count, the French state mobilized in response to what it perceived as a massive youth rejection of #JeSuisCharlie by

[9] It is a common misconception that this law exclusively targets the Muslim headscarf, leading to it commonly being called the "headscarf law" outside of France. In fact, three articles are specifically prohibited: large crucifixes (Christian), yarmulkes (Jewish), hijabs (Muslim). Sikh turbans have also emerged as a contested, potentially "ostensible," religious symbol. Outside of these school officials are given latitude to decide if an article of clothing meets the standard of an "ostensible sign;" the most common in this category is the so-called "long skirt" (*jupe longue*), which is typically considered to be a sign of religiously-motivated (usually Muslim) female modesty and subjugation.

[10] E.g. Verduzier, P. and Beyer, C. Charlie Hebdo: ces minutes de silence qui ont dérapé dans les écoles (Charlie Hebdo : the moments of silence that went out of control in schools). *Le Figaro* January 9, 2015.

undertaking the *Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la République* – the Great Mobilization for the Republic's Values – set of curricular interventions (Hutchins 2016). While exceptional in some ways, this initiative nevertheless fits into a continuity of educational interventions stretching back over two decades, all of which are meant to reinvigorate a sense of national belonging among alienated French youth and reestablish the authority of the public school system to define the terms of that belonging. In 2004 the ban of "ostensible signs" of religious belonging was undertaken in this spirit. In 1985[11] and again in 2005,[12] the teaching of the text of *La Marseillaise*, the national anthem, was reintroduced as mandatory curriculum; in the latter case the pedagogy was proposed in response to a spate of incidents of the anthem having been booed prior to soccer matches against Muslim majority countries, particularly Algeria.

However, reestablishing the authority of the public school system to define the terms of national belonging is only really possible if it there is some consensus as to the content of those terms in the first place. What became clear during in the immediate aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and the mobilization of the national school system is that there is not much agreement on what *laïcité* – the dearly-held value that had been targeted by the gunmen and defended vigorously through the *JeSuisCharlie* hashtag – *is*. Some people might point to an aspirational measure that allows national unity to emerge out of cultural and religious diversity. Some identify it as the legal framework that defines the place of religion in French society. And still others call it a basic value that defines the French nation. Roy (2005) underlines the confusion around the term by arguing that it is all of these, but that its application in practice

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11 Circulaire no 85-009 du 8 janvier 1985 de Jean-Pierre Chevènement, ministre de l'éducation nationale, intitulée "Pour une école de la réussite : préparation de la rentrée 1985". Available: http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/013003042.html.

[12] Loi n° 2005-380 du 23 avril 2005 d'orientation et de programme pour l'avenir de l'école. Available : https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr.

depends on a selective and often inconsistent application of its tenants. This inconsistency was especially evident following the attacks: for proponents of *laïcité*, it was elevated as an essential part of the French social contract, securing the possibility for an ethnically and religiously diverse society to live together in harmony. For them, *Charlie Hebdo*'s aggressive satire of religion was an exemplar of *laïcité*: by holding nothing sacred, they argued, the magazine showcased the best aspects of a society free to critique its own holy symbols (e.g. Kauffmann 2015). For detractors, *laïcité* was simply a naked apology for an oppressive system of cultural hegemony disguised as religious "neutrality:" in this view, when the elite holds up *Charlie Hebdo* as a triumph of freedom of expression, they are in fact condoning the profaning of that which some of France's most marginalized populations hold most sacred (e.g. Seymour 2015). What is certain, though, is that for at least one hundred and thirty years, groups with opposing visions of how the French state's relationship to religion should be defined have defended their points of view by appealing to this term (Kheir 2008; Baubérot 2009, 2001).

Debates and interventions in laïcité and educational practice

Laïcité sits at the intersection of multiple axes of power that are hugely consequential in the current political moment of a resurgence of European populist nationalism. As a measure of past, present, and potential newcomers' adherence to French cultural norms, it is implicated in regimes of citizenship policy across the global North that numerous theorists have identified as having taken on an increasingly neoliberal and revanchist tone (e.g. F. Adamson et al. 2011; van Houdt et al. 2011; Orgad 2010; Resnik 2010; Hiemstra 2010; Varsanyi 2008; Joppke 2007; Mitchell 2006). As a mechanism for policing people at the level of their bodily expression – especially regarding the wearing of clothing deemed "ostensibly religious," it is caught up in debates about constructions of race, gender, and religion (e.g. Hancock 2015, 2008; Scott 2007;

Rootham 2015; Davidson 2012; Butler 2008). And given its prominent place at the heart of the French school system, it enters into the ideological apparatus of state-sponsored education which many theorists judge to be primarily aimed at inculcating forms of civic allegiance acceptable deemed to be acceptable by political and cultural elites (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1976; Apple 2001, 2006).

While academic debates on all of these topics have taken into account *laïcité* as expressing different aspects of their topics, discussions that center on the concept itself remain somewhat rare, particularly in an Anglophone context. As a result, what many scholars implicating laïcité in their work have done – especially those speaking from outside of a French perspective – is to focus on its *political* as opposed to *geopolitical* characteristics, thereby de-rooting it from the centuries of political, cultural, and philosophical context that shaped it. At its core, laïcité has long been deeply implicated in mastering social difference across the space of the French nation-state, and yet many contemporary commentaries treat it as though it is a recent phenomenon unmoored from any spatial context. Describing laïcité as an articulation of neoliberalism (e.g. Rootham 2015; McRobbie 2011; Gökarkisel and Mitchell 2005) has risked assigning rationalities of governance that it may not have, and conflates it spatially with governance regimes in other global North societies. An overemphasis of laïcité's power over the body (e.g. McRobbie 2011; Scott 2007) – as important as this aspect is – similarly tends to gloss over the other geographic scales at which it has been expressed as a rational of control. And finally, insisting on its role as part of a hegemonic state education apparatus misses the everyday ways in which educators improvise and compromise in its application.

I propose an alternative perspective that I believe helps explain not only *laïcité*'s persistent presence at the heart of French political culture and social struggle, but also the forms

that it is currently taking in education policy. This perspective can be expressed through interventions I make by discussing *laïcité* in the context of each of the three conversations I cite above: neoliberal citizenship regimes, raced and gendered expressions of bodily control, and the place of state education in contemporary society. These interventions begin with a reframing of laïcité from an abstract state ideology to a concrete *technology of geopolitical control*. That is, laïcité in its long history can be conceptualized as a series of conflicts over, as Ó Tuathail (1996) puts it, "the ownership, administration, and mastery of space" (2). I use "technology" in its Foucauldian sense, as a disciplinary aspect of the governance apparatus that frames people's lives through particular rationalities (e.g. Foucault 1988; Rose 1999). In the case of laïcité, the disciplinary effect over time has been a spatial ordering of activities and identities, with the parochial and individual relegated to private and regional responsibility and the universal and communitarian to the national and global scales.

I argue that while laïcité in its contemporary form is implicated in regimes of citizenship formation consisting of individualized responsibility for conforming to cultural norms, it also draws upon rationalities of governance that reflect a specifically national mode of governance: it is, and has always been, a politics of territorial control within France deployed through state institutions for the purpose of crafting a national population out of cultural difference. In his seminal work *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), Weber speaks of the technological and ideological innovations that connected the rural margins of the French nation to Parisian cosmopolitanism: the railroads, the military, and the schools. All of these had a role to play in gradually erasing regional identities and consolidating the French nation-state long before the creation of other Western European nations such as Germany and Italy. Key in this transformation was the idea of French state secularism, which promised the state's indifference

to religious difference in return for loyalty to the idea of France above parochial identities. In the past several decades, the legacy of France's colonial history and the increasing presence of populations from the Global South – overwhelmingly from Muslim North Africa – has added a global dimension to *laïcité*'s enterprise of managing social difference within the national community. As a result, a primary justification for measures taken in the name of *laïcité* has been framed in terms of combatting the global War on Terror and in terms of defending a Western notion of human rights, particularly women's rights.

Next, while contemporary *laïcité*'s is used disproportionately to police racialized and feminized Muslim bodies, I argue that this application is rooted in a continuity of targeting difference conceived of as originating in specific subnational spaces. In the past laïcité was operationalized from the political and cultural center of Paris to integrate the *régions* stigmatized for their local dialects and practices. Today the geographic margins of the nation have largely shifted from the rural hinterlands to the urban peripheries known as *les banlieues*, and a different logic of territorial control has emerged there (e.g. Wacquant 2016, 2008; Dikeç 2007). As a result of France's positioning in historic and present flows of colonial control and global capital, these blighted landscapes have become home to a largely dispossessed and largely Muslim population (Douzet and Robine 2015; Kirkness 2014; Giblin et al. 2009; Dikeç 2007; Kepel 1991). Since the 1970s, an acceleration of migrant arrivals coupled with rounds of reactionary immigration policy and disinvestment in infrastructure and housing have created a widespread sense of disillusionment with the ideals of *liberte, egalite,* and *fraternite* promised by the French Republic. This disillusionment has spilled over in some cases into outright revolt, most notably in 2005 when *banlieues* throughout France (in addition to other similarly disadvantaged urban neighborhoods throughout Europe) erupted in weeks of violent protests in response to an

incident in which three adolescents died while fleeing police in the especially disadvantaged suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. At the same time, many second- and third-generation French citizens of postcolonial descent have sought an alternative to French identity by embracing their Muslim heritage, which in its privileging of visible, public displays of religious belonging runs headlong into the privatized faith promulgated by *laïcité* (Dotson-Renta 2015; Hancock 2015, 2008; Bowen 2009; Davidson 2012; Göle 1996).

Crucially, the question of how laïcité operates as a hegemonic value of the French state comes down to the educators who are meant to convey and enforce it, and herein lies my third contribution. Rather than assuming that the public education system neatly reproduces the French state's ideological priorities for the formation of its young citizens, I take up Lorcerie's (2010, 2013) notion of "normative confusion" as well as Lipskey's (1980) "street-level bureaucracy" and the everyday operationalization of geopolitical categories by bureaucrats as described by Kuus (2011a, 2011b) in order to think through the role played by educators on a daily basis in interpreting and carrying out the instructions they receive from higher up in the national educational hierarchy. While the highly-centralized way in which education governance in France is organized leads some to assume that its policy goals are uniformly pursued across the entire space of the nation (e.g. Gumbel 2015), I show that practitioners are in fact confronted with considerable institutional incoherence that undermines this claim. Instead, I argue that the nuanced manner in which educators put laïcité policy into practice is influenced by what I term *competence zones*: that is, teachers, principals, and other school personnel who are responsible for passing along laïcité as a civic value to French students draw on a localized knowledge of their students' communities and identities to ensure the highest possible success for communicating the values they are trying to teach.

As a result, the geopolitics of *laïcité* are on the one hand global: France's identity as a religiously neutral nation-state has historically defined itself against societies where daily life and religion are closely intertwined. In the past this identity set it apart from the other Catholic countries of Western Europe that were supposedly ruled by papal political influence; today this identity is more heavily defined with relation to the orientalized Others of France's postcolonial legacy. In the context of the global War on Terror, the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks are seen to represent an attack on France's secular way of life, and those who reject *laïcité* by promoting Islamist ideals are seen to pose an existential threat to the global order in which modern liberal democracies such as France control not only the geopolitical mechanisms of military dominance but also geoeconomic landscape of global free trade and unfettered movement across national borders (Sparke 2013, 2006). Laïcité at this level is framed in terms of human rights, security, and the cohesiveness of the French national community.

In the end, though, laïcité's application as a technology of governance is not limited to any one geographic scale: it spans multiple scales through the identities it is applied to and in the scope of its aspirations for creating a unified national community out of religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Laïcité and the cultural assimilation it demands has become a high price to pay indeed for access to the space of Western European states, which in the case of a global migration crisis is literally a matter of life and death for many (Kovras and Robins 2016). But laïcité also impacts people in the most mundane aspects of everyday life, in ways that are not reducible to control over international flows of people. *Laïcité* thus sits at the intersection of several struggles to define and control the territory of the French nation. These struggles play out in a variety of arenas, but what the French state's response to student reaction to the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in the form of *La Grande Mobilisation de l'Ecole pour les Valeurs de la*

République makes clear is that the school is a key site where the values represented by *laïcité* are most contentious and most poignantly felt both by those who hold dear to them and by those who reject them. Indeed, the *école républicaine*, the school of the Republic, is an institution considered at the heart of the French republican system and its principles (e.g. Jouan-Westlund 2014; Sachs 2007; Bowen 2007; Weber 1976). Not coincidentally, during several recent moments in which the French public was struck by a collective crisis of confidence in civic identity, correctional measures have been implemented in schools through curricular interventions meant to shore up the basic elements of French national identity. As such, the geopolitical logics of promoting a particular vision of French national identity are necessarily expressed through the particular institutional framework of the public school system, which in turn contains its own traditions, practices, and failings. Moreover, schools as educational facilities are much more than the characteristics of the institution as a whole: the ways in which organizational priorities are translated into actual practice is heavily dependent on the practitioners who interact with students on a daily basis and adapt their pedagogy to the racial and class identities of the children and families they serve.

It is clear that an examination of laïcité through public schooling involves a dizzying array of sites located at a variety of spatial scales. While the policies and laws concerning enforcement of laïcité in public schooling are bound within the institutional and legal frameworks of the French nation-state, they are driven by global geopolitical imaginations that foreground security, human rights, and immigrant integration as policy priorities. At the same time, the actual enforcement of these policies is performed by practitioners who are embedded within the local social and economic circumstances that shape their students' attitudes and behaviors. Although the centralized nature of the French education system means that policies

are meant to be enacted uniformly across the entire space of the public schooling system, varying local geographies profoundly affect practitioners' competence zones from within which they rework the messaging received from the national education hierarchy. With these complex intersecting factors in mind, it is perhaps most useful to begin by trying to understand the peculiar nature of *laïcité* as it operates in contemporary France.

Unpacking laïcité

My own journey to understand laïcité began two weeks after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, when I arrived in Paris to begin my originally planned fieldwork on the introduction of market-inspired school choice measures in the French education system. Upon arriving, it quickly became apparent to me that the deadly *Charlie Hebdo* attacks had more immediate and palpable consequences for the future French school system than the phenomenon of American educational privatization that I was awkwardly trying to extrapolate to the French context.[13] Soon, young people – many from Muslim backgrounds – from primary through secondary school began expressing their alienation from French society by taking aim at the global solidarity movement that had crystalized around the attacks, *#JeSuisCharlie*.[14] Following that, I became aware of a small group of students who had refused to participate in the national moment of silence held in part in schools, citing reasons like "you don't insult Muhammad…they were asking for it," or "I'm with the killers" (Verduzier 2015). A national scandal erupted; teachers and principals across France expressed outrage and shock at their students' behavior, and the media bemusedly

[13] This is not to say that school choice based on entrepreneurial logic characteristic of neoliberalism does not exist in France; however, much of the academic literature on this topic has been developed in an Anglo-American intellectual context (for important exceptions in the French context, see e.g. van Zanten 2006, 2009; Felouzis et al. 2013; van Zanten and Kosunen 2013; Laval 2003).

[14] On the plane ride to Paris, for example, I had read an account in *Le Monde* that detailed three Marseille high-school students' sincere belief that the attacks themselves had been fabricated as a false flag operation in order to smear the larger Muslim community.

reported on the extreme opinions that students had expressed. In response, the Ministry of Education launched the *Grande Mobilisation* to reassert control.

When I began to examine this initiative more closely, it became clear to me that it, and the dissent it was responding to, were elements of the latest manifestation of a recurring conflict over the meaning of French national identity that has been fought in the classrooms and on the playgrounds of that country's public school system for the past one hundred and thirty years. To be sure, the conflict in question is one of unequal power relations; it is largely constituted by the French state's attempts to enforce a hegemonic construction of its values through several channels, including public education. However, I believe that if we want to expose and question these relationships, it is vitally important that we place *laïcité* in its historical and geographic contexts. Context was something sorely lacking in the flood of commentaries that followed the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks: indeed, few if any commentaries in the wake of *Charlie Hebdo* posed the question of *why* the attacks precipitated the scale of response they did. After all, while acts of violent terrorism are unfortunately not rare events in the twenty-first century, not all recent incidents have provoked global solidarity and backlash against this solidarity. In 2012, for example, Mohammad Merah, a lone wolf attacker with Islamist aspirations, had murdered four military personnel – including, ironically, two Muslims – across southwestern France before entering a Jewish day school in Toulouse and barbarically executing several children. Theo van Gogh had been gunned down and nearly decapitated in broad daylight in the streets of Amsterdam in 2004 for practicing precisely the same kind of "freedom of expression" that had allegedly radicalized the Kouachi brothers and Couliaby. Even the hostages killed in the *Hyper Casher* supermarket the day following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks found themselves rapidly

overshadowed by eulogies to freedom of expression on behalf of the slain satirists.[15]

And yet none of the above incidents provoked a global solidarity movement on the scale of #JeSuisCharlie – or a similar backlash against that very solidarity. Above all, much of the critical rhetoric surrounding the aftermath of *Charlie Hebdo* assumed that the values being defended by the political and cultural establishment – particularly freedom of expression and its place in a secular society – represented a close-minded refusal to recognize the diversity of contemporary French society (e.g. Sayare 2015; Chomsky 2015; Seymour 2015). I could not disagree more with this sentiment. While the application of *laïcité* is problematic in its potential for abuse, I do not believe that it is irretrievable as a foundation for a just democratic society. Instead, to understand why *laïcité*, especially as it is manifested within the French public school system, provoked such a heated conflict among the French population in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, we need to move beyond a simplistic view of the concept as immutable ideology and see it as a politically negotiated and even fragile compromise struck between the French state and groups with a stake in expressing their sectarian identity. For the terms of this brand of secularism have never been rigidly defined in practice, even as they are often expressed through high-minded rhetoric as being handed down from time immemorial. Specifically, I argue that *laïcité*, in its current policy manifestations regulating student expression of religious identity, reflects but also reworks geopolitical visions about the kinds of social difference it is attempting to manage. While these visions frame Islam and its public expressions in terms of security, French identity, and Western human rights, they are never perfectly reproduced in education practitioners' actual, everyday applications. And yet this "ground-level" approach has been

[15] Anti-Semitic violence, it appears, is not a sufficient cause to provoke widespread outrage in France. A correspondent from *The Atlantic*, for example, who arrived at the Porte de Vincennes during the January 9 hostage crisis in *Hyper Casher*, was greeted by onlookers who shrugged their shoulders and explained, referring to the hostages, "eh, it's just the kykes" (*Ben…c'est que les feujs*). I discuss this point more fully in chapter 2.

largely neglected in studies that look at the social and political geographies of laïcité (for exceptions, see, e.g. Vivarelli 2014; Dhume-Sonzogni 2007). Therefore, to understand *laïcité* in its actually-existing practice, we must connect the local to the global, everyday social life to geopolitical statecraft, and institutional practice to state policy.

To accomplish this, I borrow from several sets of theoretical and methodological interventions that suggest complementary ways for approaching a deeply-embedded element of political culture in its multiple manifestations: first, ethnographies of neoliberal governmentality, as summarized by Brady (2014), which can offer a useful ground-up approach to often-abstract investigations of how neoliberal rationalities have permeated contemporary governanace. My second methodological intervention is drawn from critical geopolitics (e.g. Müller 2008, 2010; Kuus 2011a, 2011b) to map the discursive imaginations applied to specific spaces and places that inform their governance and management. This is especially important given the highly specific geography of laïcité interventions over time, particularly those mobilized through public education. Finally, I investigate the practice of laïcité from a "geosocial" point of view. The geosocial is a compilation of theories that, as Mitchell and Kallio (2016) argue, can usefully "conceptuali[ze] the contemporary constitution of subjects and spaces within transnational spaces" without glossing over the relational and situated nature of people and practices that can be missed by geopolitical theories of nation-state scale governance and geoeconomic notions of the extension of capitalist relations across space.

Overall, *laïcité* as both a concept at the heart of French national identity and as a set of concrete policies carried out in the educational setting is imbricated in narratives of global risk, human rights, and national responsibility that extend from the level of official statecraft to the most mundane moments on on-the-ground educational practice. Unfortunately, there has been a

tendency until now to only examine a limited set of structures within which laïcité is commonly expressed. In my view, something is missed when the discussion fails to consider the situated and relational natures of both laïcité's abstract conceptualization as well as its embodied practice. In the following sections I unpack some of the aspects of *laïcité* that highlight several of these missed opportunities and chart a way forward for my work.

What is laïcité?

The apparent problem of defining laïcité in popular and academic discourse points to a definite need to understand what is explicitly and implicitly meant by the term. First, it is vital to remember that although *laïcité* is often rendered in English as "secularism," this is an insufficient translation. Commentators commit a fallacy of composition when they attempt to frame laïcité in Anglo-American legal terms or the Anglo-American political tradition of multiculturalism. One example illustrates the incompatibility of these two political philosophies: while the American First Amendment enumerates individual rights that shall not be infringed upon by the state, *laïcité* describes the status of religions within society as a whole. The First Amendment guarantees "freedom of religion" without ever defining the terms of the communal form that this freedom takes; on the other hand, French law considers *a priori* that religious activity takes place outside of the relationship of citizens to the state. Indeed, through centuries of confrontation and negotiation with the Catholic Church, the French state has gradually established itself as a bureaucratic check, if a benign one, on the handful of organized religions it recognizes (Bowen 2009). The only truly constitutionally protected religious activity is worship inside of a religious building; beyond that the regulation of religious activities is politically negotiated in the realm of public policy, not fundamental rights (ibid). To an English-speaking audience, this appears to be extraordinary state interference in one of the most intimate aspects of a person's life (e.g.

Hancock 2008). To a French observer, though, this is politics: contentious, bitter politics, perhaps, but not unassailable rights as in the Anglo-American context.

Because of the impossibility of satisfactorily translating *laïcité* into a meaningful English phrase, I retain the French term throughout this work, unitalicized, both to retain its original meaning and to emphasize that it is constantly moving through moments of semantic openness and closure. For despite playing such a definitive role in defining French national identity, laïcité itself is a problematic term even in its original language. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the word was a neologism conceived to describe the emerging relationship between the emerging Third Republic (1870 – 1940) and the Catholic Church (Kheir 2008). This relationship, wherein the Church gradually had its influence over public life – including public schooling – removed, was formed through negotiations and debates that gave way to laws relegating religion to the private sphere (Bowen 2007, 12). The best-known of these, and the most widely-cited regarding matters of laïcité in schooling, are the *loi* (law) *Ferry* of 1882 and the *loi de 1905*. While the *loi Ferry* definitively secularized schools by requiring school facilities and personnel to have no connection to religious organizations, [16] the *loi de 1905* describes the state's relationship to religion more generally: the first article states "the State guarantees freedom of conscience and the free exercise of organized religions (*cultes*)"; the second that "the State neither recognizes, nor pays the salaries of, nor subsidizes any religion."[17]

Despite sounding definitive, in practice this law – as well as others that form the legal basis for the contemporary practice of laïcité – serve more as guidelines than rigid rules governing the government's relationship towards organized religions (Bowen 2007; Baubérot 2016, 2000). For this reason, to simply point to the French state's history of removing the

[16] Text available: https://www.senat.fr/evenement/archives/D42/1882.html
[17] Available: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000508749

influence of the Catholic Church as the basis for modern laïcité would be simplistic. As Bowen (2007) points out, despite the concept's origins in the removal of the Catholic Church from public life, laïcité rests upon a tacit acknowledgement of the historical domination of Catholicism in French society. Even as it adopted laws that progressively diminished the sphere of public life within which the Church wielded influence, the French state struck a slew of compromises with the Catholic hierarchy at national and international levels on matters ranging from maintenance of ecclesiastical property to the financing of parochial education (20).

Given this historical ambiguity, it can be unclear to what extent the French state errs on the side of principle versus practical when dealing with organized religion. Roy (2005) speaks to this fundamental uncertainty, stating that when studying the contemporary French situation regarding the expression of religious identity a crucial question emerges: what is being debated when we speak of laïcité today? Are we experiencing a replay of the same struggle over the place of religion in society, just with Islam taking the place of Catholicism? Or is there something qualitatively different about Islam that has caused French society to see in it a specific threat to republican values? I argue that elements of both are present, although other commentators do not always agree. Indeed, attempts to answer Roy's question often attempt to fit laïcité's square peg into a multiculturalist round hole, glossing over the long and contradictory history of how secular nationalism has been held up in France as a yardstick for new arrivals.[18] Instead of appreciating the degree to which negotiation and renegotiation have been at the heart of French laïcité since before the term itself was coined, the tendency has been to treat the 1905 law that proclaims the French state's absolute religious indifference as the first and last word on

[18] Ironically, such critiques that chide the French for their unwillingness to accommodate cultural and religious different often characterize them according to tired stereotypes of their supposed snobbishness and intransigence, e.g. F. Khosrokhavar, "Jihad and the French Exception," *The New York Times* July 21 2016.

the matter.

What I argue particularly belies any monolithic depiction of laïcité is the fact that the many exceptions to its principles have been granted in the service of governing space: for example, the expanded power of religious schooling in Alsace-Lorraine to reflect that region's status as German territory during the adoption of many of the foundational laws of laïcité, including the *loi de 1905*; support given to the construction of Islamic schools in colonial Algeria in order to encourage Muslim subjects to accept French rule (Dimier 2008); agreements struck with the post-colonial governments of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria for the joint management of the *Grande Mosquée de Paris*, the largest mosque in France built in the 1970s partially with public funds (Davidson 2012; Bowen 2007); the compromise negotiated with the Catholic church under which the French state pays the salaries of teachers in Catholic schools in return for making religious education non-mandatory, and so on. These and other spaces of exception that while the French state's use of laïcité as a management technique has been calculated and strategic, it has not been capricious – and that acknowledgement, I believe, provides a useful point of entry to which to better understand the logics of governance that flow through laïcité policies. Therefore, while critics of laïcité point to exceptions to its rule as throwing into question the ideological neutrality that laïcité's proponents claim for the principle, I argue that laïcité's history as a technology of managing spatial difference and articulating a spatially-bounded French identity means that ambiguity and exceptionalism are at its very heart.

Despite being portrayed as inviolable, laïcité was conceived through the efforts of the fledgling French state following the Revolution to nationalize the Catholic faith and strip power away from a clergy and religion assumed to be taking its orders from Rome (Baubérot 2000). Since then the concept – before and after being explicitly named as such – has been leveraged in

struggles to define the identity of the French nation. In this way, the particular circumstances that catapulted *Charlie Hebdo* to global prominence and, by extension, precipitated a perceived crisis of confidence in the public school system, are simply the latest manifestation of laïcité's role in adjudicating social difference. Of course, the scale of these differences and conflicts is different than in the past: At a global level, the French state is embedded in an intensification of military campaigns in the Middle East against an ill-defined "terrorist" enemy that involves daily violence against non-combatant populations with whom many Western Muslims identify. Locally, deep-seated geographies of discrimination, segregation, and exclusion that deny full participation in the French national community to populations originating in France's former colonies – among whom are counted most of France's Muslims – are becoming even more rigidly dug-in with the recent nationalist populism that has been sweeping advanced industrialized countries. Therefore, to fully understand how laïcité is leveraged within the French geopolitical imaginary as a tool of spatial management of difference, we need to examine some of the analytical tools that have been used to examine it. In the following sections I outline some of the uses and limitations of academic perspectives that have been applied to laïcité and suggest ways in which thinking geopolitically can help complement them.

Laïcité as neoliberal governmentality

Several scholars have made compelling cases that laïcité as a political ideology is closely aligned with the individualizing and entrepreneurializing effects of neoliberal governance that have transformed the industrialized West over the past several decades (e.g. Rootham 2015; Davidson 2012; Scott 2007; Gökariksel and Mitchell 2005). Much of the link between laïcité and neoliberalism can be seen in citizenship acquisition. Van Houdt et al. (2011) identify an emerging trend of what they call neoliberal "communitarian citizenship" in the United Kingdom,

the Netherlands, and France. As immigration to these places increases and the state steps back from its responsibilities of providing social support, they argue that governments have turned to avenues of integration that responsibilize immigrants for "earning" their own citizenship status by conforming to cultural standards of national identity. Laïcité in this sense is presented as a precondition for membership in the French national community, and a choice to be made by individuals to give up their former sectarian identities to take on the full benefits of a French citizenship imagined as being made up of universal values of individual liberty and freedom.

As Favell (1998) notes, during the 1980s conceptions of the process of becoming a French citizen shifted from pragmatic *insertion* (access) to everyday aspects of social, political, and economic life to a more high-minded set of principles of *intégration*, which involved a more elemental shift in an individual's identity. This shift was presumed to rest upon an individual's choice to exercise their autonomy (*volonté*) in setting down the path from immigrant to citizen. Through reports produced by the national *Haut Conseil de l'Immigration* (High Counsel for Immigration), a vision of French citizenship emerged in which the cultural diversity of France's residents is celebrated as a resource to be cultivated and protected, but is ultimately to be subordinated to a nationally-bound French community in which individuals are only identified based on their equality regarding other individuals. Identifying as a member of a group on the basis of an identity other than "French", on the other hand, is unacceptable to the republican tradition (ibid; Bowen 2007).

Laïcité, therefore, helps foster a situation in France where the idealized framing of citizenship norms is both similar to that in other migrant-receiving societies as well as exceptional. One aspect of this exceptionalism, and one identified by Dikeç (2007), is the relative lack of mediating institutions between citizens and the state apparatus. As a result,

expectations for compliance with norms of citizenship, including laïcité, are imposed most frequently at points of encounter between the citizen and the state apparatus: one often-cited example includes the requirement that all civil servants remove any religious apparel while performing their official functions. In practice this means that the actions and attitudes of individual representatives of the government are seen to be reflective of the state's purported neutral stance towards all religions. Nevertheless, assuming that laïcité can be interpreted through a neoliberal political economy theoretical lens runs into a key problem: while French capitalism has assimilated certain aspects of worldwide neoliberal trends, it remains highly mediated by state institutions and planning to a higher degree than many of its Anglo-American counterparts (e.g. Dikeç 2007; Schmidt 2002, 2003). For instance, the French state began pursuing some budgetary austerity in the 1980s in response to global monetary crisis (Jobert and Théret 1994; Levy 1999; Schmidt 2002). However, the resulting form of political economic governance that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s was, as Dikeç (2007) puts it, "state-enhanced" capitalism with a stronger role for the French state than its Anglophone counterparts. As a result, theories of neoliberal governance – which themselves have been developed in highly specific geographic and historical contexts – are not fully appropriate for understanding French political economy.

Nevertheless, laïcité is practiced across innumerable dispersed sites across the institutional landscape of the French state education apparatus, which themselves are hierarchically related to one another in carefully-defined ways. Given this level of devolvement of laïcité's enforcement within the French state bureaucracy, making use of a governmentality approach to track the application of such policies can be quite useful. However, as Brady (2014) notes, there has been a tendency in the neoliberal governmentality literature to stay within the

realm of abstraction when speaking of state power's application across space. She argues that ethnographies of governmentality – looking closely at the daily, mundane activities and attitudes that shape the form of governmentalizing processes – is crucial to reconciling theories of how neoliberalism operates in an ideal sense with its actually-existing forms across time and space (cf. Brenner and Theodore 2002).

I will discuss some of the methodological implications for a governmentality approach in the following chapter, but this observation has several immediate implications for applying a neoliberal governmentality lens to laïcité policy. For one, it means that we should look closely at the concrete institutional contexts within which laïcité is defined and operationalized, instead of assuming that the articulation of laïcité is uniform. Another implication is that spatial context matters as well. As noted above, the French national political culture is one that bears some resemblance to those of advanced industrialized economies. It does, nevertheless, have many important characteristics that make it unique. One of these is the state's approach to managing cultural and ethnic difference, which in France is shaped by historical and geographical circumstances that set it apart from its neighbors.

Laïcité as the management of cultural difference

To understand laïcité as a geospatial technology of managing difference, it is also necessary to look closely at the centrifugal, assimilating forces that have characterized western European states since the emergence of the modern nation-state in the nineteenth century (A. Marx 2003). Even through the perennial political conflicts of the late eighteenth through late nineteenth centuries, France was consistently engaged in a politics of transforming, as Weber (1976) puts it, "peasants into Frenchmen." In practice this meant taming the *provinces*[19] of France and bringing

[19] Even in contemporary France, *province* (province) has a pejorative meaning suggesting close-minded

them closer to the cultural and political center of Paris. In the regions, prefects, school administrators, and other cultural agents tasked with ministering to these populations described them in terms curiously reminiscent of those used to describe colonial populations in Africa and Asia: *sauvage* (wild), *paysan* (country-dweller). The reasons for this were principally the inhabitants' beliefs in forms of mystical Catholicism and their inability to speak standard French (Weber 1976, chapter 1). Indeed, even as Napoléon III was touring the France's cities in 1851 to consolidate first his presidency and then his emperorship of the country by promising public works to promote the grandeur of the French state, it is estimated that at least one-fifth, and probably more, of the population could not understand his words (Kirkland 2013).

Against this backdrop, the 1882 *loi Ferry* can be seen in part as one of the first large-scale attempts to assert state control over the geopolitical space of France by excluding the church from primary and secondary education. In this way, it could not only replace religious education with civic education that emphasized French identity as the first loyalty of the citizen, but also take control of language learning; the Church had, as part of its proselytizing mission, had previously adapted education in the provinces (particularly Brittany, where the inhabitants spoke Gaelic Breton rather than a Latin-derived French dialect) to the local languages. Thus, laïcité, though it would not be named as such for decades to come, was at the heart of the French state's geopolitical strategy for reshaping its citizens' affiliations from their regional identities to a national one. The schoolroom was also a space where the peasant's mystical interpretations of natural phenomena would be replaced with scientific explanations, adding a biophysical element to the secularization of the space of the French nation (Weber 1976).

This assimilating impulse and the attendant colonialization of territory inside the

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provincialism and backwardness set against cosmopolitan and progressive Paris.

boundaries of the French state eventually extended to the country's overseas colonies, particularly those in North and West Africa. As Bowen (2009) notes, the place of Islam in contemporary France is shaped by three main "timeframes", with the colonialization of Algeria and its especially acrimonious legacy making up the third. Algeria's coastal areas, fully incorporated as metropolitan French territory between 1848 and 1962,[20] was nevertheless ruled through separate governing regimes for French settlers and the indigenous Muslim population. A series of laws passed throughout the 19th century, often as a result of lobbying on the part of French settlers (*colons*), gradually eroded the indigenous population's rights. At the same time, these laws were instrumental in maintaining a fiction that the colonized Algerian population was a corps of French citizens-in-the-making by offering citizenship in return for renouncing any right to be governed by Islamic law (Barkat 2003). The practice of veiling in Algeria proved to be especially vexing for its French rulers: the general Thomas-Robert Beauregard, who was one of Algeria's conquerers as well as its first governor, noted that "the Arabs escape us because they hide their women from our gaze." (qtd. in Clancy-Smith 2006). From the very beginning of the French occupation of Algeria, the veiled body formed an important element of the cultural and racial difference that was seen to separate the civilized populations of not only France but the increasingly-European Algeria from a feminized, downtrodden Other.

The ongoing tension between assimilation to an idealized French identity and legal access to full French rights was transferred from North Africa to France by the arrival of wave of workers recruited from the country's former colonial possessions to meet labor shortages in the metropole during the 1960s and early 1970s (Dikeç 2007, 41). By the early 1980s, non-European

[20] French rule in Algeria dates to 1830 with the invasion and conquest of the city of Algiers. At the time Algeria was under the rule of a *dey*, an Ottoman-appointed ruler who operated with considerable autonomy from Istanbul. Three *départements* (administrative regions of metropolitan France) were established in Algeria: Oran, Algiers, and Constantine.

– especially North African – populations had become increasingly visible and embedded in French society through institutions of everyday life as well as through political demands for equality and religious recognition (Feldblum 1999). In the meantime, however, the 1973 oil shock and global recession led to restrictions on immigration, followed by changes to laws making family reunifications with workers already residing in France more difficult (ibid; Favell 1998). Against all of this, the French right began increasingly sounding an alarm over the non-French identity of these new "immigrants" who, they contended, threatened the cultural cohesion of the nation (Shields 2007).

France's historical entanglement with the Muslim world, particularly Algeria, are inextricable from the way in which laïcité is conceptualized today. The ties between France's colonial history and its current geopolitical relationships are manifold. In the realm of official international relations, the country maintains an uneasy trans-Mediterranean alliance with the leaders of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria (Bowen 2007). as well as a considerable population tracing their roots to the formerly colonized peoples of North and West Africa. At the same time, France's actions in contemporary world conflicts in the Middle East has placed it prominently in the minds of its Muslim citizens. Contrary to its decision to remain outside of the so-called "coalition of the willing" making up the military force participating in the U.S.-led invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq beginning in 2003, France has been an active contributor to airstrikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) since 2013. As such the country's strategic interests and its non-Muslim citizens have earned a place on ISIS and allied Islamist terrorist organizations' hit lists as acceptable targets in their global intifada.

Beginning especially in the late 1980s and into through the mid-90s alongside the intensification of the Algerian Civil War, laïcité saw itself often articulated as a security matter.

As a result, in France the management of difference at home is intimately linked to the way in which France views risk and danger on a global scale. This view of laïcité as a sort of guarantee of domestic security also has considerable effects on the way in which spaces at a sub-natioanal scale classified according to their potential for disrupting national harmony. This kind of thinking has a very specific nomenclature in French society, *communautarisme*, to which I now turn.

Laïcité and communautarisme

Often associated with laïcité is the French word *communautarisme*, which can be awkwardly translated as "communitarianism" or "communalism." Like laïcité, *communautarisme* is a neologism, although its etymology has a more recent pedigree: its first use in official political discourse was in a 2003 press release[21] jointly issued by then-Minister of Youth, Education, and Research Luc Ferry[22] and then-Deputy Minister of Academic Instruction Xavier Darcos, which signaled the government's intention to tackle a purported increase in racially-motivated (particularly anti-Semitic) harassment in schools (Dhume-Sonzogni 2007, 41). The nature of the racist harassment mentioned in the press release, however, was highly specific: motivated by popular portrayals of the school environment such as Brenner's (2002) *Les Territoires Perdus de la République*, the rhetoric held that Muslims were expressing their frustration with the contemporary geopolitical situations of the second Intifada and the Iraq War as well as decades of social stagnation by enclosing themselves in their religious practices and lashing out at Jews (Adamson 2006; Vichniac 2008).

[21] Available: http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid323/contre-les-derives-communautaristes-reaffirmer-les-principes-de-la-laicite-republicaine.html.
[22] No relation to Jules Ferry.

Ascribing anti-Semitic harassment to the presence of "communalism" is confusing to an Anglophone audience but more intuitive to a French one; the term has a pejorative meaning in French that implies an obstinate unwillingness to accept outsiders, and suggests a pathological insularism on the part of the community in question (Halpern 2004). *Communautarisme* has since become a discursive shorthand to describe the voluntary closing off of oneself in a culturally- or religiously-defined community. As Dhume-Sonzogni (2007) notes, the use of *communautarisme* to qualify problematic behavior on the part of communities is, in fact, a political one. In the case of the Ministry's press release as well as other school-based behaviors marked as *communatariste*, the term serves to conflate an understanding of ostensibly "ethnic" Muslim behavior and practices with behavior more generally considered antisocial. Indeed, because of the term's ambiguity as an actual sociological phenomenon, it is even more persuasive as a marker of risky populations who purportedly threaten the unity and stability of French society (Delphy 2004). When paired with laïcité, *communautarisme* discursively injects an understanding that the people who are resisting this pillar of French republicanism are willfully turning their backs on the ethnic and religious indifference that the concept promises.

Alongside geoeconomic discourses that promote connectivity and openness as the key vehicles for promoting cross-cultural cooperation (Sparke 2006), *communautarisme* also suggests that groups who reject the Republic's political values are setting themselves up for longer-term isolation. Crucially, the geographic concentration of Muslim populations often accused of willingly perpetuating cultural insularity in blighted urban ghettos of the *banlieues* adds a dimension of spatial isolation to this narrative. Through the discourse of *communautarisme*, the real and figurative distance between domestic French Muslims and the larger global Muslim population is collapsed, facilitating observers' conceptual links between

illiberal Islamic practices abroad and segregated neighborhoods domestically (cf. Hancock 2008). Writing on the autumn 2005 riots that took hold across the country's impoverished urban peripheries, the *banlieues*, Piettre (2013) notes that for fear of naturalizing a link between violent tendencies and Islam, even critical perspectives took care to "dodge" the questions of whether Muslim identity played a role in rioters' collective claims they were articulating to the French state. In other words, identity and geography are materially and discursively linked in such a way so that even sympathetic commentators found it difficult to conceive of a "domestic" urban French Muslim identity divorced from global Islam and global Islamism.

The effect of this conceptual collapsing of space between sites of local urban poverty and the places of origin of many of their inhabitants has far-reaching implications. To date few Anglophone scholars have considered the prominence of *communautarisme* as a sociological discourse with geopolitical implications for the French state's policies directed toward urban areas with high concentrations of Muslims (for an exception, see Dikeç 2007). By contrast, several French scholars have studied the operationalization of *coummunautarisme* in educational contexts (e.g. Ferréol 2003; Dhume-Sonzogni 2007; Ribert 2003), but have not fully considered the outward-looking implications of this application of discourse to policy. My use of geosocial understandings of both the dominant discourses generated by the term as well as its reworkings by on-the-ground educational practitioners helps take a step towards unraveling the global and local meanings it generates as a component of laïcité-enforcing policy. Doing so is especially important given the nature of these policies, which govern some of the most intimate aspects of people's lives. Despite being framed as a value that is equally accessible to everyone through the political process, laïcité demands that its adherents – among other things – have a bodily presence in public space that erases their racial and cultural difference. And yet, racial and

cultural difference are elements of identity that are not so easily dispensed with by the Muslim populations that find themselves under the most intense scrutiny from laïcité in the first place.

Laïcité on the (Muslim) body

Laïcité is unique among other core national French values in the way in which many of the practices targeted by it are expressed by and on the human body. By prescribing a muscular separation of private identity from public space, laïcité is inescapably tied up with rituals of prayer, clothing, diet and other highly visible practices that many religions – including the dominant Catholicism – consider central to their faith. According to its proponents, any visible expression of religious affiliation in the space of a state institution can be considered an attack on the state's absolute neutrality to religion and, by extension, the cohesiveness of a national community built upon a secular, civic identity.

A substantial literature exists documenting the ways in which laïcité is expressed and resisted through embodied practices. Largely motivated by feminist considerations of the body as a political and politicized space, these studies show how the seeming neutrality of laïcité is in fact made possible by reference to a gendered, racialized, class-positioned Other (e.g. Rootham 2015; Davidson 2012, 2003; Scott 2005; Göle 1996). Davidson (2012) argues that Muslim bodies and identities, which are disproportionately affected by policies seeking to promote laïcité, are "saturated" with "Muslimness" in a way that other religious identities in France are not (3). These bodies and identities are indelibly marked so that *any* bodily expression of Islam – including core aspects of Muslim practice like public prayer, visible garments, and dietary practices – is considered irredeemably irrational and placed outside of the republican community. In addition, many Muslim expressions of faith – particularly through clothing – are gender-specific. Women's covering of their hair, or veiling, has emerged as a perennial issue

considered to be exemplary of Islam's rejection of Western norms of individual rationality generally and gender equality specifically.

In addition, the feminized, irrational body of non-conformity to republican norms is one that has a very particular location in real and imagined space in the French collective consciousness. As Clancy-Smith (2006) demonstrates, the history of veiling as a marker of indelible cultural and racial difference is one with historical roots dating at least to the French occupation of Algeria, when French authorities and the general population alike identified veiling as a practice that represented both a potential source of restive intransigence as well as a particularly Islamic mode of oppression that threatened French notions of gender equality. As she argues, "…colonial discourse centered on an active, masculine, and seditious Islam was overlain with a second discourse that had for its object an immutable and monolithic Islam that rigidly organized all family structures and sociosexual relations" (25). In this double understanding of Islam as a threatening presence in colonial space, the security threat posed by potential uprising was augmented by a moral imperative to rescue Muslim women from the literal spaces of their bedrooms and bring them into the open society of French-style gender equality.

As a result, the Muslim body marked by laïcité as non-conforming to republican principles is not only thoroughly feminized but also very specifically located in specific imagined geographies that counterpoise a racialized Other to the civilized metropolitan population (Gökariksel 2009; Hancock 2008; cf. Saïd 1978). Such an imagination has meant that while the equalizing principles of laïcité are often portrayed as universal and all-encompassing over the space of the French republic, in practice interventions meant to overcome challenges to laïcité are quite often spatially targeted to those spaces that are seen to be deficient in their level

of conformity to norms of French state secularism. The intersectional feminization and racialization of non-conforming bodies in Western policing and regulatory regimes is well-documented (e.g. McRobbie 2011; Hancock 2015; Mirza 2013), and is expressed in locally specific as well as more generalizable forms. In France, one aspect of laïcité's contradictory application is that it often is harshly applied to Islamic practices while similar Catholic practices are largely overlooked. For example, Catholic nuns' habits – which are functionally and even aesthetically similar to the Muslim *hijab* – are technically subject to the same set of laïcité policies, but in practice considered very differently by political elites and the general population alike (Bowen 2007). And yet laïcité's gendered and racialized nature cannot fully account for the inequitable treatment of Muslim practices in French society. Simply pointing to the racist and sexist underpinnings of laïcité fails to explain, for example, why veiling is considered so differently in France than in Britain, a country with its own extensive colonial past. I expand on this point in the following section.

Notably, however, French feminists have been divided on questions relating to enforcement of laïcité as a sacrosanct principle of the French republic, particularly over the 2004 ban on ostensible religious symbols worn in schools (Roux et al. 2006; Delphy 2006). This, along with debates over the "authentic" meaning of laïcité that have been observed in other arenas (Kheir 2008), points back to a semantic and conceptual ambiguity deeply embedded in the history of the term that has never been fully resolved. This has led to a situation in which critiques of laïcité – or logics of governance that implicate laïcité – are not always clear on what, specifically, they are directing their critique at. As a result, they are uncertain of how to reconcile high-level pronouncements regarding laïcité with embodied experiences of laïcité-enforcing policies. As I discuss in the next section, my own approach attempts to hold the multiple levels

of laïcité as a hegemonic concept together in a productive tension, looking past surface-level rhetoric about laïcité expressed through official branches of the French state while also recognizing that such rhetoric is contained within popular understandings – as well as contestations – of the term.

Laïcité: The French Exception?

This dissertation aims to elucidate the role of political crisis in bringing laïcité to the forefront of national discussion in France. A natural question, and an especially important one from a geographic point of view, to pose regarding this thesis would be "can an understanding of struggles over laïcité in education tell us anything about societies outside of France?"[23] After all, as Roy (2005) notes, the politico-legal framework that makes up laïcité is one that is indeed unique to France. It would therefore be logical to conclude that the encounter between Islam and laïcité constitutes a unique situation among the migrant-receiving societies of Western Europe.

This question is even more pressing against the backdrop of a developing refugee crisis in Europe that is fanning the flames of xenophobic rhetoric among the continent's far-right political parties that are experiencing unprecedented electoral success. Geddes (2003) describes debates in France around immigration and national identity that explicitly referred to the non-European character of Muslim immigrants began to occupy space in the political mainstream from about the early 1980s. This period, which saw the rise of the far-right and anti-immigrant *Front National* party to electoral prominence and a republican backlash against the multiculturalism movements that had characterized the 1970s, was characterized by anxieties about the essentially "unassimilable" character of new migrants to France (see also Shields 2007; Hargreaves 2007).

[23] This question was posed to me by Dr. Nicole Nyguen in a panel on education geographies at the 2016 meetings of the Association of American Geographers in San Franciscio, and I am grateful for her inquiry and insight.

While French discourses about Islam casting it as dangerous, incompatible with Western values find commonality with similar discourses applied to the religion across the non-Muslim Global North (Butler 2008), in the French context these discourses are compounded by a more general reaction against the expression of any religious or sectarian identity in public space.

However, the French model of secular governance has inspired similar models in other countries throughout the world, most notably in Turkey, which undertook in the early 20th century a shift to a militant secularism based on France's own early experiments in laïcité (Davidson 2003; Yavuz and Esposito 2003). Indeed, it is worth questioning whether local models that take laïcité as a starting point can be identified as sharing similar global aspirations in their attempt to recast the terms of national citizenship in terms of allegiance to the state over and above religious and regional loyalties – and, if these aspirations are shifting in the wake of reactionary right-wing populism that is shifting state policies across the global North away from established norms of the modern liberal nation-state. For example, Gökariksel and Mitchell (2005) take up this question by framing anti-veiling discourses in Turkey and France within both states' attempts to foster a modern, rational subject able to participate freely in a global marketplace of labor and commodity exchange. In both cases the creation of a rational subject presupposes the existence of a culturally bound, unfree subject who submits to religious control. To what degree, then, are these parallel creations of a distinction between "veiled" and "unveiled" subjects the result of a common global political economic processes? And what are we to make of the rise of ultranationalist politics that resists *both* the economic integration *and* the cultural diversity that global openness brings?

Because of its application to elements of religious identity that are inescapably visible in public space, laïcité likewise emerges as an issue that potentially transcends national borders by

moving on the bodies of migrants, particularly women. What is problematic about some of these approaches is that in focusing heavily on the politics of the body as central to policies on veiling and other personal religious symbols, these studies sometimes ironically disembody laïcité policies from their particular spatial and historical contexts. Rootham (2015), for instance, places laïcité alongside two other contemporary "technologies of control," post-feminism and neoliberalism. In doing so she somewhat anachronistically and aspatially assimilates laïcité as a historically ambiguous concept as well as a set of contradictory political practices to two other historically and spatially specific sociopolitical phenomena. While thoroughly showing how her subjects' experience of laïcité is experienced daily as embodied practice and how it intersects with race and class norms, she nevertheless largely treats the French context in which those experiences take place as interchangeable with those of other advanced industrialized countries. For instance, she briefly mentions but does not expand upon the geographic and historic specificity of *la banlieue* that intersects with French Muslim identity in extremely important ways that are not reproduced in other national contexts.[24] And she does not mention the slowly simmering right-wing nationalism represented by the *Front National* that has been driving, since the 1980s much of the state policy seeking to circumscribe Muslim expression in France. The point here is not to excoriate Rootham for not including everything under the sun in a single article; however, I do want to point out how national specificity intersects importantly with global structural forces to produce a specific iteration of state secularism.

The question of a common global context versus a nationally-specific setting for reactions to laïcité becomes even more crucial when the phenomenon of Islamist violence is

[24] As a matter of opinion, I also take issue with her almost dismissive attitude towards the complex issues linking anti-Semitism, certain expressions of Muslim identity, and the Israel-Palestine conflict, given France's history of particularly vicious Anti-Semitism.

taken into account. Several recent commentaries have focused on critiquing laïcité for its role in relationally producing terrorist attacks across France. While these analyses are important for showing the ways in which laïcité's integrative ambitions often produce exclusion and inequality, they often contradict their own presuppositions about the nature of laïcité. Paradoxically, many critics of French republicanism and laïcité try to show the limits of the French model of integration in an increasingly globalized world by presenting a spatially isolated French nation at the center of their analysis. A recent essay by Khosrokhavar (2016) amply demonstrates this attitude:

> Above all, France hasn't been able to solve the problem of economic and social exclusion. Young people in the impoverished suburbs, the banlieues, marginalized and with few prospects, feel like victims. They become prime targets for jihadist propaganda, often after a stint in prison for petty crimes. Neither Germany nor Britain faces the banlieues phenomenon, at least not on such a scale…One reason is that France's vision of citizenship, which strongly insists on adherence to a few exalted political values, has seriously eroded over time…Postwar Germany, on the other hand, chose a far more modest and prudent vision: economic progress. Today, Germany has a rather muted policy toward the Muslim world, and it displays no desire to unite all its citizens around universal principles. Britain isn't trying to create a monocultural society either. It has opted for multiculturalism, which can abide hyphenated identities and communal behavior. But France remains resolutely universalist even though its assimilationist ambitions are increasingly at odds with everyday reality, and this growing gap is a source of pervasive distress. [25]

Khosrokhavar's commentary – like many other similar ones – performs a spatial sleight-of-hand: it situates France at the heart of global economic and human movements while presenting the country as a hermeneutically sealed entity totally at odds with its presumably more enlightened neighbors. France, it seems, is the only country in Western Europe with an exclusionary immigration regime, with highly-held civic ideals, and that is too obstinate to recognize its own failings.

This is a kind of "French exception" that I want to argue vehemently against: such narratives completely elide the geographically complex ways in which political space is created at all scales. Instead we are presented with a perspective in which a supposedly monolithic

[25] From an essay translated by John Cullen as "Jihad and the French Exception," *The New York Times* July 21, 2016.

French political culture is assimilated to the entire space of the French state. Khosrokhavar's explanation, for example, reproduces the narrative of the *banlieue* as an exceptional space of territorially-expressed anger and disgruntlement, without acknowledging the ways in which international migration, media portrayal, and state urban policy have relationally constructed the *banlieues* as political spaces over time (Wacquant 2016, 2008; Haenni 2010; Giblin et al. 2009; Dikeç 2007; Kepel 1991). It compares France's integration of Muslim immigrants to Britain's and Germany's, despite the unique immigration regimes that have been produced by all three countries' very different colonial histories (Bleich 2001b). And, importantly, it entirely glosses over the challenges to multicultural values and policy that have recently experienced unexpected – but decisive – electoral success across the Western industrialized world. At the time of publication of Khosrokhavar's article, the popular vote to withdraw the United Kingdom from the European Union and its regime of unfettered borders was a month past. In that light, his celebration of Britain's multiculturalism that can "abide hyphenated identities" over France's obsolete universalism seems off the mark.[26]

In addition, my research has shown convincingly that such a characterization of laïcité as a sort of wrecking ball that ignores all cultural and social difference is inaccurate as well as unfair. In my conversations with teachers, principals, and other official representatives of the *Ministre de l'Education,* I was consistently struck by their deep knowledge of and willingness to accommodate their students' multiply situated identities. While the ideological elements of French republicanism that elevate cultural assimilation over celebrating difference run through the French public education system, it would be inaccurate to say that laïcité is imposed indiscriminately throughout. Rather, the geopolitical imaginations that make it possible to

[26] Interestingly, the December 2016 victory of the staunchly anti-immigration François Fillon in France's center right *Les Républicains* party presidential primary elections might serve to confirm Khosrokhavar's observations.

conceptually link a girl in a hijab with terrorists murdering cartoonists are subtly but powerfully reworked by practitioners who are accustomed to compromise and negotiation in their daily work with youth.

In offering this critique of Khosrokhvar and others who write on the difficulties of French society's attitude towards cultural difference, I do not mean to ridicule their analyses but point out the ways in which they are limited in their geographic imaginations. Typically, this has happened by constructing a French nation-state that is essentially equivalent to other Western European nation-states in its political traditions and cultural norms, but that has chosen to cut itself off from multicultural values. By making use of a geopolitical lens to examine the relationships within and beyond France that make up the contemporary conception and application of laïcité, I show that it is insufficient to take this concept at face value and judge it as it appears in government proclamations and Ministry of Education circulars. Rather, it is a fragile expression of a social compromise that is being strained as France – along with much of the industrialized West – is asking difficult questions about what and who it wants to be.

Chapter Organization

Chapter 1: Towards a geopolitical understanding of laïcité outlines the critical geopolitical theory and methodology I will use to understand the narratives that drive laïcité's application in education policy. Drawing from the critical geopolitics literature, I discuss my methodological approach using discourse analysis to uncover geopolitical narratives within everyday governing practices. These literatures include the early critical geopolitics literature that sought to denaturalize geopolitical relationships by examining focus on the role of discourse in constructing governable political spaces, as well as feminist political geography that focuses on the importance of connecting abstract discourses of statecraft to the embodied experiences of

governed populations. I also discuss the geographic background to my inquiry, *la banlieue*, which has been under heavy scrutiny by French society and the French state as a territory in need of increased management and control. I finish this section by developing the notion of the geosocial as a framework for bringing together the global and local geopolitics of laïcité.

In **Chapter 2: *Charlie Hebdo, #JeSuisCharlie*, and a Crisis of Confidence in the *Ecole Républicaine*** I sketch out the background events that catapulted questions of religious freedom and expression in French society to worldwide prominence. I also give an overview of the creation of the modern *école républicaine* and the major initiative that was implemented in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, *La Grande Mobilisation de la République*. I show how this curricular reform fits into a continuity of similar responses to crises of French national identity in attempting to reinvigorate educational authority and the teaching of republican values. By doing this I show how the school as both a national institution and as individual establishments have been continuously relied upon as tools to manage social difference.

In **Chapter 3: Theories of citizenship and nationalism in education** I review literature on state perspectives on integrating outsiders into the national community, with an emphasis on these topics in the context of the European Union and France. This literature is useful for understanding how certain aspects of a nationally-bounded identity, such as laïcité, can become naturalized to the point of appearing invisible but are nevertheless very present in everyday expressions of nationalism. At the same time, this literature highlights the precarity of narratives of national community (cf. Anderson 1990). This contingent nature of national identity is highly relevant to laïcité, as a constantly renegotiated agreement that weakly holds together political coalitions presenting temporary, if hegemonic, notions of community. Moreover, the presence of laïcité at the heart of conflicts over the shape of French public education requires a careful look

at how national education systems have historically been created to instill a carefully spatially-bounded sense of national identity in students. In their curricula and practice, national education systems are likewise oriented towards the centrality of particular values – such as laïcité – in defining who and what are considered inside and outside of the national community. As research has shown (e.g. Mitchell 2011; Staeheli and Hammett 2010; Mitchell and Parker 2008), children have a keen sense of their national belonging, or lack thereof, that is highly significant in understanding how nationalist curricula may affect their understandings of their geopolitical identity.

The final two chapters turn to empirical evidence to examine the individual and institutional mechanisms that translate geopolitical conceptions of risk, security, and human rights into actual, everyday practice in schools. Over the course of these chapters I develop my concept of "competence zones," which draws on but also extends theories of how ground-level practitioners in a bureaucratic system develop their capacity for acting autonomously in their work. In **Chapter 4: Laïcité educational policy between "peculiarly French" bureaucracy and on-the-ground practitioners**, I draw upon interviews with teachers and principals to establish practitioners' "practical schemas" (Bowen and Bertossi 2014) for working with laïcité in their daily work. First, despite the strong centralization of the French national education system, educators bring a great deal of practical knowledge of the social and cultural environments in which their work is embedded. On this basis, they are accustomed to daily improvising, adjusting, and negotiating in order to achieve their pedagogical goals. Second, although educators bring a variety of conceptual frameworks to laïcité policies, these understandings seem to coalesce around three main themes by which they operationalize the enforcement of these policies: protecting the space of the *école républicaine* as a space of

encounter for students from different backgrounds, providing students with a common touchstone of French identity, and maintaining the smooth everyday running of the education system.

In **Chapter 5, Reworking laïcité in the realm of the geosocial** I develop my notion of "competence zones" by thinking through educators' experiences in their own words. I offer a discussion about how the concept of the "geosocial" (Mitchell and Kallio 2016) can help reconceptualize educational laïcité as a concept that sits at the intersection of global conflict, the institution of the national education bureaucracy, and students' bodies. In this section I discuss three high-level geopolitical discourses that have been used to justify the need for laïcité-promoting policies, particularly the ban on *signes ostensibles*: security, French national cohesion, and women's and girls' rights. Drawing again on interviews with educational practitioners, I show how these narratives are received and subtly reworked through their daily application of the policies they are tasked with carrying out. At the same time, I reaffirm the need to examine laïcité at this institutional level, between state ideology and individual experiences, to successfully connect educators' reworkings of the concept back to a larger awareness of cultural difference in French society.

Finally, I conclude by asking **what next for laïcité?** Here I reflect on some of the events that have taken place in France since I began my dissertation work and point to the ways in which they might stimulate a geographically-informed reexamination of this principle, long considered so indispensable to French identity and the Republic. Amidst considerable social and political upheaval across Europe, it is more important now than ever to have an effective framework for looking past the rhetoric surrounding contentious points of social and cultural difference.

Chapter 1: Towards a geopolitical understanding of laïcité

> It's true that we have a bit of trouble making others understand, especially abroad, what this word "laïcité" means, and what value it has.
>
> - Prime Minister Alain Juppé, to the National Assembly, February 4, 2004 (qtd. In Kheir 2008).

Introduction

As the above quotation suggests, laïcité is a slippery term even for the people who are most dedicated to upholding it as a principle of the French Republic. Indeed, the history of laïcité suggests that it is somewhat of a blank canvas, allowing different parties to advance their vision of state secularism with reference to a label that evokes a cherished cultural value. Kheir (2008), for example, shows that even during late 19th-century debates over the set of laws codifying a modern understanding of laïcité in French society, political rivals alternately claimed that their vision of laïcité was the "authentic" one that fit into the heritage of the French Revolution. This posturing around one term continues in contemporary debates as well. Kheir describes how French feminists who opposed the 2004 law banning ostensible religious symbols in schools identified the *application* of laïcité in that instance as sexist and racist, but defended the *principle* of laïcité – at least, as they interpreted it "as it existed up until 2004: religious neutrality of the State, its institutions and civil servants, but not users of public services" (Chouder et al. 2008, qtd. in Kheir 2008).

The semantic and political uncertainty around laïcité has considerable consequences for academic understandings of its application through state policy, particularly in education. In the introduction, I discussed several frameworks that have been used to understand laïcité as a social and political phenomenon, highlighting both their potential insights as well as areas where these frameworks appear to be limited in that regard. As the French state attempts to leverage laïcité as a civic value to be taught through the *Grande Mobilisation des Valeurs de la République* educational intervention, it is vital to understand how we should theorize not only official

expressions of the initiative's goals and methods, but also its actual practice on the ground. Doing so requires us to embrace laïcité's status as a cultural shibboleth and examine the multiple dimensions it can take on as a political term. In particular, I argue that these dimensions are largely geopolitical in that laïcité encapsulates and expresses hegemonic understandings of global and local relationships between an imagined ideal French society and its 'others' who represent all that it is not. At a global scale, laïcité seals France's status as the birthplace of modern human rights that stands as a beacon among those places that deny such dignity to its citizens. More locally, laïcité is used to identify and label those places where French republican values are seen to be deficient, and in need of intervention.

In this chapter I discuss a methodology for establishing a geopolitical understanding of laïcité. To do this I examine three frameworks that suggest what kind of evidence we might use for thinking about laïcité as a geopolitical concept: neoliberal governmentality, geopolitical discourse, and geosocial negotiation. Each of these concepts carries a particular ontological understanding of social and political phenomena: neoliberal governmentality focuses on forms of political subject-making that have emerged under conditions of advanced capitalism; geopolitical discourse identifies narratives of risk, opportunity, and danger that are conceptually mapped onto different spaces and places; and geosocial negotiation reveals actors and their moments of transformative agency within the structures of the political economy. Together, these understandings can help create a more complete understanding of laïcité by compensating for the others' shortcomings and blind spots, and in doing so suggest a broad range of instances where we can observe laïcité in its real-world manifestations.

I then move on to considering methodological implications for placing laïcité at the intersection of the theoretical frameworks mentioned above. In general, I draw upon work in

qualitative social science that has been adapted and expanded by geographers. While my study is not true ethnography in the sense of deeply entering into the lifeworlds of my research subjects (cf. Herbert 2000), I nevertheless am committed to a "grounded theory" approach (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967) that takes seriously those subjects' lived experiences as the basis for constructing my own conceptual understanding. More specifically, I am inspired by the study of how on-the-ground practitioners receive and rework discursive understandings of the subject of their daily work. Such an approach has been applied in several contexts, most notably by political geographers who seek to understand how state actors' geopolitical knowledge influences the policies that they are charged with applying to various places (e.g. Kuus 2011a, 2011b; Müller 2008). This work helps us understand how to classify and interpret the daily work of state bureaucrats who are charged with carrying out an institutionally-defined mission but who nevertheless exercise a fair amount of personal discretion in their work.

I also discuss the geographic context within which the subjects of my study – public school teachers and principals – are operating. In my view the setting of the *banlieue*, the often-marginalized urban peripheries surrounding major cities in France (and especially Paris), is vital to understanding the contemporary application of laïcité through policies aimed at inculcating a certain vision of national identity among young people. And yet it has been ignored or glossed over in many critiques of these same policies. For the French, terms like *en banlieue*, *banlieuesard*, and so on carry a set of social meanings that are hard to appreciate for outsiders (except perhaps through reference to terms like *ghetto* or *the hood*, but as I note below, these are not entirely appropriate analogies). Overall, the urban peripheries of Paris and other French cities have decades of embedded social, political, and economic processes that have created a very specific environment on which laïcité is being deployed as a means of managing difference (cf.

Wacquant 2016, 2008; Dikeç 2007). And as I show later in this dissertation, educational practitioners carry a keen awareness of these layered periurban landscapes to their work.

Finally, I move to a framing of my position with regards to both the object of my research as well as some of the larger ethical questions circulating around the practice of laïcité in contemporary French society. The ways in which laïcité has been framed by commentators – particularly in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks – have served as some of my primary inspiration for this project. It would be disingenuous for me to not disclose that in some cases I have had a strong emotional reaction to some of these commentators' perspectives that have certainly impacted my approach. Fortunately, I am able to take direction from a substantial body of work reflecting on the embodied responses of scholars to their work. One perspective, elaborated by Hyndman (2003), advocates an approach that is particularly applicable to cases where structural violence has been combatted by more targeted acts of violence. This "neither / nor" view helps move beyond retribution and *quid pro quo* justice that often characterizes thinking in these situations. It has certainly been very useful for me in coming to terms with my own work, advocating a mode of scholarly activity that is hopefully compassionate while uncompromising in its core principles.

Overall, in this work my overarching analytical framework is inspired by Hanson-Theim (2009), who argues that the field of education geography should take a more "outward-looking" perspective to consider how phenomena in education policy and practice *produce* larger changes in the economy and society rather than being simply *derivative* of those changes. In other words, instead of interpreting struggles over laïcité in education with reference to pre-existing theoretical frameworks, I instead use those struggles as a vehicle to investigate the current state of those frameworks.

Theoretically and empirically situating laïcité

The current controversy over laïcité's status as an equitable principle is in no small part due to the tendency for French political and cultural elites to speak authoritatively about it as a non-negotiable requirement for admission to French society while at the same time offering apparent exceptions – and therefore preferential access – to favored groups at the expense of marginalized ones. Part of this apparent contradiction can be attributed to two fundamental aspects of French political culture that have important implications for a study of laïcité in its multiple manifestations: first, as Bleich (2001a) points out, French policy concerning civil rights is much more heavily geared to guaranteeing the equal status of all citizens before the state instead of identifying and compensating for structural disadvantages on a group-by-group basis. The second point, which is closely related to the first, is described by Dikeç (2007): in the French republican tradition, social equality is seen to be premised on having as few barriers between citizens and the state institutions that serve them as possible. In practice, this means that an effective starting point for examining the formal and functional aspects of contemporary laïcité must reconcile the overarching narratives presented about laïcité as a deeply held civic value with the actual instances of its application throughout the state apparatus.

The overarching narratives that circulate around laïcité, while conforming to the idiosyncratic aspects of French political norms, do intersect with more generalized trends being observed across the industrialized West. An important way in which Western industrialized states have attempted to exert control over increasingly diverse populations is to portray their values as universal and uncontestable. Often these attempts rely on tying national values to supposedly uncontested global ones, like human rights. Such claims to "universal" principles of human dignity and self-determination are contested by national and cultural minorities for their

implicit Western bias and postulation of a threatening non-Western "other" who categorically refuses to assimilate to ostensibly self-evident norms. Particularly in the case of state institutions that are heavily involved with inculcating a sense of civic membership in young people, this kind of contestation aims for a narrower spatial construction of political loyalty based on moral, religious, or cultural difference and challenges the state's efforts to form children in cosmopolitan forms of consciousness (Mitchell 2001; Apple 2001; Bash 2001; Niens, Reilly, and Smith 2006).

In the French model of ideal citizenship, such contestation is considered in the abstract as fundamentally incompatible with the republican ideal of creating unity out of difference. And yet, as Bertossi and Bowen (2014) note, the uncompromising discourse that circulates around laïcité is often selectively targeted at the practice of Islam in public spaces such as schools and hospitals, while compromises are constantly made with other religious groups (especially the Catholic Church; see also Bowen 2007). It seems then that in practice, laïcité is less of a fundamental value that underlies the relationship between the French state and religious institutions, and more of a way of framing which transgressions of the state-church boundary are acceptable and which are not. This framing can be seen across multiple institutions that interact with citizens in their most intimate moments such as schools and hospitals, in which individual instances where laïcité is seen to be challenged are adjudicated both in their institutional context (Bertossi and Bowen 2014) as well as in overarching politico-legal apparatus of the French state.

Given the mediating influence of institutions and institutional practitioners in bringing laïcité's high-minded principles down to the lived experience of those who are the subject of its policy interventions, I argue that it is precisely these mediating spaces and moments that should form the basis for the empirical investigation to be brought to it. Below I describe three

theoretical inteventions with methodological implications for this investigation, outlining the potential contributions and limitations of each.

Neoliberal governmentality

The difference between laïcité as an abstract political and cultural ideal, as it tends to be expressed in high-level political discussions, and its concrete manifestation in the form of policies that police the boundary between private faith and public life, is one that implicates multiple forms and sites of political power. In this way, it appears less as an instance of state ideology and more as a Foucauldian technology of government made up of multiple nodes at which the "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 1988) is realized. Therefore, investigating the ways in which laïcité is applied to people's everyday lives lends itself to a conceptual framework that treats laïcité as governmentality, and locates the forms of power that sustain it in multiple places in and beyond the state.

Despite the contemporary dominance of neoliberalism as an explanatory framework for understanding developments in global social and economic governance, scholars have begun to critique the ways in which this outlook has tended to become a monolithic and ossified (e.g. Li 2011; Brenner et al. 2010; Collier 2012, 2009; Ong 1996). As Brady (2014) argues, much scholarly work in the governmentality tradition has remained at a high level of abstraction, not fully exploring the actual pathways that have created the general environment of devolved and privatized governance under neoliberalism identified by this literature. She argues that as a result, the degree to which state-driven neoliberalization is identified as a primary explanatory factor in a wide range of social and political phenomena is perhaps exaggerated at the expense of other social mechanisms and rationalities that contribute to the formation of political awareness and action.

I argue that although advanced forms of capitalism in France have certainly impacted the exercise of laïcité as a basis for social policy and the management of difference, relying on neoliberalism as a primary framework for understanding its contemporary form is potentially ahistorical and aspatial. As mentioned in the introduction, French contemporary capitalism bears hallmarks of neoliberal governance that has been more thoroughly discussed in Anglo-American contexts, but also important differences that reflect the lasting influence of the French republican contract and the role prescribed for the state as a guarantor of social cohesion (Dikeç 2007; Schmidt 2002). In addition, the multiplicity of sites and scales at which educational laïcité policy is implemented points towards the need for an ethnographic investigation of rationalities of governance as identified by Brady. She notes that such an approach is inspired by a rethinking of Foucault's own later work that has only recently been published in English[27], which treated governmentality more methodologically than ontologically. That is, Foucault himself understood a governmental approach as an impetus to look for pathways and nodes of power throughout multiple institutions across society. He also deemphasized the presence of a neoliberal metanarrative framework shaping the development of forms of power within a relatively narrow set of parameters.

Understanding how laïcité is situated (or not) within neoliberalism, and whether or not a governmentality approach is appropriate (or not) for examining its contemporary form is an important question. Although some studies have argued that it does indeed (e.g. Rootham 2015; Görkariksel and Mitchell 2005), there has not been sustained engagement with locating laïcité as a principle of contemporary French governance within the broader structures that have been

[27] Somewhat ironically, Foucault's thought is far more influential among social thinkers outside of his home country and original language; among social anthropologists in France his influence is relatively limited and tends to be overshadowed by more class-based analysis such as Bourdieu's.

identified as neoliberal in nature or neoliberalizing in their effects. Geographers and other scholars have increasingly considered the impact of spatial variation as a factor in influencing the development of multiple neoliberalisms and, as a result, multiple forms of neoliberal governmentality. Nevertheless, there has been considerable disagreement about the degree to which the geographic idiosyncrasy of neoliberal governance should be considered against a more structural understanding of neoliberalism as a phenomenon (Wacquant 2012; Collier 2012; Peck and Theodore 2012).

Some work in ethnography has attempted to move beyond some of these theoretical impasses by proposing a methodological approach that can flexibly speak to *both* the uniqueness of particular governmental interventions that appear to encompass qualities of neoliberalism *and* the common aspects of these projects that point to a larger structural shift taking place in the global political economy. In an introduction to a theme issue of *Foucault Studies* on "ethnographies of neoliberal governmentality", Brady (2014) notes that

> "The ethnographic turn within studies of neoliberal governmentalities is particularly worth taking note of because there is widespread agreement that neoliberalism is very commonly conceptualized as a *governmentality,* and because ethnographic studies actively address what is viewed as the governmentality literature's 'Achilles' heel,' namely its lack of attention to multiplicity and context."

What many studies in this vein propose is to operate in the "fuzzy" space where theoretical "schemas" for governance intersect with the actual operationalization of these schemas, recognizing that the very nature of neoliberalism at any geographic scale is to operate through a series of shifting contradictions, compromises, and incoherencies (e.g. Collier 1990; Lippert 2012; 2005). Although, as some critics charge, to do this is to render the identification and critique of structural power meaningless (e.g. Wacquant 2012), there is nevertheless an analytic power that emerges in identifying not only the rationalities of liberal and neoliberal government that permeate contemporary governance practices but also non-liberal discourses as well.

Locating non-liberal rationalities within systems of governance otherwise characterized by liberal modalities is especially important in studying institutions dedicated to intimate care of vulnerable populations. This is especially applicable to the study of education, which has been deeply affected by market-oriented reforms at a variety of levels, including encouraging students, parents, and practitioners to see education as a personal opportunity to be seized rather than a public good for the benefit of all (e.g. Mitchell and Lizotte 2014; Purcell 2011; Popkewitz 2007; Pedroni 2006). Although there is ample evidence to suggest that care in this sense has been somewhat co-opted and reworked through market rationalities of cost-benefit accounting and personal responsibility, it is likewise clear that care work – including the education of children and young people – nevertheless remains imbued with affective and ethical ties that are not reducible to economistic thinking (e.g. Lawson 2007; Brown 2003; Tronto 2000; Kittay 1999). Therefore, I retain the most useful aspects of a true *ethnography* of neoliberal governmentality to remain fully open to the possibility – indeed, probability – that the everyday language and practice of educators will express a variety of rationalities not fully reducible to a single economistic logic. In addition, even their understandings of laïcité will necessarily contain the multiple and sometimes contradictory "official" understandings of the concept as expressed by the French state over time.

Nevertheless, conceiving of laïcité simply as a continuously morphing field of power risks missing the moments when it has been used to brutal effect to demand compliance with French cultural norms from marginalized populations – a compliance that in some cases may never have been intended to be achievable. Therefore, I turn now to a consideration of how discursive expressions of the control and administration of territory – geopolitical discourse – can inform an investigation of laïcité.

Geopolitical discourse

National identity is fundamentally understood in spatial terms, and a primary function of state education systems is to instill in fledgling citizens an identification of their territorial identity with a slate of national values belonging to that territory. In theory, *La Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la République* is a project of the French Ministry of Education and is meant to be applied equally throughout the space of the French state. However, official and public rhetoric surrounding the student response to the post-*Charlie* moment of silence that motivated the creation of this program make it clear that it was conceived with a keen awareness of the highly specific geography of the student resistance that it is meant to respond to. Therefore, while the rhetoric of *La Grande Mobilisation* may be presented in spatially neutral terms, its manifestation in practice – and the "practical schemas" used by its practitioners – will reflect a very specific geography of existing and future conflicts over how laïcité should be understood in the educational context. In this context, a critical geopolitical look at *La Grande Mobilisation* can help move beyond a view of the public education system as a monolithic state ideological apparatus and arrive at a more nuanced view of how hegemonic geopolitical identities are negotiated through education.

At the heart of both official state representations of fundamental values as well as contestations of these values is a wealth of geopolitical discourse that places these values – and those who embody them – as being either inside or outside the space of the nation. A recognition of this phenomenon can be traced through the critical geopolitical literature, which places a heavy emphasis on the role of discourse not only in describing spaces of belonging to the national community, but also in constructing these spaces themselves (e.g. O'Tuathail and Agnew 1992; O'Tuathail 1996; Müller 2010; Kuus 2011a, 2010). In choosing to locate my

investigation into laïcité as one of overlapping and intersecting geopolitical narratives, I am deliberately choosing a term – geopolitics – that, as Ó Tuathail (1996) notes, is an "inconvenient fiction" in its appeal to critical geographers to describe a broad range of Eurocentric attempts to rationalize and control territory. The inconvenience, he argues, comes from an overuse of "geopolitics" that strips it of its historical intellectual heritage as a specific project of early 20th century imperialism that found its most extreme expression with Nazi expansion aspirations (16). In applying a critical geopolitical lens in this work, I hope to avoid inappropriately broadening the meaning of the term for the purpose of rhetorical convenience. Recent developments in feminist geopolitics and critical geopolitics have successfully made use of "geopolitics" as a framework for critically interrogating state practices at a variety of political scales. I situate my own work in this tradition, in seeking to reveal how laïcité is a concretely territorial technology of governance that has been and continues to be mapped onto domestic and foreign space by the French state.

O'Tuathail (1996) classifies critical geopolitics as the recognition that what is often taken for granted in discussions of the borders and divisions making up the world is in fact the result of "'geo-politics,' the politics of writing a global space." (18) Early in its conception this recognition was directed largely at de-linking state power from a narrowly territorial conception in which sovereignty begins and ends at political borders of the sort that can be seen on maps (Kuus 2011a). Amidst increasingly transnational forms of governance that emerged during the 1990s and 2000s – including the expanding powers and spatial scope of the European Union – the critical geopolitics literature sought to problematize both proclamations of a newly "borderless" world (e.g. Sparke 2006; Coleman and Agnew 2007) as well as the notion that state power is applied within its territory evenly to all places and all its political subjects (e.g. Painter

2006; Sparke 2006).

A key development of the critical geopolitics literature is to recognize how political space is produced both discursively as well as practically (Kuus 2010; Müller 2008; Kuus and Agnew 2008). In very mundane and everyday ways, hegemonic discourses about how spaces *should* be governed inform concrete policy for governing them; these policies in turn inform further discourse on the part of not only political elites but also mid-level bureaucrats, who repeat and elaborate common-sense understandings of places in their daily duties and communications (Kuus 2011a, 2011b). To date many studies investigating the discursive element of geopolitical policy and discourse have been carried out in the context of foreign policy elaborated at the national scale, especially the Cold War (e.g. O'Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Gregory 1994) and the American-led "War on Terror" (Agnew 2003; Gregory 2004; Gregory and Pred 2006), but also on discourse produced in sub-national territorial conflicts (e.g. Megoran 2006).

An interesting extension of the critical geopolitics literature investigating sub-state and / or sub-national discourses around identity and territorial power, and one that is especially relevant for the present work, is that which investigates identity building in post-conflict societies through schooling (e.g. Bekerman 2011; Zembylas 2010; Staeheli and Hammett 2010; Niens and Chastenay 2008). In this work geographers have investigated the efforts of state public school systems to reconcile past conflict typically involving two national groups making competing claims to the territory of a sovereign state. What has emerged is a useful insight into the often ambivalent attitudes taken towards allowing past power structures to persist in the post-conflict school setting while attempting in some ways to give space and voice to previously marginalized populations. While state elites articulate optimistic pathways for reconciling past violence through education, often these goals are not fully realized due to their imperfect

reproduction in everyday practice. Complicating their efforts are the additional complexity of the intended recipients of messages of national unity; as many studies have shown, children and young people have a remarkable capacity to interpret and rework official discourses communicated through educational efforts (e.g. Staeheli and Hammett 2013; Mitchell and Parker 2008; Weller 2003).

While education-based efforts to construct a particular vision of national identity have obvious parallels to a study of laïcité as a lever by which the French state is attempting to shore up its youth's civic identity, there are many limitations as well. For one, most studies investigating the impact of civic curricula focus on the endpoint of such interventions; that is, they provide a rich image of how children and young people interpret state ambitions for their education, but tend to say little about the delivery of the material. Moreover, there is often an underlying assumption that teachers and other ground-level educational professionals simply reproduce materials, course plans, or other directives handed down from above as-is, exercising little of their own agency. In effect, little attention tends to be paid to the "in-between" spaces and actors of education policy (for exceptions, see Mitchell and Lizotte 2016, 2014). As a result, the empirical material for such studies often consists of official policy documents, textbooks and other teaching materials, or the reactions of students to curricular and policy initiatives, while bypassing the people and processes that move these from one end of the educational apparatus to the other.

In this case, it appears that the ethnographies of neoliberal governmentality has much to offer a geopolitical discourse approach, and vice-versa. The former's attention to pathways, context along with its flexible ontology of power can help illuminate otherwise invisible sites where territorial power is articulated, and the latter can add a non-liberal dimension to

understanding structures of contemporary governance. However, I would argue that there is still a potential missing element even in the midst of these two frameworks' synergy. In particular, there is a risk that the embodied experience of practicing education policy can get lost or glossed over if it is not explicitly foregrounded in at least part of the intellectual narrative. Given that much laïcité policy is *literally* embodied in its regulation of personal expressions of religious belief worn on the body, there is a need to account for how this aspect of is experienced by the subjects of laïcité policy. Therefore, I now turn to a recent rethinking of developments in critical and feminist geopolitics termed the "geosocial" that has theorized the inclusion of embodied, affective presence within larger geopolitical and geoeconomic structures.

Geosocial negotiation

Writing out of a concern to bridge feminist geography and political geography through geopolitics, Hyndman (2003) offers a vision for how the two might be "bridged" in a feminist geopolitics. Such an approach, she argues, would bolster critical geopolitics' strength in deconstructing taken-for-granted categories of spatial control and management by helping it avoid falling into the very disembodied, "view from nowhere" territorial gaze that it purports to critique. At the same time, she argues that a feminist geopolitics should look to previous feminist interventions in international relations to reaffirm the impacts of conceptually contingent, but materially powerful geopolitical constructs such as borders, security, and mobility.

Hyndman's intervention presages a series of developments that would eventually be summarized and further developed as "geosocial" inquiry by Mitchell and Kallio (2016). Surveying the field of feminist geopolitics and writing on transnational subjectivities, they argue that a powerful, if often unnamed, sensibility emerges from this work's emphasis on the embodied and relational of political subjectivity in a transnational world. This sensibility takes

seriously the hegemonic categorizations of space and population that are deployed in statecraft, and reveals how embodied, affective, and relational experience is both constituted within those categorizations and defies them. Work in this area has involved investigations of the embodied nature of state methods of border control (Hyndman 2012; Mountz 2010; the classification management of populations considered to be "risky" (Mitchell 2006, 2009), and transnational identities.

Overall, what such an approach offers to both more traditional geopolitical work as well as inquiry into contemporary governmentality regimes is a focus on the moments where high-level statecraft is translated into concrete, on-the-ground outcomes. Given that laïcité has historically been a slippery concept whose definition or application has never been fully consistent, being able to ontologically take account of these translational moments is important to understand how ideological framings of laïcité as a core national value interacts with practitioners' own understandings of it, and how discursive expressions of the importance of renewing civic education become actual pedagogical practice in the classroom. Further, work on embodied statecraft has taken note of the fact that these instances of translation are rarely straightforward processes, involving personal discretion, relationships, and temperament as variables in state agents' execution of their duties. This is doubly true in educational settings, where the everyday work of instruction requires teachers to negotiate between on the one hand the expectations and values that they have acquired as a result of training and experience and on the other, the standards and cultures of their students' lifeworlds.

As I will show in later chapters, enforcing laïcité indeed involves a series of negotiations to try to satisfy both parties' needs and accomplish the larger overall goal of adhering to Ministry of Education protocols. Occurring as they do at the intersection between overaching geopolitical

narratives about the status of laïcité as a bulwark of Western democracy and the grounded daily experiences of educators and students alike, I term these processes of trying to find compromise to achieve greater educational goals *geosocial* negotiation. Beyond being a theoretical framing of the topic at hand, thinking through laïcité policies in general and the *Grande Mobilisation* in particular as consisting of a series of negotiations has methodological implications as well: it leads me to focus primarily on the negotiators representing the French state, teachers and principals. I argue that due to their position between the institutional apparatus of the Ministry of Education and the schools and neighborhoods meant to be managed through laïcité policies, it is they who can provide one of the most complete pictures of how the negotiation process takes place in real time. Students' experiences are a vital part of the overall story in any investigation of education and education processes (cf. Holloway *et al*. 2010); however, time and resource constraints did not allow me to document these experiences. In what follows, therefore, my narrative should always be considered partial and incomplete.

Establishing a geopolitical discourse methodology for laïcité

This dissertation examines conflicts over the meaning of laïcité in public schooling as struggles that reflect competing notions of geopolitical belonging in French society. In order to accomplish this, I situate interpretations of laïcité within different patterns of discourse that privilege certain visions of French citizenship and identity over others. At the same time, I identify potential sources of data about the practice of laïcité policy by examining spaces and actors of institutional practice in order to capture the embodied nature of the work done by education professionals. These actors in turn are inseparable from their geographic context, which is primarily composed of the social and economic environments their schools and students are embedded in. Simultaneously capturing these different elements of contextualized and embodied practice

requires a well thought-out methodological approach that is open to unforeseen opportunities for meaning-making and political subjectivity formation.

In my work I draw on a series of field-tested qualitative methods common in geography and social anthropology, which I describe further below. However, in terms of an overarching methodological approach I follow in part Müller's (2008, 2010) framework for discourse analysis in critical geopolitical work. As he notes, discourse analysis in critical geopolitics has been a popular, if often ill-defined, methodological framework used to examine how geopolitical discourses create different political spaces through the very act of speaking about them. The lack of precision in discourse analysis can be attributed to a desire on the part of scholars to leave the area of study open for further work and interpretation, but can also lead to methodological uncertainty and difficulty in communicating the results of work. To resolve this, Müller proposes a solution by adapting Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) theory of discourse to the field of critical geopolitics. Further, he makes a careful distinction between methodology (as a comprehensive system for gathering and interpreting data) and methods (i.e. the tools by which data are collected). He argues that if discourse is to be used effectively and meaningfully as a basis for geopolitical inquiry, both the methodology and methods require careful specification and tight adaptation to the empirical project in question.

While not pretending to fit firmly in the discourse analysis research tradition, my work nevertheless attempts to treat the concept of discourse rigorously as an empirical category. For that reason, I elaborate below different aspects of Müller's critical geographic discourse analysis methodology to provide a defined scope for my work while at the same time remaining open to unexpected moments of empirical or theoretical insight that may not conform tightly to a predetermined framework.

Geographic context

One of the most important perquisites for successfully defining both method and methodology in discourse analysis, Müller argues, is specifying the contexts in which the discourse is embedded (see also Ó Tuathail 2002). The two types of context that he discusses as central to geopolitical research are borrowed from other forms of discourse analysis and can be described as *distal* and *proximate.* In Müller's model, these two contexts are socio-spatial; that is, they describe not only aspects of identity that influence the meanings that particular actors produce and the geographic spaces within which these meanings are produced, but also where these two aspects overlap. Distal context, then, refers to how actors are situated in broad social categories such as class, gender, and race, as well as how these categories are shaped by large-scale phenomena. Proximate context, on the other hand, describes the identities and spaces that are immediate to the production of meaning. Being explicit about what places, events, and histories are implicated in these contexts is vital to keeping the scope of data collection relevant to the question at hand.

As I discussed in the introduction, and will continue to reference throughout this work, my work is motivated in part by my sense that non-French writers critical of laïcité have tended to de-spatialize the concept, pulling it out of its peculiarly French surroundings. For that reason, the distal context for my work is the social and political culture of the French nation-state since the late 19th century. While it is true that laïcité contains many important similarities to other forms of state secularism across the industrialized West, I do not believe that a meaningful analysis or critique of it as a national value can be successfully mounted without taking its "French-ness" seriously. My approach has both theoretical as well as methodological implications: while I draw on a wide range of theorists and ideas to discuss laïcité in its contemporary manifestations, I pay particular attention to perspectives that understand laïcité as

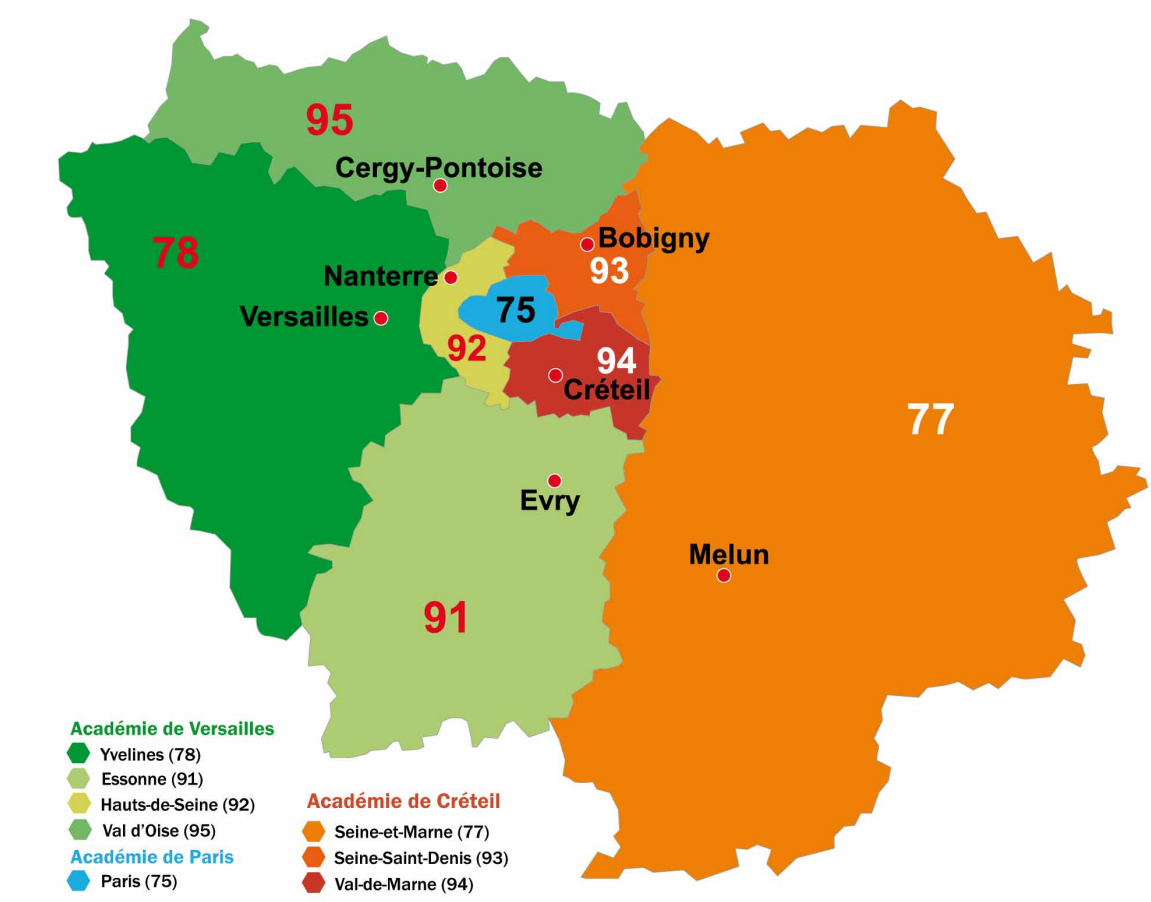
a thoroughly *French* concept. In addition, I take most seriously the opinions and interpretations regarding laïcité of people who have lived, been educated, and worked in France for most of their careers. Such an approach is, to be sure, not unproblematic. However, given limited time and resources I believe it is the most intellectually honest avenue for me personally to pursue.

Likewise, establishing a proximate context for this work is vital for maintaining a specificity of method. In this case, it the *banlieue* – the urban peripheries of French cities – for several reasons: first and foremost, it is a space of material deprivation that powerfully shapes the identities of its inhabitants as well as public policy that is targeted at it. In the case of schooling, the official classification of areas as priority education zones is done according to the socioeconomic character of the surrounding area. Second, although in reality the banlieues of Paris are diverse in the ethnic makeup of their population, their level of economic prosperity, and their urban landscape, the term evokes for a large portion of the French population an imagined geography of poverty, lawlessness, and danger (Douzet and Robine 2015; Kirkness 2014; Dikeç 2007; figure 8). Third, despite this diversity, the banlieues nevertheless hold large portions of France's Muslim population that is disproportionately affected by measures meant to reinforce laïcité. Finally, the banlieues continue to be the site of initial contact between recent immigrants and the French state, particularly though its attempts to introduce state-sponsored measures for laïcité.

I describe the *banlieue* as a geographic context for understanding state laïcité policy more fully in the following chapter. However, at the moment it is necessary to highlight the national specificity of the *banlieue* as opposed to it being simply a generally impoverished urban space common across the industrialized West. It is tempting to regard the *banlieue* as a sort of analogue to the American inner city for several reasons: both are highly racialized spaces that

have been the subject of economic restructuring and a degree of systematic state disinvestment. However, as Wacquant (2016, 2008) argues, the analogy is inappropriate. Despite similarities in their demographic composition, Wacquant notes that the *banlieue* is simply not as segregated as its American counterpart. In addition, the mechanisms that structure the political economy of the *banlieue* or inner city with respect to other urban spaces are not the same. As a result, it is important to understand policy targeted at or having a disproportionate impact in the *banlieues* in its "native" context and not simply as a variation on postindustrial landscapes in the global North.

For this reason, the geographic extent of my study is focused on urban peripheries in two *départements* within the larger school administrative zone of the *académie* of Créteil and one in the *académie* of Versailles. These *académies* contain a large portion of the poorest banlieues in the Paris metro region, and are among the most ethnically and racially diverse school administrative areas in the country. It should be noted that the area covered by the *académies* of Créteil and Versailles also contain significant rural areas; while these are not necessarily any less likely to be the site of laïcité interventions than more urban areas, logistical considerations in addition to a desire to focus on the nearby urban peripheries of Paris led me to concentrate on the *départements* of Seine-Saint-Denis (Créteil), Val-de-Marne (Créteil), and Hauts-de-Seine (Versailles). The following map shows the locations of these départements with respect to their encompassing *académies:*



Map 1: Départements in the académies of Paris, Versailles, and Créteil

For an institutionally-centered methodology

At the center of France's national imaginary is the *école républicaine*, the institution whose aspiration is to form future generations of French citizens whose relationship to their country and to each other is one based upon republican ideals of cultural neutrality. Over the past several decades, the emergence of a coherent Muslim French identity and its struggle for recognition has exposed the limits of the integration apparatus embodied in the public education system and the implicit Christian European bias underlying the "neutrality" it is trying to impart. This conflict has led many scholars and commentators inside and outside of France to mount damning critiques of the system based on the continued presence of segregation, racism, and intolerance at the heart of the French school despite repeated efforts to re-inject it with republican values.

Depending on the political and cultural orientation of the observer, these condemnations have variously derided the system for its failure to prevent the emergence of a supposed Muslim "communitarianism" closing off children in non-French values, or slammed the public school as an ideological arm of the French state that erases non-white, non-Christian French identity in the name of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*.

While there is no shortage of critique of the system however, relatively few of these works have examined the basis on which rests public discourse about the paucity of civic values in the *école républicaine*. In his examination of the public crisis generated around anti-Semitic racism and Muslim communitarianism in schools, Dhume-Sonzogni (2008) looks more closely at the institutional mechanisms by which events in which racist remarks and actions by students are filtered up into a national discourse. His methodological orientation is one that attempts to return to the origin of these events and examine the process by which they are transformed into "facts" whose popular meaning is indisputable:

> Publically opening this question [of racism in schools] – which the ambition of this work is to contribute to – does not at all come back to downplaying the normative issues of politics' relation to racism. It does, however, mean to enlarge and try to reformulate the question in taking a step to the side in order to move away from its too often catastrophic interpretation. Racism poses questions to the school [as an institution]; and we would not learn much if we limited ourselves to impulsively judging racist acts and condemning the phenomenon in itself…We have also known for a long time the role of the school in the "naturalization" of social inequality. The task is, therefore, not to critique, nor to deplore, but rather: taking account of the impotence of public anti-racist discourse, understanding *what racism does in the school* – in all of the possible meanings of the expression – and how school actors understand it (27-28, emphasis in the original).[28]

My own work attempts to follow in this pattern by taking up the issues surrounding laïcité as it is pursued in the French educational setting and understanding the meanings it produces by the people who are charged with enforcing it. In order to do so, I privilege, as Dhume-Sonzogni says, "an understanding beginning in *the space of the institution* and therefore *in educators'*

[28] See also: Derouet J.-L. 1992. *Ecole et Justice. De l'égalité des chances aux compromis locaux?* Paris, Métailié.

space of work." (29; emphasis in the original). By doing this, I do not mean to suggest that other points of view – notably, of students and families who are affected by policies meant to enforce laïcité – are less valuable or accurate. Rather, for the purposes of my current investigation I am deliberately limiting my field of inquiry to keep a focus on the question of how laïcité is deployed institutionally as a means of managing social difference in space.

Methods

The nature of the dialectical theoretical problem posed by this research – examining current theories of neoliberal education reform by connecting the extralocal to the local and back again – calls for a similarly dialogic research method. Therefore, my work is based methodologically upon Burawoy's extended case method (1998), as well as feminist research in geography that has sought to contextualize global political-economic processes as a series of distinct but geographically relational processes in different places (e.g. Katz 2004; Roy 2010).

Within Müller's elaboration of Laclau and Mouffe's conception of discourse analysis, he identifies two primary states of discursive utterances that have analytical value: *elements* and *moments*. *Elements* are fragments of discourse that are open to definition, while *moments* are elements that have been temporarily fixed within a hegemonic system of meaning. What Müller's classification highlights is a dialectical nature of discourse, which moves between states of being semantically open to struggle over its meaning and being closed to alternative interpretations. Because of laïcité's historical ambiguity, such a model is ideal to examine the adaptation of this term to different situations and by different groups.

Data definition and classification

The data for this dissertation come primarily from a series of interviews conducted during four primary research periods between 2011 and 2016 with representatives of the Ministère de

l'Education Nationale, ranging from teachers and principals at the school level to bureaucrats at the level of the *académie* of Créteil and *circonspection académique*. I carried out semi-structured interviews with these informants, which were transcribed and analyzed for markers indicating discursive moments and elements related to *laïcité*. A list of people interviewed, a map of the schools they represent, and interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

In choosing to locate my investigation of the institutional deployment of the Ministry of Education's curricular reforms in a series of gradually devolving scales from the district to the school, I am building in part upon preliminary research that revealed a strong "street-level bureaucrat" (Lipskey 1980) phenomenon within the French school system. Despite being organized at a national level, with responsibility for different aspects of the system descending a carefully-delineated hierarchy, my research on the management of student assignment policies revealed that the actual functioning of the system is much more haphazard and improvised than such an organization would suggest. A similar pattern emerged in my inquiries into the application of post-*Charlie* curricular reforms, so I apply a similar logic to the interpretation of their implementation. In practice, what this means is that although the Ministry of Education provides a wide range of materials, resources, and guidelines for teaching and enforcing laïcité in the classroom, in the end much of how laïcité appears in actually existing practice rests on the discretion and values of principals, teachers, and parents who make up the "ground-level" education apparatus.

To capture the discursive elements and moments involved in the implementation of laïcité programs, I examined interview transcripts for the presence of words and phrases that indicated that these programs were in some way geographically targeted as a response to areas of known or supposed "risk." This initial set (edic) of words were drawn from existing official

classifications of education priority zones as well as common phrases used to refer to disadvantaged urban environments or their populations: *quartier difficile, zone sensible, issu(e)s d'immigration,* and so on. As the interviews evolved, certain other discursive variables emerged from the material (emic). A matrix of variables involved in the research can be found in appendix A.

A note on translation

This dissertation draws heavily on printed material and interviews in French. I have chosen to do all translation myself to take responsibility for the communication of this material to an English-speaking audience, and all errors are my own. However, it must be said that while French and English share a great deal of vocabulary, especially in more elevated registers of the two languages, they are nevertheless very different. To begin with, there are many "false friends," or cognates whose meanings are quite different, between the two languages. One example of this is *attendre* (to wait), which does not have the same meaning as "to attend." Other cognates do same similar meanings but very different connotations, as in the French word *discours*, which means "speech" both in the sense of everyday oral communication and that of a prepared text to be spoken aloud. While it can have the more academic and sociological meaning of the English "discourse," (and indeed the French philosopher Michel Foucault uses *discours* in this way), this is a far less common usage. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, French and English syntax are quite different, and common everyday idioms can rarely be translated directly between the two languages. For that reason, I have tried to render French speech in natural, ordinary English while retaining the speaker's intent and meaning. Often this requires reordering or reworking the original language to some extent. In appendix B I provide the original version of all translated text throughout the work.

Framing my position

I remain an outside observer to the question of how *laïcité* should be expressed in contemporary French society. On the one hand, I derive a certain benefit from this outsider position: I am able to remain more objective to a political culture that I am not fully immersed in, and people have, on the whole, been very willing to share their thoughts with me precisely because of that detachment. On the other hand, I cannot fully appreciate the identity issues at stake in the conflict over laïcité – either those expressed by the republican position defending it as a necessary condition of membership in the national community, or those expressed by people contesting its hold over their lives. At the same time, I am an embodied subject with opinions on these issues that arise from my embodiment, and I think it is only fair to address my position here.

I admit to and accept a Western bias that privileges Enlightenment-derived values. I do not accept that anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism, denial of science, or – most of all – the killing of unarmed people can be excused as the inevitable consequence of an uprising among oppressed people chafing at the yoke of Eurocentric modernist principles, or that past injustices committed in the name of imperialism or colonialism allow us to be blasé about murders committed in cold blood. However, I also recognize that the historic relationship of the French state – like all European and European-descended states – to people of color and people of the Global South has been one of consistent physical and psychological violence. And I recognize that there are deep and painful contradictions that arise from the cohabitation of former colonizers and the formerly colonized and that cannot be easily reconciled.

Unfortunately, it seems that most accounts of Islam in Western society are sadly bifurcated: either they situate themselves within a Huntington-esque “clash of civilizations”

narrative, portraying a looming and monolithic Islamic society against a noble, embattled, and tacitly Christian one; or they veer dangerously close to promoting a *quid pro quo* politics in which Western violence of the past and present is to be paid for by Islamist violence in perpetuity. In researching this work, particularly in examining the rhetoric surrounding the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, I have been shocked and offended by the material that falls into both camps, especially when the commentators appropriate the attacks to push their own political agendas that have nothing to do with the problems of contemporary French society. I am also bemused at the unabashedly condescending attitudes English-speaking commentators often take toward France and the French by assuming that they know much more than they do about both. My observation is that this tendency, whether conscious or not, stems from a rhetorical assimilation of French society to Anglo-American norms or, more simply, disdain for the French.

My own experience in France consists of a full school year of teaching English in three primary schools – during which I also volunteered for various organizations, including one of France's most prominent social services organization and the French Boy and Girl Scouts – and three primary research visits, respectively two and a half, one, and five months long. I do not pretend by any measure that this time constitutes deep experience or that I know all there is to know about France or French society, but what it does tell me is that much of what is written on that country from across the Channel or the Atlantic is ignorant at best or in bad faith at worst. My hope in this work is to show that there *is* a conflict between white European society and its historical "others", and it *is* one deeply steeped in violent history, but that it is not inevitable.

A critical geopolitics of neither / nor

In attempting to respond to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Hyndman (2003) argues for a framing of those events that runs counter to the binary geopolitical thinking that typically

dominates discussion of such events. Following 9/11, the United States and a coalition of its allies unleashed its military might in Afghanistan with the purpose of overthrowing the theocratic Taliban regime, thought to have harbored Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. In critiquing the use of military force and the collateral damage and suffering inflicted on civilians, commentators found themselves pilloried for giving comfort to the enemy. Even within the critical academic community, scholars were compelled to distinguish between their contempt and their critical stance: for instance, Gregory (2004) finds himself obliged to state his unequivocal condemnation of the September 11 attacks in offering his own critique of the "architectures of enmity" that implicate the West in the violence it receives.

Through my work, I have found that navigating the desire to condemn acts of violence while recognizing the deeper structural violences that produce individual incidents to be epistemologically and ethically tricky. While wanting to acknowledge the accumulated trauma that leads to violent and even deadly outbursts by chronically marginalized populations, I am unwilling to write off such violence as an inevitable result of structural injustice. I have taken considerable inspiration from Hyndman and others in resolving this tension. Perhaps the position that I hope to occupy can be best expressed in her statement of her theoretical and ethical stance in relation to September 11:

> writing about 'spaces of terror' is a daunting task, in part because the political landscape 'post-9/11' changes from one week to the next, and also because no analysis can capture the pain or loss experienced by those affected by such events. While I do aim to *analyze* the events and aftermath of September 11th, I also want to position myself politically to the violence they embody. To my mind, nothing justified the killing of innocent people on September 11th. Nothing justifies the retaliatory killing of innocent people anywhere else (2, emphasis in the original).

Later, drawing on Cockburn (2000), Hyndman sums up her counternarrative to the divisive post-9/11 rhetoric: "*neither* is the killing of thousands of innocent civilians in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania warranted, *nor* is the killing of thousands of innocent civilians in Afghanistan" (6, my emphasis).

It would be possible to quibble about some of Hyndman's words – what, for example, constitutes "innocence" or "guilt" in the context of structural oppression and violence? – but I choose to take her at face value and think through my own work along similar lines. This, I believe, is necessary for me to be an effective and committed student of an idea that incites multiple forms of violence: Opposition to laïcité has directly or indirectly produced hundreds of murders in cold blood in France and elsewhere over the past two years: Paris in January and then again in November 2015 and Nice in July 2016 are simply three of the most high-profile events. In many cases, the response of the French state has been stringent, at times spilling over into oppressive, as dozens of searches and raids have been carried out across the country to ferret out potential terrorist threats. Often these raids are carried out in poor and immigrant-heavy areas in the *banlieues*, terrorizing families on the grounds that they *may* be connected to someone who may harbor Islamist ambitions. However, just as I do not condone the response of the French state in retaliation for terrorist attacks, I also protest vehemently against anyone who would see the Islamist attacks in Paris, Nice, or elsewhere for anything but what they are: brutal acts of senseless violence carried out by misguided zealots. I cannot accept equivocation on this point, or narratives that suggest that violence is an inevitable or natural response to embedded histories of French colonial rule – as violent and despicable as they are in turn.

My own personal connection to France has also meant that a "neither / nor" outlook has been useful in understanding my own positionality with respect to the phenomena I study. Following the November 2016 attacks in Paris, a worldwide "Pray for Paris" movement swept across social media. While I was not partial to the "pray" part of that formulation, I participated in my own small way, thinking of my many friends who were in Paris that night, including one who had spent the evening barricaded in a bar near the Bataclan theater. Soon, I was baffled to

find that supporting Paris was considered by some of my friends and colleagues to be a hypocritical act, given the other forms of violence being perpetrated across the world that were not receiving the same mediatized attention. While my initial reaction was to be angered that someone would think that the people and places important to me should be given less consideration, I have since better been able to appreciate the frustration people feel when human disasters in the global North receive disproportionate global sympathy in comparison to places in the global South that experience violence on an ongoing basis.

Hyndman's example has also been influential for me because it motivates me to seek an understanding of laïcité and other elements of French political culture that do not rely on an oppositional ontology. By looking closely and frankly at the interconnections and relations that make up contemporary laïcité and the subjects of its state policies, I believe I can see more clearly the ways in which it has been marshalled over time as a technology of managing difference across space in the service of the French nation. This is not to say that such a use has always been just or good, but to recognize that it is a constantly evolving and changing phenomenon that cannot be usefully characterized in the monolithic way that some critics have done. I believe that if we really want to move towards a realization of the promise of laïcité – achieving harmony in social diversity – we need to be honest about what it has done as a political concept over time and over space.

Chapter 2: Charlie Hebdo, #JeSuisCharlie, and a Crisis of Confidence in the Ecole Républicaine

Introduction

Late in the morning on January 7, 2015, masked gunmen forced their way into the Paris offices of the weekly satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and opened fire with AK-47s, killing 11 and wounding 11 more before claiming a 12th victim as they escaped the building: *Police Nationale* officer Ahmed Merabet, whom they shot in the head at point-blank range as he lay wounded on the sidewalk, begging for mercy. Later identified as the brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, the attackers spoke perfect French, calling out the names of their intended victims, including editor-in-chief Stephane 'Charb' Charbonnier and co-founder Jean "Cabu" Cabut, as they shot them (Mauriaucourt 2015). Indeed, the three men were natural-born French citizens; the Kouachi brothers were of Algerian descent, and had grown up in Paris's suburbs. The same was true of their accomplice Amedy Coulibaly, a French citizen of Malian decent who had grown up in Reims, the capital of the world-famous Champagne region, and who coordinated an attack on a Kosher grocery store on January 9 near Paris's Porte de Vincennes with the Kouachi's assault.

Before being catapulted to global attention by the Kouachis' attack, *Charlie Hebdo* was, at best, a niche product with a weekly print run of about 60,000. As described by *New Yorker* columnist and former Paris correspondent Adam Gopnik, the magazine fit into a "peculiarly French and savage tradition" of satire that used vicious caricature to mock what they saw as political and religious hypocrisy among the powerful of any persuasion (Gopnik 2015; figure 3).[29] Much of this aggressive satire was directed towards Islam: In 2006 it enjoyed a brief period

[29] Indeed, *Charlie Hebdo*'s brand of comedy would be unfamiliar to most Americans; it is not subtly satirical in the way that, for example, *The Onion* is in highlighting the absurdity of real-life events by slightly embellishing them. The heavy use of caricature somewhat resembles that used in *Mad* magazine, but is much more exaggerated in its crude juxtaposition of subjects of caricature and incongruent behaviors or utterances.

of notoriety by inserting itself into global controversies over the depiction of the prophet Muhammad when it reprinted cartoons that had appeared in the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 and eventually provoked riots across the Muslim world that killed 200. In 2011, the magazine's offices were firebombed in advance of an issue titled "*Charia* [Sharia] *Hebdo*"[30] featuring Muhammad as "guest editor" skewering the post-Arab Spring reintroduction of Sharia law in Libya. This incident led to Charbonnier and other members of the staff being offered permanent police protection. In 2012, Charlie Hebdo published caricatures, some nude, of Muhammad in response to attacks on US embassies following the release of the American-produced anti-Islamic short film *The Innocence of Muslims.*

The magazine's history of violating Islam's injunction against depicting Muhammad proved to be a decisive motive in the Kouachis' attack. Shortly before the two men's deaths at the hands of police in a print shop in Dammartin-en-Goële, where they had taken refuge, Chérif Kouachi confirmed that they had been acting on behalf of al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula because of *Charlie Hebdo's* repeated "blasphemies". During their rampage through the newspaper's offices, witnesses reported that the two brothers had shouted "*Allahu akbar!*" ("God is the greatest!"[31]) several times. Meanwhile, Ahmed Coulibaly placed his own attack in the Islamist register by targeting a kosher supermarket (*Hyper Cacher*) near the Porte de Vincennes in Paris and stating his intentions to the hostages he took on January 9: "You really don't get it. I've come to die a martyr. To avenge the name of Allah and his prophet Muhammad…there will

[30] "Charia" is the French spelling of *Sharia*, Islamic law known popularly in the West for its extreme forms practiced in some Muslim theocratic societies.

[31] This phrase is often translated as "God is great!", a translation that captures the same basic meaning and retains its Islamist connotations, but in standard Arabic, *akbar* is unambiguously the comparative / superlative form of the word *kabeer*, "big / great."

be many more like me to come." [32]

The Kouachis' and Coulibaly's motives had a profound influence on the aftermath of the attacks. Because of their specific targeting of *Charlie Hebdo* for its content, the dominant discourse held that the target of the attacks had been free speech and free expression beyond the magazine's specific brand of irreverent humor (references). A massive and international solidarity movement anchored by the viral Tweet #JeSuisCharlie ("I am Charlie [Hebdo]") evolved almost immediately. Already on January 7, it was estimated that 35,000 Parisians had gathered to protest the attacks and demonstrate in favor of free speech. Vigils rapidly spread: on January 10, 700,000 people demonstrated in cities across France. On January 11, a massive march counting 2 million people, the largest in France since World War II, was led through the streets of Paris by French president François Hollande and other heads of state. In the meantime, a complex set of political positions crystalized around what many commentators identified as a basic conflict lying at the heart of the attacks: the notion of an inalienable right to freedom of expression, pitted against the need to self-censor to respect difference in multicultural societies. Public intellectuals across the globe invoked the attacks to defend one or the other point of view, often appropriating them to promote their own political positions.[33] In the midst of this posturing, *Charlie Hebdo* was consistently held up as a sort of martyr for free speech. As Gopnik (2015) wryly pointed out, *Charlie Hebdo*, which had made its name thumbing its nose at all

[32] From *Three Days of Terror* (2016), directed by Dan Reed. More information available: http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/three-days-of-terror-the-charlie-hebdo-attacks

[33] Especially in the United States: e.g., linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky, who seized upon the solidarity response and especially the #JeSuisCharlie hashtag to point out the hypocrisy of mourning an attack in Europe when similar death tolls as a result of state or non-state terrorism in non-Western countries barely provoked reactions (Chomsky 2015); conservative political commentator David Brooks, who argued (in spite of the newspaper having never been affiliated with an educational institution of any kind) that *Charlie Hebdo*'s extreme irreverence would be considered hate speech in American educational settings and therefore pointed to the need for eliminating campus speech codes (Brooks 2015); the president of the extreme right-wing Catholic League, who ambiguously expressed sorrow for the deaths while suggesting that the *Charlie Hebdo* staff had brought the violence on themselves for their repeated irreverent depictions of religion (Dolan 2015).

establishments, was suddenly thrust into the position of symbolizing the political establishment's position on the place of free speech in society.

The conventional wisdom regarding the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks – that they represented an attack on the very principles of democratic Western society – quickly hardened into an inflexible litmus test for one's adherence to modern standards of decency and civilization (Klug 2016). For Muslims around the world but especially in France, an intolerable situation emerged: on the one hand, many in the community despised *Charlie Hebdo* and its continuous desecration of one of their prophet; on the other hand, to "not be" *Charlie* was, in the days and weeks following the attacks, increasingly equated with outright support for terrorism (Kiwan 2016; Sayare 2015). A diverse range of positions emerged: Across France some Muslim community and religious leaders, argued that a more nuanced outlook was perfectly compatible with French identity: "There's not the 'Charlie' good guys on one side and the 'not-Charlie' bad guys on the other. That's not what France is; France is debate…you can be French and not be Charlie." [i] Other positions were more ambiguous, expressing anger and even hostility towards *Charlie Hebdo* and the French society that had allegedly tolerated its antics, while stopping short of justifying the attacks. Some more extreme positions invoked the assailants as the true martyrs, substituting the #JeSuisCharlie hashtag with provocative versions such as #JeSuisKouachi. Infamous French pseudo-comedian[34] Dieudonné M'bala M'bala, who enjoys a huge following on social media, inserted his brand of commentary by offering his own reappropriation of the hashtag in a tweet timed to coincide with the massive January 11 march in Paris mocking the celebration and

[34] Dieudonné, as he is commonly known, is a comedian only in the loosest sense of the term; his viciously anti-Semetic brand of "comedy" often makes tasteless reference to concentration camps, generally mocks the Holocaust, and trades on conspiracy theories alleging Jewish or Zionist control of world affairs. In his 2012 film *l'Antisemite* (The Anti-Semite), he plays a violent and alcoholic character that, among acts mocking Auschwitz, uses the nerve gas agent Zyklon B as a cologne.

ending in "…as for me, I feel like *I am Charlie* Coulibaly".[ii]

Why not #JeSuisMyriam? Contextualizing the #JeSuisCharlie response

The attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* pulled longstanding tensions over global terrorism, immigration, and racism at the heart of contemporary society to the surface of global public debate at a magnitude not seen since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Since then, terrorist attacks in the global North had not had the same impact, either in France or internationally. One significant example of the relative lack of response to a premeditated terrorist attack, pointed out by journalist Scott Sayare (2015), can be seen in a series of attacks that took place in Montauban and Toulouse in southwestern France in March 2012. Mohammed Merah, a French citizen of Algerian descent, killed three French paratroopers of North African origin between March 11 – 15. Early on the morning of March 19, he entered the Ozar Hatorah school in Toulouse and killed a rabbi and three young children aged 3, 6, and 8 (figure 5). The oldest, Myriam, was the daughter of the school's principal and was subjected to an especially barbaric execution-style murder as Merah shot her in the temple at point-blank range (Sayare 2015; Sayare and Erlanger 2012).

While the Montauban and Toulouse attacks generated an international response in the form of marches, rallies, and other expressions of support for France, this response paled in comparison to that following the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings. It seems especially curious that more sympathy would be generated for the non-existent "Charlie" than, for instance, Miriam, who suffered a graphic and brutal death in front of her mother. However, a brief look at France's history of anti-Semitism and its relationship to laïcité can be instructive in this regard. As Bowen (2007) notes, anti-Semitism is firmly linked in the French collective consciousness to attacks on the principles of laïcité, beginning from the 1898-1899 Dreyfus affair. At the time, simmering

resentment on the part of Catholic traditionalists against the French state for having greatly weakened the Church was publicly and brutally expressed in false charges of treason brought against a Jewish colonel. The legacy of the deportation of Jews under the collaborationist Vichy regime during World War II is also a key aspect of the French collective disgust of anti-Semitism. Today, attacks on laïcité that smack of anti-Semitism continue to evoke collective anxiety: In response to an uptick in anti-Semitic violence across Europe marked particularly by the 2012 attack in Toulouse, France passed in 2014 a controversial law expanding the government's power to monitor citizens' Internet use and strengthening existing legal sanctions on expressions of anti-Semitism (including Holocaust denial, already illegal under the 1990 Gayssot Act) under the vaguely-defined category of "apologies for terrorism." [35]

This law was invoked to press charges in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks: in fact, one of the most high-profile cases involved Dieudonné, infamous for among many other public expressions of anti-Semitism his his invention and propagation of the so-called *quenelle* (a stylized reverse Nazi salute). After tweeting his above reference to attacker Ahmed Couliaby in mockery of a grand march in Paris in memory of the victims and involving dozens of world leaders, he was arrested on January 13, 2015 on charges of promoting terrorism (BBC 2015). Similarly, following the incidents of non-compliance in schools, nearly forty children and their families were likewise questioned on charges relating to "apology for terrorism." To many in the Muslim community as well as many non-Muslim observers, the harsh sanctions meted out by the French state to those who expressed disagreement with the "official" line regarding the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks as an assault on freedom of speech were simply the latest development in the systematic repression of a long-marginalized community (e.g. Chomsky 2015). Especially in

[35] Loi n° 2014-1353 du 13 novembre 2014 renforçant les dispositions relatives à la lutte contre le terrorisme. Available: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr.

connection with the seeming readiness of the state to prosecute speech deemed "anti-Semitic," a widespread perception developed that the French state would bend over backward to defend the relatively tiny Jewish community while displays of anti-Muslim sentiment, among which *Charlie Hebdo*'s constant depictions of Muhammed, were quietly tolerated. Indeed, among the criticisms leveled at France's leadership following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks was its purported hypocrisy in holding up the magazine as a paragon of French values of free speech while simultaneously censoring anti-Semitic expression (e.g. Fassin 2015). Other observers critical of the French state's response noted wryly that many of the world leaders prominently leading the January 13 Paris march were themselves notorious for suppressing the free speech and freedom of the press they were supposedly demonstrating in support of.

This perception of a double-standard, however, is somewhat more complicated than it appears; Jews in France make up less than 1% of the country's population but are victims of 51% of its documented race-motivated hate crimes (Goldberg 2015). While it is certainly not the case that all French Muslims harbor resentment or hatred against their Jewish compatriots, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are tragically common in this community: 67% of French Muslims surveyed by the *Fondation pour l'Innovation Publique* believed that Jews had "too much power in France's economy." 61% believed that Jews hold too much power in France's media. And 44% believe in the existence of a global Zionist conspiracy (Frum 2015). Even more perplexingly, French Muslim anti-Semitism has found an unlikely ally with European neo-fascist nationalist groups; in France, this alliance is ironically represented by Dieudonné's friendship not only with *Front National* ex-president Jean-Marie Le Pen, but also extreme right-wing nationalist Alain Soral. In a more everyday way, a small but notable phenomenon is French Muslim support for the FN despite this party's traditional hostility to people embodying "non-

French" characteristics. Using a "the friend of my friend is my enemy" logic, a number of disaffected Muslims justify this otherwise puzzling political support by pointing to their shared hatred for the FN's other traditional boogeyman: Jews (Frum 2015).

Despite the French collective revulsion with all things anti-Semitic, instances of hate speech or acts directed against Jews have had an uneven impact on public discourse. While anti-Semitic sentiment in France as measured by survey responses is not the highest in Europe (Italy, Poland, Spain, and especially Hungary have staggeringly high levels of anti-Semitic sentiment), it has steadily increased over the course of the 2010s. For example, in surveys carried out by the Anti-Defamation League, the number of respondents answering "yes" to the question "Jews have too much power in the business world" increased to 35% 2012 from 33% in 2009; the number of respondents answering "yes" to "Jews are more loyal to Israel than their own country" increased from 38% in 2009 to 45% in 2012 (Anti-Defamation League 2012). Global geopolitics play an important role as well in the state of the Jewish community in France. The beginning of the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 saw a dramatic ten-fold increase in the number of anti-Semitic acts and threats from 1999 to 2000. In addition, the French government's generally cool attitude towards Israel and its support for the Palestinian cause has created a feeling of abandonment on the part of French Jews (Vichniac 2008).

The French extreme right itself provides a further aspect of the large-scale context for understanding the geopolitical implications of laïcité. Politically marginalized during most of the twentieth century, the French extreme right had enjoyed a brief period of popular legitimacy during the 1954 – 1962 Algerian War when the political spectrum united around the defense of Algeria as an integral part of France (Shields 2007, 41). Following this, it politically retreated before reemerging in 1972 as the newly-christened *Front National pour l'Unité Française*

(National Front for French Unity), later shortened to just the *Front National*, or as it is popularly known, the *FN*. In the early – to mid 1980s, perceived failures on the part of the Mitterrand government to check the tide of illegal immigration and maintain law and order had led to a swelling of popular support for anti-immigrant measures that the FN capitalized on, forcing the left to tack right and leaving the center-right in disarray (ibid, 208).

During the 1990s and 2000s, the FN gradually gained in influence, culminating in 2002 with Jean-Marie Le Pen's passage to the second round of the presidential election. Recent electoral successes by the FN during the 2014 European Parliament elections and 2015 departmental elections attest to the party's successful attempts to broaden its appeal and distance itself somewhat from its more overtly racist and anti-Semitic (to the point of ousting Jean-Marie Le Pen in favor of his daughter Marine as the party's leader after one Holocaust-denying rant too many) roots while maintaining its anti-immigrant and white Christian French identity. [36] In addition to growing in number, its electoral successes have also spread geographically outside of its traditional bastions of support in the south of France (*Le Monde* March 22, 2015). [37]

Crisis in the École Républicaine?

Amidst the swirling appropriations and reappropriations of emotion surrounding the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, another series of events that would cause sustained alarm occurred: Two weeks

[36] It is important to remember that the French extreme right bears few similarities to its American counterpart: while roundly condemning and rejecting communism, the FN is by no means a market-fundamentalist party; it argues for relatively strong regulation of capital-labor relations within a corporatist model, and proposes strong welfare state provisions. Interestingly, the FN's 1972 electoral platform called for a "complementary allowance" to be given to mothers with children under 2 who voluntarily gave up paid work to stay at home, after which they would be given "preferential" treatment by employers when they sought to reenter the labor force (Shields 2007). Finally, while the French right is closely associated with Catholic identity (and, in some cases, a very traditional pre-Vatican II version of Catholic identity), it does not seek the same integration of theocratic values with public policy to nearly the same degree as its American counterpart (ibid).

[37] More recently, the so-called "Brexit" referendum removing Great Britain from the European Union has provided additional political support to the FN's isolationist agenda.

after the attacks, schools throughout France held a non-denominational moment of silence for the victims of the attacks. Across the country about 200 cases of non-compliance in about 70 schools from primary to high school were recorded. The French press published a sampling of these responses, many provided by teachers: In response to his teacher's instance that he participate, one eighth-grade student in Lille casually replied, "I'll kill you with a Kalishnokov." [iii] Another reportedly told his teacher "they [the *Charlie Hebdo* staff] were asking for it. You reap what you sow when you provoke." [iv] For their part, teachers who encountered these responses were reportedly shocked, outraged, and above all at a loss for words. Unable in large part to understand where these reactions could be coming from, teachers found themselves emotionally and mentally unprepared for these young "not-Charlies." As a teacher in a middle school in Paris vented to Slate.fr, "after these nauseating, outrageous reactions, I was totally pissed off…and all these students who say, 'yeah, but they insulted the Prophet.' Yesterday a mother called her daughter at school to tell her to not respect the minute of silence!"[v] Another teacher found herself unable to cope in any measure: after arriving at her middle school the day following the attacks, hearing students say "I'm with the people that killed it [*Charlie Hebdo*]," convinced her to request a transfer.[vi]

In the atmosphere of shock and suspicion surrounding the attacks, to see and hear children coolly justify or shrug off the violence was considered to constitute a major crisis. And yet the attitudes surrounding this phenomenon appeared familiar; as recounted in Emmanuel Brenner's landmark, if controversial, 2002 work *Le Territoires Perdues de la République* (The Republic's Lost Territories; figure 6), since the 1990s teachers had noted a marked uptick in the frequency and virulence of "Islamist" sentiment, including viciously anti-Semitic behavior directed not only at curricular material (particularly the Holocaust and the deportation of French

Jews during World War II) but also at Jewish students. Despite these types of behaviors not being unprecedented, and having undergone several rounds of sensationalism in the French press, the incidents that emerged during and following the minute of silence were the first that provoked a massive response on the part of the government. According to the French Ministry of Education and repeated by Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, forty of the student reactions were referred to the criminal justice system for being "defenses of terrorism". In contrast, as of January 14, 2015, about fifty similar criminal proceedings against adults had been undertaken throughout France (Johannès and Vincent 2015). Summoned before the French National Assembly to explain the incidents and the planned reaction, the Moroccan-born Vallaud-Belkacem declared:

> "[After the attacks] teachers across France quickly understood that the school would be on the front line for reacting to these attacks, to explain to students the inexplicable, and to manage their emotions and reactions. In the wake [of the attacks] I had sent them a letter asking not only that they have students respect the minute of silence planned for the next day, but also that they create spaces of dialog and discussion. They did it, and for that I thank them. It did not always go well. There were incidents; numerous incidents, even. They are serious, and not a single one of them must be taken lightly. And not a single one of them will be taken lightly." [vii]

After enumerating the number of incidents and noting that a portion of those had been referred to the criminal legal process, the minister evoked a hard line to be taken by the national education system:

> The school is on the front line; it will be firm in punishing [similar incidents] and in creating educational dialog, including with parents, for parents are partners in education. The school is also on the front line of responding to another question, for even where there were no incidents there were too many questions brought up by students, and we've all head the "yes, I support Charlie, but…", the double standard. Why defend freedom of expression here [i.e. *Charlie Hebdo*] and not there [i.e. anti-Charlie sentiment]? These questions are intolerable to us, above all when we hear them at the school that is tasked with transmitting values. And we must ask ourselves about our ability to do this, it's what the Prime Minister did yesterday with superintendents, it's the reason for which I am mobilizing the entirety of the education community so that we do not respond only with speeches but with concrete action. [viii]

The "concrete action" promised by Vallaud-Belkacem was manifested in the months

immediately following the attacks in three primary public actions: first, in rapid response the Ministry of Education provided, on its instructor resource website Educscol (eduscol.education.fr), a list of "pedagogical tools" for talking about the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in classrooms. Following this, between February and May 2015 1,325 roundtables involving more than 80,000 participants were held by the Ministry of Education under the title "Mobilization of the School and its Partners for the Republic's Values." (*Mobilisation de l'école et ses partenaires pour les valeurs de la République*). Third, on the basis of conversations held during these roundtables the Ministry announced the creation of the "Citizen Reserve" (*La Réserve Citoyenne*), a volunteer corps of citizens who can give their time to provide curricular support for teachers by drawing on their personal or professional experience to teach republican values. Together, this group of initiatives fall under *La Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la République*: "The Great Mobilization for the Republic's Values," suggesting an uncomfortable attempt at portraying consensus and solidarity in a context of bitter debate over the terms of this solidarity.

In examining *La Grande* Mobilisation, it is tempting to take an ahistorical view of the mobilization of the entire national education system, seeing it as an exceptionally repressive measure in response to resistance. However, this notion ignores the simple fact that the French education system has *always* been used as a technology to manage difference across the space of the French republic. To understand how the revolt of two hundred schoolchildren could cause such alarm among the French public and its political leadership, it is necessary to understand the place of the French public school, the *école républicaine,* within French society.

The roots of the école républicaine: governing difference, governing space

At the center of the modern French nation is its public school system, known as the *école*

républicaine. Unlike in the United States or Britain, dissatisfaction with public schooling in France has not produced an ideological and material investment in an alternative quasi-private sector (e.g. Mitchell and Lizotte 2014; Cohen and Lizotte 2015; Lizotte 2013); for instance, no equivalent of the American charter school or the British academy school exists in France. Following the French Revolution, both government-sponsored and parochial schooling were key instruments across multiple governing regime changes in the linguistic and cultural homogenization of the peripheries of French territory, making, as Weber (1977) puts it, "peasants into Frenchmen." Throughout the *régions*, schools were exceptional spaces within the local environment, within which the values of an evolving dominant French nationalism were taught and enforced against provincial affiliations based on regional or religious identity. I argue that this function continues today in a different form, but the "peripheries" that are being targeted have shifted: instead being defined by their literal distance from the center of cultural and political power in Paris, the peripheries of the French nation to be reintegrated through the education system are identified by socioeconomic factors that mark risk and difference. This identification occurs in official ways through the establishment of priority education zones such as the *REP* (*réseaux d'éducation prioritaire*), as well as in public imagination through popular culture and rhetoric.

The idea of a common and free education guaranteed by the state had appeared with the advent of the 1789 French Revolution, but had languished through changes in power and the return of the Catholic Church during the following decades (Muller 1999). It was not until 1882, when the so-called *Loi Ferry* was approved by the French Parliament, that the *école républicaine* in its present form: obligatory, free, and – perhaps most controversially – *laïque,* or in its noun form, laïcité. The word is often used as a sort of synecdoche for the law itself (e.g. *loi sur la*

laïcité scolaire, "law on educational secularism"), despite not appearing once in the text (Kheir 2008). The 1882 law, despite being voted in the context of a long series of laws at the beginning of the French Third Republic gradually separating the influence of the Catholic Church from the power of the French state, was relatively limited in its outlook: its most radical provision regarding the place of religion in education was removing obligatory religious instruction definitively from the national curriculum (while providing a day off for voluntary religious instruction) and limiting the authority of religious leaders to inspect educational facilities. Nevertheless, laïcité dominated the legislative debates around the law from its introduction in 1880 to its adoption in 1882. Curiously, as Kheir (2008) shows, both opponents and proponents of the secularization of the public school system seized upon laïcité as a term for describing their vision of a "religiously neutral" French state: for those who favored the total removal of Catholic influence, neutrality meant that the state must be equally indifferent to all religions; for those who defended the preservation of religious instruction and the role of Catholic clergy in education, neutrality meant that the state must be equally permissive to all faiths' attempts to enter into the space of the school.

Paradoxically, laïcité is considered to be definitive of the *école républicaine* even as it was a contested concept literally from the very beginning of French education as it is known today. In part, this is a testament not only to a sort of mythos that surrounds the term itself and its place at the birth of the modern educational system, but also how threats to French identity are often filtered through the failure of schools to fully integrate and unify the French citizenry through proper education in the shared value of republican secularism. Indeed, in all of the Ministry of Education's official responses to the post-*Charlie* incidents, laïcité was and continues to be consistently emphasized as first among the values to be reinforced, alongside the

classic French trifecta of *liberté, égalité,* and *fraternité*. For example, included in the materials provided to teachers on Eduscol is a rubric entitled "Addressing the founding principles of the Republic in primary school," with a video called "What's laïcité?" (*C'est quoi, la laïcité*?),[38] and materials for middle and high-school students on "freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and laïcité."[39] Both include references to the "Laïcité in Schools Charter" (*Charte de la laïcité à l'école*). This document, which since the beginning of the 2013 – 2014 school year is posted in all educational establishments below the university level, contains fifteen "principles" of laïcité as it applies in school settings. For non-French audiences, the most familiar and perhaps infamous of these is the "headscarf law," a 2004 law passed on the recommendation of a presidential commission that states, in the words of article 14 of the *Charte de la laïcité*, "[that] in all school spaces, wearing symbols or clothing that ostensibly show belonging to a religious community is forbidden." Less well-known outside of France are other cases of personal religious values clashing with elements of the *Charte*, including controversies over whether Halal food and pork-free alternatives should be provided school cafeterias and whether Muslim students can be allowed to skip swim periods if they do not want to be with members of the opposite sex while in bathing suits.[40]

The emphasis on laïcité as a binding and uniting value in schools can be seen in part as derived from the supposed consensus around the term as it is discussed in certain political and academic circles. Just as Baubérot (2000) describes the "three thresholds of laïcité" as having been the initial rejection of the Church as a political actor by the Revolution, the loi Ferry, and

[38] C'est quoi, la laïcité? Available: http://www.1jour1actu.com/france/c-est-quoi-la-laicite-53870/
[39] Available: eduscol.fr
[40] Although relatively few high-profile cases involving these aspects of educational laïcité have emerged in recent years, both were seized upon by candidates for the center-right party *Les Républicains'*s presidential nomination as examples of the degradation of French values.

the loi de 1905, so does, for example, *C'est quoi, la laïcité*? explicitly explains laïcité as dating from the 1905 law. The *Charte de la laïcité à l'école* likewise makes references to the law in certain of its articles by evoking "liberty of conscience" (article 1 of the 1905 law). As Bowden (2007) notes, however, to reduce the evolution of laïcité to these few moments glosses over the fact that its current status as the conventional wisdom is the product of a history of bitter and often bloody struggles. Similarly, Muslim children, very few of whom do not casually threaten to shoot their teachers with assault weapons, nevertheless find themselves confused by the atmosphere of community and mutual respect promoted by videos like *C'est quoi, la laïcité?* contrasted the fact that they or their classmates can be barred from school for wearing certain pieces of clothing. For many of them and their families, laïcité – however well-meaning the teachers and officials who sing its merits – appears as yet another false promise of integration and admission to French society that instead is turned against them to remind them of their difference.

In this sense, the primacy of laïcité in the French public school system, from its reformation at the beginning of the Third Republic to its reemergence as a priority aspect of post-*Charlie* educational reforms, has a particularly geographic salience. The perception of a critical deficit in the French education system's ability to teach laïcité as an essentially French value to students is not a general one; it is specifically located in those schools and communities located in the "badlands of the Republic" (Dikeç 2007), heavily populated by people marked by their racial and cultural difference. However powerful the hegemonic discourse of an unassimilable national periphery, though, it runs up against the mundane realities of spatial management as exercised through the national education bureaucracy. Indeed, the imagined geography of areas of heightened risk for non-compliance with laïcité intersects in consequential ways with the

particular geography of the institutional apparatus of the French education system, to which I now briefly turn.

The banlieues: spaces of state intervention

At a national and global scale, an assimilationist reterritorialization of French identity and the recuperation of laïcité as an essentially French value clash with a growing Muslim frustration with the contradictions and disappointments of the promises of French republicanism. Beneath that frustration, though, lies the more immediate geopolitical context within which conflicts over laïcité are experienced in an embodied, everyday way. Here, in contrast to the centrifugal force represented by an abstract laïcité promising to allow French citizens to live together in harmony, laïcité exerts a centripetal force pushing people and communities apart in defiance of republican aspirations to a single national community. This context is materially represented by an embedded history of residential and scholastic segregation that has created over the past thirty years a patchwork of underfunded, underserved urban ghettos whose infrastructure and living conditions are decaying even as second and third-generation descendants of Muslim immigrants from France's former colonies find themselves unable to leave them and make better lives throughout the country. Many of the schools where anti-*Charlie* sentiment was expressed were in so-called *zones sensibles* – socioeconomically "sensitive" areas that make up much of the urban periphery of most of France's major metropolitan areas and especially the urban periphery of Paris. These areas are known as *banlieues* in French, which translates to "suburb" in English. However, both the real and imagined geographies of the French urban fringe covered by the term *banlieue* has little to do with the American conception of suburban areas; in many cases, they correspond more closely to the American conception of the "inner city," with landscapes marked by neglect and disinvestment.

Ironically, the *banlieues* originally represented a triumph of modernist principles in architectural design and urban planning. In large part, they are manifested by massive building projects on the peripheries of many of France's major cities that were meant to speed the recovery from the Second World War by providing desperately needed housing for country-dwellers (thus providing a mid-20th century extension of the "Peasants into Frenchmen" project) and foreign workers invited to the country as temporary laborers. Many of these foreign workers came from North Africa, especially Algeria, which at the time was integrally part of French territory. Over the course of the 1970s and 80s, volatile immigration laws and an uncertain environment regarding family unification led many of these workers to choose to remain in France, bringing their families to live with them and settling in the *banlieues* (Geddes 2003; Kepel 1991).

Like the provinces of the late 19th century, the *banlieues* of the late 20th and early 21st centuries evoke for many French people places that are technically inside French territory but remain wild, uncivilized, and lawless. This vision was reinforced by media portrayal of widespread riots that took place throughout *les banlieues* in France as well as in other marginalized urban spaces in Germany and Britain in the fall of 2005. Initially in response to the death of two adolescents in Clichy-sous-Bois who were electrocuted in a transformer where they had hidden while fleeing police, the riots evolved into an explosion of frustration and resentment accumulated over decades of geographic and social exclusion. During this time, the French government made use of a 1955 law passed in the context of the Algerian War to create a state of emergency authorizing curfews and increased policing in the areas affected by the riots. As the law had only been invoked in colonial contexts to that point [41] (in Algeria and New Caledonia),

[41] As of this writing (March 20, 2017), the state of emergency has been invoked two additional times, after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and the attacks of November 15, 2015. It was set to expire at the end of July 2016, but was

observers, including inhabitants of the *banlieues*, grimly observed the irony of its application in the heart of French territory, suggesting that the government considered the people living there "indigenous" (*indigènes*) (Piettre 2013).

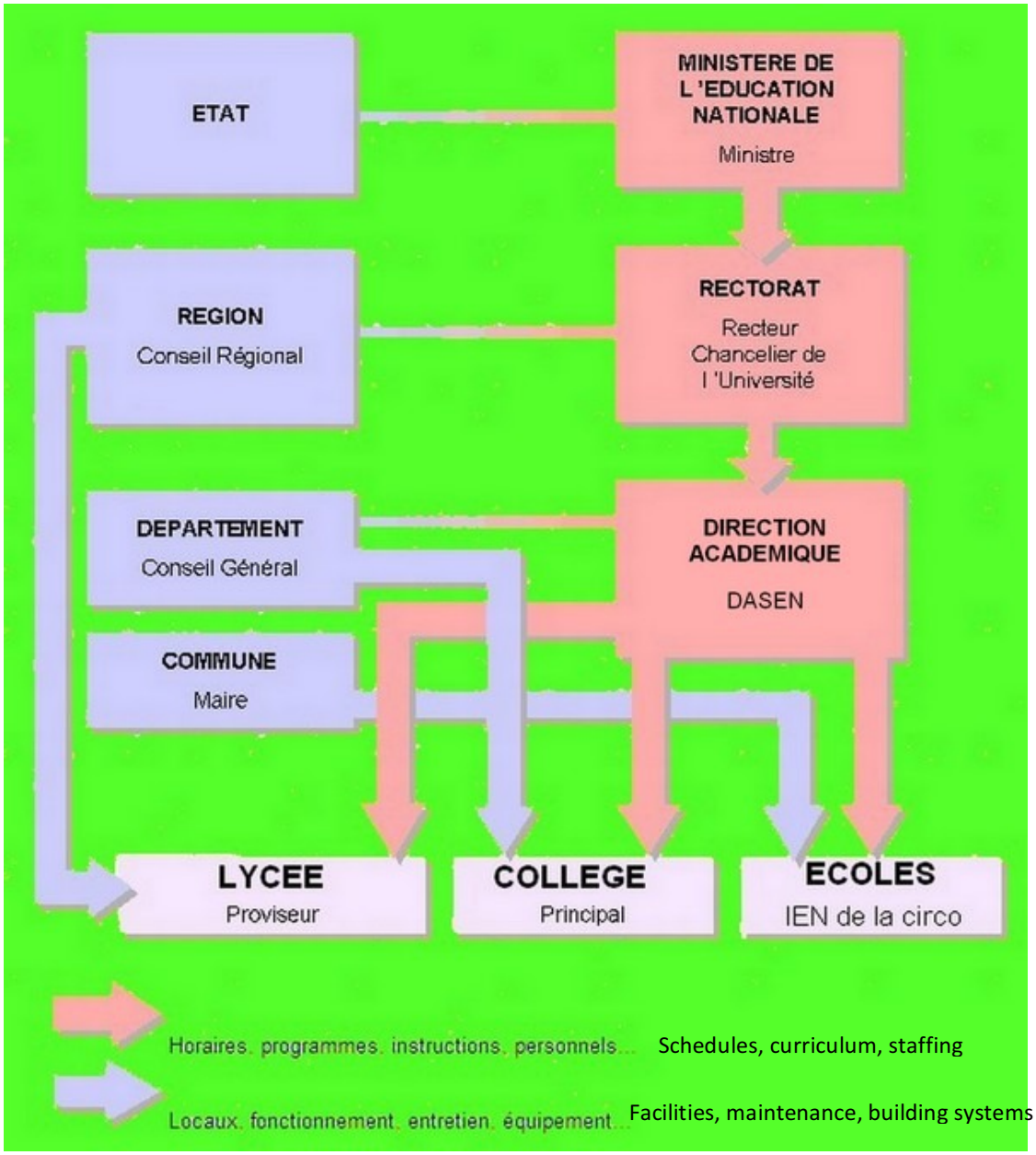
Despite, or perhaps because of the worldwide media coverage of conditions in *les banlieues* and the violence that discontent over these conditions produced, these urban ghettos remain a frightening *terra incognita* to many French people. Despite the proliferation of social and infrastructure plans and projects allocated for *les banlieues*, material improvements have been slow to materialize, particularly in education. Indeed, in some places, such as my research sit e of Saint-Denis, an acute shortage of teachers at the beginning of the 2013, 2014, and 2015 school years left many primary and secondary schools with entire classes (~25 - 30 children) who lacked a classroom.[42] Such incidents have reinforced the sensation that not only is the French state culturally and symbolically indifferent to entire urban areas with a high concentration of immigrants, but materially indifferent through neglect or even a deliberate withholding of financial support.

The French educational landscape

Very much unlike the American educational system, the French education system is a highly centralized and hierarchical system of cascading authority originating in the *Ministre de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieure, et de la Recherche* in Paris. The below chart provides a summary of the key functions and the geographic scale that is granted authority over them:

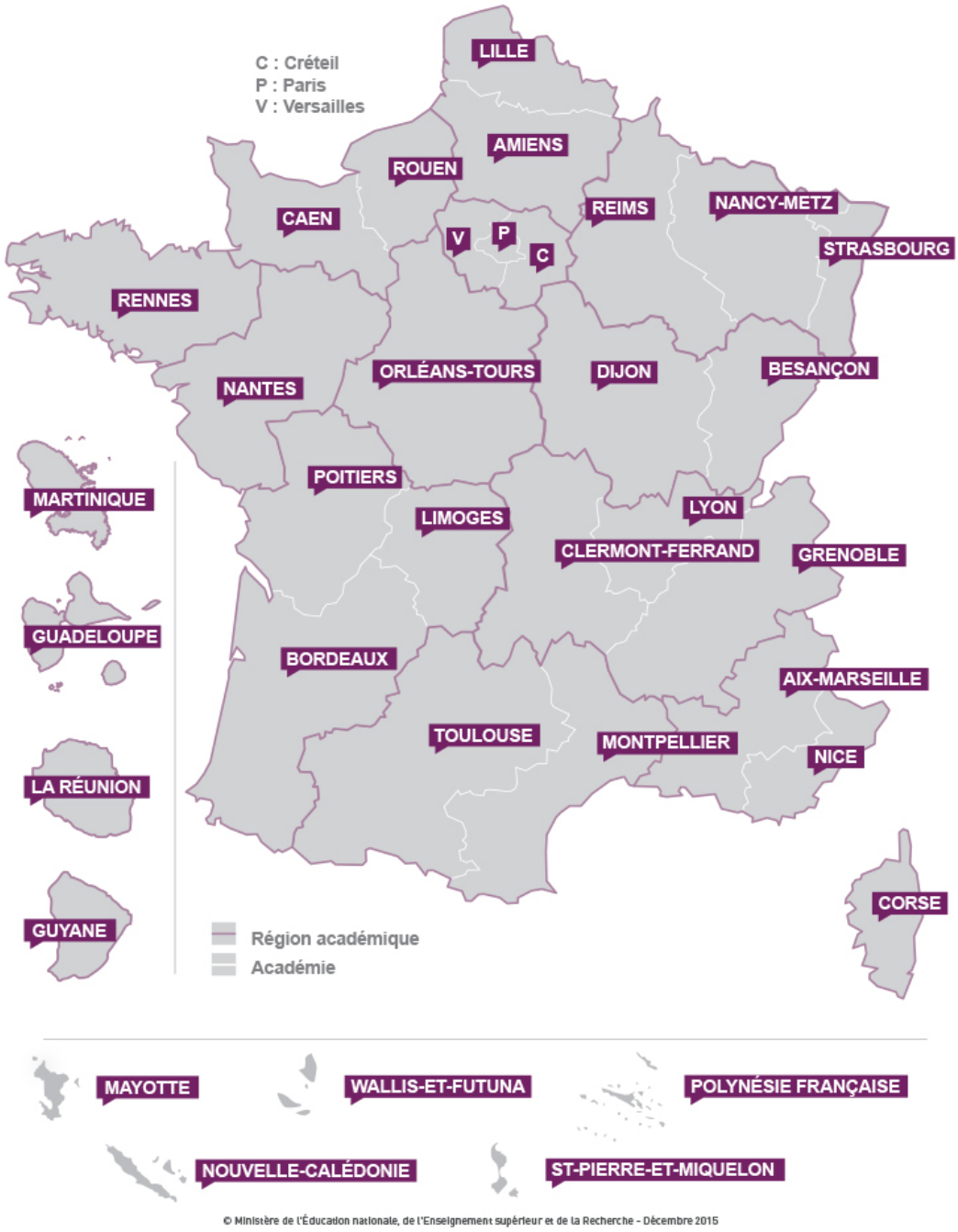
extended after the July 14 terrorist attack in Nice that killed 87.

[42] From a press release distributed by a parents' group calling themselves the "Ministère des Bonnets d'Âne," or the "Ministry of Dunce Caps," in not-so-flattering reference to the Ministry of Education and its officials.



Distribution of key functions of the French Ministry of Education

In France, these progressively devolved administrative functions are themselves organized geographically at several hierarchical scales.



Map 2: French Ministry of Education Académies as of January 1, 2016. Available: education.gouv.fr.

Below the level of *académies*, the system is further organized with a Ministry of Education structure at the *département* level. Beyond that, a series of *circonscriptions académiques* roughly congruent with municipal boundaries organizes services.

As the map indicates, *académies* are roughly geographically coincident with the administrative regions of the French state. Despite a degree of decentralization, the national Ministry of Education largely retains control over the creation and communication of policy related to curriculum and institutional governance. For the most part, local offices are charged with implementation while higher levels carry out planning and administration functions. Importantly, one central aspect of the *Grande Mobilization* initiative was the establishment of an explicit hierarchy of laïcité specialists throughout the French school system, with additional staff deployed at the *académie* and *circonscription académique* levels. There is some local variation in the way in which these staff are organized, but overall each *académie*'s laïcité efforts are coordinated by a *référent laïcité* (laïcité officer) who reports directly to the central bureaucracy (e-mail to the author, May 2016). The network of *référents* is coordinated by a central officer who is in charge of disseminating information and priorities down the chain. Teachers and principals wishing to call on the services of the *référent* and his or her staff can do so either by proceding through the hierarchical structure of the *circonscription* or directly to the *académie* level through a dedicated e-mail address.

Despite a superficially byzantine appearance, the educators I spoke with described the process of contacting the laïcité specialist staff as relatively clear and straightforward within the bounds of their normal experience with the education bureaucracy. Although other aspects of the Ministry of Education's bureaucracy lead to moments of confusion and incoherence, as I will describe in Chapter 4, there was no indication that structures for calling on the services of the *référent* were especially opaque. Nevertheless, the institutional scaffolding that permeates teachers' and principals' daily experience, as well as that specific to the *Grande Mobilisation de*

l'Ecole, both play key roles in the way in which laïcité policies are realized on the ground. I therefore now turn to a discussion of institutional culture and its influence on state policy.

Institutions and institutional actors

As discussed in chapter 1, in order to capture the interplay between the central education bureaucracy and its public-facing manifestations in the form of schools, I consider schools – and their staff – as semi-autonomous institutions. Such an approach is especially important in the context of the overheated rhetoric that was generated in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* moment of silence. As Bowen et al. (2014) note, a productive discussion of Muslim integration in general and the proper application of laïcité in particular requires cutting through the contentious and sweeping political discourse on the topic. To this end they propose an approach to investigate the dialectic between national imaginaries of citizenship and how these are actually applied within the frameworks and limitations imposed by particular institutions. Doing this can help reveal how particular settings and the actors within them draw upon their own experience, sense of organizational mission, and resources to reshape larger, often distant, public discourse in their daily work.

This approach – connecting large-scale discourse to on-the-ground practice that is reproduced in institutional settings – is one that appears in many discussions of citizenship and immigration in societies in the industrialized West. Geographers have added an additional dimension to this discussion by situating institutions within the spaces and places where the local interpretation and reshaping of larger citizenship discourses takes place. For example, they have examined spaces where people encounter the border-making and border-enforcing apparatuses of the state (e.g. Varsanyi 2008; Sparke 2006; Mountz 2004), or places where encounters between racial and / or cultural difference is set against changes resulting from economic restructuring

(e.g. Lawson et al. 2010; Hiemstra 2010; Leitner 2010). In so doing they have revealed how such spaces are not just political spaces but *geo*-political spaces where the everyday circulation of discourse about particular groups has an impact not only on rhetoric and policy but also the ways in which the spaces containing these populations are imagined and governed.

However, consideration of education and especially schools as institutions of citizenship education is somewhat limited. While considerable attention is given to the role of schooling as a state institution conveying its ideological aims for civic education, much less inquiry has investigated how individual schools embedded in their local surroundings act as vectors for transmitting these values. Indeed, studies that do examine citizenship education from the point of view of the school as an institution tend to portray the public school system in the abstract, not taking into account local factors that shape how these educational goals are actually carried out (but see Mitchell and Parker 2008 for an exception). On the other hand, many North American studies have examined how schools' socioeconomic and racial profiles intersect with other ideological aims promoted through curriculum (e.g. Nguyen 2014). What is notable about schools as institutions, then, is that they not only are tasked with transmitting a certain slate of values by the larger national community that they are located in, but they carry out this task in a highly localized way.

Bowen, Bertossi, Duyvendak, and Krook (2014) propose a framework for understanding the role that national institutions, such as schools, play in creating and circulating discourses about Muslim populations and Islam. In their day-to-day functioning, these institutions operate in "relative autonomy" to national ideologies regarding citizenship, values, and immigration. By this they mean that while such ideologies certainly intersect with the daily practices of ground-level state employees, in the end these civil servants draw on their own framings of issues to

address problems in the most immediate and practical manner possible. This mirrors an understanding of how low-level civil servants both reproduce and undermine the ideological goals of the state in their day-to-day functioning as "street-level bureaucrats" proposed by Lipskey (1980). In addition, while schools are located in a hierarchy of power and accountability due to their status as state institutions, they are not defined solely in terms of their role in distributing this power or in adhering to this accountability. Rather, through a set of contextually specific rules, norms, and practices – what Bowen *et al*. term a "practical schema" – that are constantly shifting in response to pressure from higher authorities or shifts in public opinion as a result of high-profile events, French schools produce meanings about their Muslim students that inform national discourses. Bowen *et al.*'s framework as well as empirical evidence that they present throughout their volume, suggest that there is likely to be a large difference between the Ministry's notion of an ideal *Grande Mobilisation* pedagogy and the ways in which it is actually implemented. Therefore, examination of this difference, and the "practical schema" that arises from this difference, can tell us something about the meaning of the assumptions being made by the Ministry, as well as why these assumptions fall short in the contemporary French educational environment.

Priority Education Zones

No conception of French identity has ever been uniformly applied across time or space; it is in exceptional periods, and especially times and places of crisis, where the republican contract has been assumed to be under the most threat and therefore efforts to shore it up most vigorously pursued. Bertossi and Bowen's (2014) account of the events leading up to the passage of the 2004 "headscarf" law documents interesting spatial contradictions within politicians' and school officials' testimony made to the Stasi Commission regarding their awareness of the "threats" to

laïcité. While most politicians' and intellectuals' references to such threats emphasized their "anywhere, anytime" quality posing danger across the entire space of the French nation, in practice there was – and continues to be – a keen geopolitical sense of where the assault on laïcité was located, and by extension who was perpetrating this assault. Emmanuel Brenner's *The Lost Territories of the Republic,* which gained in popularity and notoriety in 2002 for its charged cultural determinist rhetoric, furnished such a geopolitical understanding by firmly planting problematic students within the spatial concentrations – mostly in *les banlieues* – of an equally problematic Muslim culture.

The spatial targeting of educational institutions by the French state is nothing new: in the 1981s, the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire*, or Priority Education Zone, became a new tool to identify and intervene in schools that were academically failing or otherwise experiencing problems ("Education Prioritaire"). As Laborde (2008) points out, ZEPs (and their administrative descendants) are exclusively established on the basis of sociological categories legible to the French state: economic status and social class as measured by one's profession and the number of children classified as "immigrants" on the basis of language ability. Other less prominent indicators are meant to dance around the French state's understanding of these places as having high concentrations of postcolonial populations: for example, a 1982 document outlining the philosophy and implementation of priority education lists "large families" (*familles nombreuses*) as a precipitating factor in classifying a place as a priority intervention zone.[43] This racialized form of state knowledge intersects with a bureaucratized form of classification to produce a very specific geography of current and potential sites of intervention.

Although the implementation of priority education has changed over time, it has always

[43] Available: https://www.reseau-canope.fr/education-prioritaire/comprendre/reperes-historiques.html.

been geographically defined and targeted ("Education Prioritaire"); indeed, the social and economic indicators chosen to determine an area's eligibility for being placed in the "priority" category have been added to over time but have consistently been aggregated in such a way to create a powerful spatial imaginary of school underachievement. Nevertheless, research bears out that the link between an area's economic profile and its children's academic success is stronger in France than in any other OECD country (Elie 2016; PISA 2012). Therefore, a strong imaginative geography about the racial and social makeup of priority education zones coexists with an actually-existing profile of poverty and cultural outsiderness among local residents. As a result, while the ZEP has been replaced by other administrative frameworks named by a multiplicity of acronyms (e.g. REP, ÉCLAIR, etc.), the term itself remains embedded in educators' vocabularies as a sort of synecdoche – along with *banlieue* – for places containing racial difference, potential conflict, and even danger.

What this means for the implementation of a program like *La Grande Mobilisation*, which is explicitly aimed at addressing cultural and religious aspects of student's civic awareness, is that educators tend to receive a multiplicity of discourses about their student populations through their formal education as teachers and principals, as well as ongoing communications from the French Ministry of Education about new guidelines for interacting with their classes. As I will show in chapter 4, these received discourses combine with educators' practical knowledge to produce often-unexpected outcomes that do not necessarily represent a simple reproduction of state discourse. Despite the highly-centralized nature of official knowledge about school populations as reflected through the spatial ordering of priority education regimes, teachers and principals alike exercise a great deal of personal autonomy and professional judgment in applying the mandates they receive from higher up in their daily work.

Reestablishing state authority with *La Grande Mobilisation*

La Grande Mobilisation de l'école pour les valeurs de la République was announced on January 22, 2015 as a program of concrete measures to be undertaken as a direct response to the student incidents following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. As mentioned earlier, the package of responses was characterized by Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem as a decisive intervention in response to what had been broadly characterized as an intolerable situation of student rejection of core French values. It contains eleven "principal measures":

1. Reinforce the transmission of the Republic's values
2. Reestablish the authority of teachers and republican rituals
3. Create a new "citizen" curriculum program:
4. Fully unite with students' parents and create time for dialog with them
5. Mobilize all of the resources of local government
6. Prioritize mastery of the French language
7. Accelerate the undertaking of the anti-dropout plan
8. Reinforce measures against social and geographic disadvantage
9. Action for the most vulnerable populations
10. Mobilize higher education and research to educate all of society on the fault lines that cross it and on factors contributing to radicalization
11. Reinforce the social responsibility of institutions of higher education

Of these, numbers 1 through 3 are grouped under the subheading "Bring laïcité and republican values to the heart of the school's mobilization." It is these three, therefore, that I will examine most closely in order to understand how *La Grande Mobilisation* can be placed within the context of theories of citizenship, immigrant assimilation, and geopolitical identity formation among youth in schools. I examine each briefly below to pull out some key themes, continuities, and points of incoherence among them.

Reinforce the Transmission of the Republic's Values

The "transmission" of the Republic's values is in fact a two-pronged pedagogical undertaking: on the one hand, educating students about what these values are and why they are important; on the other, training teachers to competently explain these values both in specific

pedagogical programs and on an ad-hoc basis in response to student questions. Interestingly, although ministerial proclamations seemed to promise a thorough makeover of the national civics curriculum in response to the post-*Charlie* incidents in schools, it is this first of the principle measures that seems to have produced the fewest concrete artifacts in terms of policy or curriculum materials.

At the time of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, teachers and especially apprentice teachers across France became immediately aware of their impotence to communicate clearly to students what they took for granted: how the principle of laïcité explained why material appearing to mock religion such as that contained in *Charlie Hebdo* should be protected while other offensive media could be banned on charges of anti-Semitism or racism. This was especially true for student-teachers, who felt "abandoned" by their own instructors and left to fend for themselves (e.g. Dautresme 2016). In response to this collective sense of ill-preparedness, Vallaud-Belkacem announced as part of the *Mobilisons* initiative the recruitment of 1,000 *formateurs*, instructors hired by the state to teach in turn the principles of laïcité and civic studies to school personnel. In addition, it was announced that knowledge of republican values including laïcité and the ability to communicate these values would be incorporated into teacher training curriculum and the national exams taken by would-be teachers. Notably, the Ministry declared its goal that all teachers, regardless of their academic discipline, would be knowledgeable about and able to explain to students the Republic's values.

As a result, training in the Republic's values has become more and more integrated into the material taught by France's teacher training schools, the *Ecoles Supérieure du Professorat et de l'Education*, or *Espé*s. However, despite Ministry-level support for reinforcing teacher education in laïcité, in practice such material remains rather marginal in terms of time and

attention among the subjects that teachers-in-training are expected to learn (Dautresme 2016). Many teachers note that, despite the availability of a considerable range of pedagogical materials that give suggestions for teaching the concept of laïcité at levels from elementary through high school, they feel ill-prepared themselves to explain in concrete terms what laïcité is and why its importance to the cohesion of French society:

> In spite of these initiatives, future teachers still feel poorly prepared. "I can define what the Republic's values are, but no one has taught me how to teach them to someone else," worries Caroline Coubard, second-year teaching student in social studies. Certain [student-teachers] are still refusing to touch upon questions about laïcité, liberty of expression, or the [November 2015 Paris] attacks with their students. That's what Ariel, a math student teacher in Toulouse, says. She prefers to not talk about the November 13 attacks with her students, despite the abundance of resources provided to her by the Ministry of Education and the Espé. "I sent them to the history professor, who's much more up to speed on these questions." [ix] (Dautresme 2016)

One issue that seems to be giving teachers trouble is that teachers are not given concrete situations in which to evaluate how laïcité would apply, but rather taught only in ways that suggest that laïcité is self-evident or "implicit."

Another, related, issue is that some teachers believe that they already have a perfectly serviceable understanding of laïcité, and so have no real need to continue to educate themselves about it until confronted by students who either challenge its precepts or are curious about its deeper meanings. As one teacher told me, she found her own knowledge coming up short when a group of students in her school began asking questions about laïcité she was unable to answer:

> So, not having a tool for [teaching laïcité]…I got in touch with the Académie de Créteil, I found out by looking at the website that there were a lot of policy experts and also that there was one for the Republic's values. And so I got in touch with her. And it was her who put me on the right path, who I'd say gave me a lot of [teaching] methods, in fact. And also, what I thought was really great, what we saw with the philosophy professors, was that she also made some things clear for me that for a lot of professionals…well, it seems to have been my experience – that for a lot of professionals, we know what laïcité is. That's it – that we don't have to really talk about it because it seems obvious to us. Like something that, well, that doesn't really cause confusion in and of itself. (interview with the author, June 23 2016) [x]

In this particular case, the teacher found the resources put at her disposal very useful indeed, and was able to eventually parlay the support she received into a larger program for the school and its students around issues of laïcité in public. What her narrative reveals in contrast to those reported

by newer teachers or teachers-in-training demonstrates is that while resources are certainly available to those teachers who seek them, the level of experience an educator brings to his or her work has a great deal of bearing on how he or she judge their own mastery of the abstract, foundational national values they are supposed to upload and model. Clearly, a measure that aims at strengthening the overall application of the Republic's values through the potential participation of all schools and all personnel has a great deal of internal variation to take into account.

Reestablish the Authority of Teachers and Republican Rituals

The second measure proposed by the Ministry of Education lays out a new disciplinary order to classify and respond to certain student behaviors directed at teachers. It proposes that

> [a]ny behavior aimed at the Republic's values or the authority of the teacher will be subject to automatic notification to the principal or director, educational dialog involving the student's parents, and, if needed, disciplinary action. No incident will be left unaddressed. [xi]

Many commentators inside and outside the educational community saw this measure as heavy-handed or even authoritarian (e.g. sudeducation92.org, 13 April 2015). Others questioned the practical utility of such a proclamation even if the measure of discipline it demanded from students were desirable in the first place; for Espé instructor Bruno Robbes, for example, any teacher would know that to demand respect from his or her students on the grounds that he or she is a teacher and they students would be laughably ineffective as a discipline strategy, or even dangerous (Robbes 2015).

However, according to Jeanne-Claire Fumet, référent de laïcité in the *académie* of Créteil, this directive must be understood against the context of a larger effort to help students understand the purpose of laïcité. Noting that punitive measures are to be seen as a last and regrettable resort in extreme cases, she describes this measure as being primarily proactive and

pedagogical in nature:

> If pedagogy and dialogue fail, if we really end up with nothing. Well, there are disciplinary measures that can be taken, but measures – you must understand that concerning this question, a disciplinary measure that isn't rooted in a [pedagogical] process, accompanied by all possible pedagogical attempts to make the student understand and bring him or her[44] back to the heart of the republican school, would be a failure for the Republic (author's interview, June 24 2016-1)

Indeed, while "reestablish the authority of teachers and republican rituals" has an authoritative ring to it, the measure, like the others in the *Grande Mobilisation*, has no legal weight behind it. It is a guideline – albeit a strongly worded one – not a mandate. One important corollary to a mandate stating that "no incident will be left unaddressed" would be recordkeeping and other forms of bureaucratized follow-up. While publicly available statistics identify several categories of "serious" incidents reported by schools, these figures do not include matters relating to laïcité or other republican values. Nor are there such categories representing student opinions of school climate or student complaints.[45]

Indeed, it appears that as yet there is no systematic attempt to track incidents that would fall under the heading of behavior "aimed at" the Republic and its values. This is an area I intend to follow up with through more sustained inquiry with Ministry of Education personnel. For the moment, though, the reactions of teachers I spoke with regarding the *Grande Mobilisation* did not include any complaints about additional recordkeeping or other administrative tasks that might indicate the increased presence of such systems. On the contrary, they tended to indicate that they were afforded a fair amount of autonomy in dealing with issues of student non-respect of laïcité, and were not required to follow up in such issues with higher levels of the Ministry bureaucracy. I expand more on this point in Chapter 4.

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[44] The use of the masculine pronoun *le* in the original French should not be taken as a gender-exclusive use of language on the part of the administrator; *étudiant* (to which *le* refers) is grammatically masculine.

[45] Based upon statistics available at: http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid57096/reperes-et-references-statistiques.html#Données_publiques.

Create a new "Citizen" Curriculum Program

The third principal measure of the *Grande Mobilisation* aims at establishing specifically curricular measures that address civic education and aim at instilling a sense of national identity in students. In part, the plan to establish additional curriculum was piggybacked on an already-existing 2013 law that had established a new "moral[46] and civic" education program, EMC (Enseignement Moral et Civique, Moral and Civic Instruction], under the broader auspices of the "reestablishment of the republican school" program (*refondement de l'École de la République*; http://eduscol.education.fr/pid33120/enseignement-moral-et-civique.html). The national teacher resource website Eduscol (eduscol.education.fr) provides a variety of teaching materials for primary and secondary levels, focusing on issues that stem from an ethic of laïcité: racism, gender discrimination, homophobia, the wearing of religious symbols, and so on.

A detailed discourse analysis of the documentary evidence that makes up the moral and civic education curriculum is beyond the scope of this work. However, two characteristics of EMC are of interest: first, the primacy of laïcité as a key value. One of the texts detailing the principles underlying EMC, for example, makes this case explicitly:

> The morals being taught [in EMC] are civic morals in as much as they are directly descended from citizenship values (knowledge of the Republic, acquisition of its values, repect for rules, for others, for [the Republic's] rights and its privileges. These morals are also secular [*laïque*] morals that are founded upon critical reason, respectful of religious beliefs and of differences of opinion, and that upholds freedom of conscience. *As such, these secular morals become indistinguishable from civic morals.* (http://cache.media.eduscol.education.fr/file/EMC/15/2/Ress_emc_introduction_465152.pdf; my emphasis)[xii]

[46] "Moral" education in France stretches back to the Third Republic (1870 – 1940) as an adjective for the republican morals based on laïcité that constituted the government's education priorities. A major part of Jules Ferry's education reforms aimed at establishing a non-sectarian, agnostic basis for morality that would substitute for the religious values that had been up until that point taught in French schools. See Mercier, D. (2005), L'enseignement de la morale au quotidien: le rôle des inspecteurs primaires, 1880 – 1914, *Histoire de l'Education* 105.

Second, the range of recommended pedagogical tools provided on Eduscol is notable for its heavily didactic character; methods that seek to recreate an idealized public sphere of debate and exchange between free, rational individuals dominate the list.

One major program stemming from the *Grande Mobilisation de L'École pour les Valeurs de la République* related to the "citizen" curriculum program has been the establishment of the *Réserve Citoyenne*. This volunteer corps provides an opportunity for private citizens to speak, on the request of teachers and principals, on their life and career experience with republican values to students. While I was unable to access either people who had participated in the conception of this program or its participants, this program makes up one of the most enduring aspects of the *Grande Mobilisation* and so I intend to follow up on it in future work. In particular, this is one of the farthest-reaching curricular programs focused specifically on civic values and especially laïcité undertaken in modern times in the French school system. It is especially notable for bringing community members into the space of the school, something that is relatively uncommon in the French educational system; typically educational space has been regarded solely as the realm of professional educators and students.

Conclusion

The *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, as France's bloodiest Islamist terrorist attack in nearly two decades, brought a number of long-simmering tensions within French society to an open boil. Despite its long history of thumbing its nose at any and all symbols of political and religious authority, the magazine became elevated to a symbol of the exceptionalism represented by France's brand of secular humanism. Suddenly, what had previously seemed to many political and cultural elites a perpetual gadfly was transformed into a rallying point against the even bigger supposed threat posed by Islamist extremism.

I have already detailed the numerous critiques leveled at the selective lionization of *Charlie'*s lauded republican traits at the expense of its less savory ones, and will not rehash those arguments here. However, what I am most interested in tracing is the way in which the backlash to the #jesuischarlie phenomenon revealed a series of key stress points in the French republican narrative of social unity over cultural difference, and how those fractures spread to the national education system. Of particular interest is how the school, the *école républicaine* as an almost mythic institution of French national identity, became singled out as a site for intervention by the government in an attempt to repair the fissures they perceived. The following chapter aims at understanding this by drawing together literature on the construction of citizenship in the contemporary industrialized West as well as theories about the role of state education in identity formation.

At the same time that the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks revealed weaknesses in the abstract concepts of republican citizenship that lie at the heart of the French nation, though, they also revealed institutional weaknesses in the education system itself in its ability to render key French values legible not only to students but also to educators themselves. The confusion experienced by many teachers and principles about what exactly laïcité is supposed to mean poses a serious problem to many of the "Principle Measures" of the *Grande Mobilisation de l'École pour les Valeurs de la République,* given that they presuppose an unambiguous application of laïcité and other republican values. It is, for instance, somewhat meaningless to aspire to the "reestablishment of the authority of republican rituals" without a firm understanding of what exactly those rituals represent. And yet, there appears to be a certain lack of confidence among the people charged with carrying out those rituals in their own understanding of the meaning of what they are meant to be celebrating.

Nevertheless, the sense of crisis generated by a handful of student reactions to the post-*Charlie* moment of silence was enough to provoke the creation of a new citizenship educational program and a network of professional and volunteer educational personnel to carry it out. The newness of the *Grande Mobilisation* means that is not yet possible to evaluate its impact on educational discourse over the long term. However, it clearly draws upon existing geopolitical discourses about the origins and implications of student discontent in such a way as to reinscribe those discourses within a key state institution. What remains to be seen is how the institution itself responds to the introduction of these discourses, and whether they will be reproduced by education professional in the neat ways proposed by Ministry of Education teaching materials. First, though, we need to understand more about the nature of educational institutions as an arm of the state that is charged with training and forming its future citizens.

Chapter 3: Citizenship and nationalism in education: *La Grande Mobilisation les valeurs de la République* as a crisis response

The root problem is, instead of thinking calmly about issues related to laïcité, we act as though some French people were dunked into the cauldron of laïcité, like Obélix into the magic potion, as little children – naturally, they will always defend democratic values and gender equality – while Muslims need to be spoon-fed laïcité on a regular basis because they're not "naturally" secular (*laïques*). How can you feel like a normal citizen when you're constantly being scolded for being a poor [French] republican? [xiii]

Historian of laïcité Jean Baubérot, interviewed in *Le Monde* October 15, 2016.

Introduction

In the preface to a collection of transcribed speeches and legal texts on the subject of the creation of the *école républicaine*, Muller (1999) waxes poetic on the institution and its ostensibly illustrious history:

> With its rows of unchanging tables, its teacher's dais, its blackboard and its façade topped by a republican frontispiece, our School comes to us from a dream, from a utopia created in the days following the French Revolution. This dream has been pursued by four generations of indefatigable builders, who endeavored to give it little by little a stable and concrete form, so solid that its foundations still support the present edifice (5).

Set against contemporary depictions of France's public schools, such a description seems somewhat otherworldly: Already in 1993, the book *The Republic Will No Longer Educate: The End of the Ferry Myth* had questioned the exceptionalism of the *école républicaine,* in particular its supposed innovation in providing free and secular education. In 2002, the controversial but influential book *The Republic's Lost Territories* would describe a French education environment so far removed from Muller's loquacious description that just three years later the "solid foundations" seemed to have crumbled or evaporated into thin air. The 2008 film adapted from a book of the same name *Entre les Murs* ("The Class" in its English-language version) depicts a fictionalized version of a young teacher's actual experiences in a Parisian middle school located in a Priority Education Zone (*Zone d'Education Prioritaire*). The film, which won the Palme d'Or at the 2008 Cannes festival, gives a "day in the life" year-long narrative vacillating between

banality and crisis, representing a gulf between Muller's lofty ideals and the realities of teaching the prescribed curriculum to a multicultural student body who often sees little relevance in it to their own lives.

Even in the face of these and other widely acknowledged accounts of the difficulties taking place in France's schools, the mythos of the *école republicaine* as an institution with the power to create a unified national community out of the chaos of social difference remains strong (Sachs 2007). In contrast to the United States, where the widespread public perception of a failure of the educational system has spurred a state abandonment of public schools in favor of massive investment in a quasi-private educational sector (e.g. Cohen and Lizotte 2015, Mitchell and Lizotte 2014), French educational struggles continue to be framed within the basic framework of the *école républicaine*. One major reason for this is the much more centralized governance structure of French as opposed to American schools. A second, and more consequential factor in the French tendency to focus on the public school system during times of crisis, is an enduring normative belief that the space of the school itself can function as a pristine republican utopia, where sectarian difference is reduced to insignificance through rational thought and education. During the debates leading up to the 2004 ban on ostensible religious symbols worn in schools, this view of the school fueled much of the rhetoric employed by those who reported a crisis of laïcité in public schools, especially in reference to the *hijab*:

> The [republican] school welcomes students. Is it a sanctuary, that is to say, a space protected from strife. Society's conflicts cannot penetrate it. It is inacceptable that the public, secular [*laïque*], and obligatory school should be polluted by the demands of "communities" that would try to impose their beliefs, their habits, their customs upon it.
>
> Teachers' job descriptions do not include taking sides in or arbitrating cultural or religious rivalries. Ignorant and / or paranoid enemies of republican wisdom would have teachers' roles reduced to that of an activities leader [*animateur*], referees to keep track of debate time, or even blue-helmets [i.e. UN peacekeepers]. They would allow these so-called class debates where each group defends its preconceived notions without listening to others' arguments except for the purpose of fighting them. At the end of the class, everyone leaves with hairline

> fractures, teeth marks, wounds, a lack of knowledge, the defeat of reason, the annihilation of the republican school (Vianès 2004, 266).

Ironically, in dismissing the presence of religious identity in public schools, Vianès invokes a vision of the republican school itself as a sacred, inviolable space. What is most striking, though, in this description is the disgust and disdain expressed for the invasion of the space of the school by cultural and social difference, which is assumed to be an inevitable source of disorder and disaccord among students. The powerful image of the walls of the school literally enclosing a space of refuge from sectarian strife is one that draws in part upon the crisscrossing geopolitical narratives I argue are embedded in laïcité. Filtered through the crisis mentalities that perennially situates schooling at the root of attacks upon French national identity, these narratives obscure the links the draw between the intimate and the abstract: just as nonconforming Muslim students' bodies wearing religious symbols become synecdoche for the risk presented by global terrorist networks, principals' and teachers' adjudication of everyday behavioral and dress code issues are framed in the larger struggle against Islamist extremism.

Geographers and other scholars have pointed out the ways in which intimate fears are translated into state policy, policing of "risky" bodies in the name of order and security (e.g. Mitchell 2009). In this chapter I discuss how this process has taken place in the specific context of the French school. Contrary to the vision of the space of republican school as a u-topia, literally nowhere in terms of being totally detached from the social and economic inequality that pervade French society, education in France is embroiled in the same geographies of global change that have driven conflict in French society. In particular, the very geopolitical discourses that have driven attempt after attempt to leverage the educational system as a technology of managing local social difference are those that are generated by geographic imageries of global risk and danger and the Muslim bodies that embody them.

I begin with an examination of literatures on how citizenship is constructed in the advanced capitalist migrant-receiving societies of the of the global North. Although one of my goals in this work is to move beyond thinking purely through a neoliberalism lens, it is necessary to address this body of work given its outsized influence in the citizenship literature. What many scholars have observed in this area is a trend among these countries towards a retrenchment of assimilationist policy and rhetoric that places a disproportionate burden not only on newcomers but on *de jure* citizens who are cast as outsiders. I then examine how these phenomena have been manifested in the specific contexts of the European Union in general and France and particular. Overall, what these bodies of work contribute is a framework for understanding the intersection of state perspectives on the role of real or imagined outsiders with specific immigration and citizenship policies. To connect this framework to the institution of the school, I consider literature that examines the role of the school as a key citizen-making apparatus, and how perceived threats to national cohesion and identity have been reflected in curricular and policy interventions in education. This literature also includes perspectives on how young people react to such interventions and take on – or reject – their ideological goals.

Throughout these theoretical reflections, I maintain the position that the youth rejection of *Je Suis Charlie* represented by the post-attack incidents during the national moment of silence must be understood as more than a Muslim cultural incompatibility with the values of the modern liberal nation-state. Likewise, *La Grande Mobilisation* should be viewed as more than simply a repressive tactic of the French state to silence dissent among a population viewed as problematic. In sum, I argue that what the student reaction to the post-*Charlie* moment of silence and the Ministry's counterreaction points to is the fragility of the laïcité compromise at the heart of French national identity. And yet this compromise has been central to holding together the

French state and French national identity for over one hundred years.

Normative models of citizenship in contemporary France and Western Europe

It is by now commonplace to describe governance in the advanced economies of Western Europe and North America since roughly the beginning of the 1980s as "neoliberal," that is, based on economic and political principles that privilege government activism on behalf of market institutions to keep them functioning through and beyond economic crisis. During the past two decades, inquiry into the form and function of neoliberal government has moved past the state to investigate how individuals are drawn into patterns of self-regulation as a means of replacing welfare functions of the state that have either been eliminated or greatly diminished (e.g. Larner 2000; Peck and Tickell 2002; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Cruikshank 1999; Katz 2005). As a consequence of interest in the intersection of the state's regulation of individuals under the conditions of political and economic austerity that often accompany neoliberal government and individuals' own self-regulation under these same conditions, some authors have asserted that recent shifts in policies regarding integration in the migrant-receiving societies of Western Europe and North America can be largely understood in a neoliberal framework. In particular, it has been posited that the broad shift away from policies and attitudes favoring multiculturalism and towards assimilation should be understood primarily in the context of a restructuring political economy marked by deindustrialization and the progressive dismantling of the welfare state (e.g. Joppke and Morawska 2003; Alba and Nee 2003).

In such a context, an increasingly austere environment for newcomers produces more competition for the remaining available services, and thus incentives to self-regulate in ways that make oneself a more attractive candidate for those services. "Attractiveness" in this context is often framed in terms of adopting muted forms of cultural difference, defined according to the

host society's conception of what degree of difference is considered "acceptable." This shift finds its expression in the move away in the form of the ideal citizen from what Mitchell (2003) terms the "multicultural self" to the "strategic cosmopolitan." Overall, the benefits of forming citizens who have cultural competency and the ability to work and communicate across difference have been reframed from notions of global unity and social justice to issues of national security and economic competitiveness (Mitchell 2007; Kymlicka 2003). This reframing is particularly manifested in education, where pedagogies that emphasize engaging with people across cultural and social difference are valued not on in terms of their potential to enhance coexistence among diversity for its own sake, but to manage potential risks arising from social difference (cf. Mitchell 2009). The reasons for this shift have been mainly located in two related phenomena: a convergence of public policy across the industrialized West towards neoliberalism as a broad model for social and economic governance on the one hand, and gradually increasing pressures put on the institutions of the social welfare state by increasing numbers of immigrants on the other. I consider each of these in turn before turning to their more specific manifestations in the political and cultural spaces of the European Union and France.

Citizenship in the neoliberal moment

Neoliberal policies are entrenched within several levels of government, most notably at the scale of the individual within which neoliberal governance seeks to reshape individuals' political subjectivities and instrumentalize their aspirations as vehicles for disciplining and ordering social life (Rose 1999). In an age of globalizing cultural and economic linkages between places neoliberal policy has gained additional saliency as a means of promoting nation-state unity in the face of centrifugal forces diminishing the state's role as an arbiter in matters of social policy (e.g. Isin and Wood 1999; Sassen 2009). Notably, in response to anxieties about diminishing

economic and political advantage within the societies of the global North governments have touted neoliberally-inspired policies in several areas of social provision as means of encouraging individuals to situate their own self-improvement as individuals in the context of national economic and social progress (Rose 1996, 2000).

In the introduction and chapter 1 I briefly considered whether a global movement towards modes of governance that fit broadly under the label "neoliberal" can characterize struggles over citizenship in the post-*Charlie* context in France. Here I expand on that reflection by beginning with Larner's (2000) observation that neoliberalism – a broadly defined political and economic philosophy centered around market fundamentalism – is demonstrated through simultaneous manifestations in policy applications, political ideologies, and everyday discourses. Normative models of citizenship are, likewise, expressed through a similar set of channels: policy that defines the legal terms of citizenship status; ideology that shapes public opinion about acceptable cultural and social qualities of citizenship; and discourses that constantly shape and reshape the ways in which people see themselves as ideal citizens of a society.

As a result, many scholars have observed that the progression of neoliberal ideas into public governance overlaps with evolving notions of who and what is "deserving" of citizen status. In general, the retreat of the state from the provision of public welfare and the restructuring of the economy to include a greater proportion of employment in precarious, low-wage jobs has been accompanied by increased scrutiny of those who are making claims to access the public goods that citizenship provides (e.g. Leitner 2012; Lawson *et al.* 2010; Sparke 2006; Pratt 2004; Ong 1996). What is key to these and other studies' examination of the relationship between neoliberal practice and constructions of citizenship is the way in which they study neoliberalism as a grounded, "actually existing" phenomenon shaped by local political, social,

and cultural circumstances instead of a collection of abstract concepts divorced from space and history (cf. Brenner and Theodore 2002). In these and other case studies, neoliberalism – and its legal and ideological impacts on citizenship – is embodied in the behavior of agents of the state, material living and employment conditions, and in many cases, inscribed onto individual bodies by processes of economic restructuring, immigration policy, and popular imaginations of who is "inside" and "outside" of the national community.

Another important observation made by scholars of neoliberalism is that just as its manifestations are highly context-specific, neither is the overall phenomenon a coherent program that is distributed evenly across space. Indeed, although the seeming ubiquity of policies over the past 35 years that fit into a neoliberal mold can give the impression that such a model is inevitable and more or less identically implemented from place to place, in truth the geography of neoliberalism reveals itself to be very patchy, with policies and their impacts having disparate effects (Brenner *et al*. 2010). Attention to the geographic variation of neoliberal policy and practice highlights the reality that any consensus driving forward neoliberalism as an economic and political project is highly fragile, resulting in as many moments of failure as success. These failures are important in that they can indicate where neoliberal policy is resisted, and where such resistance is taken into account to inform how to better build consensus and consent for future rounds of political and economic restructuring. Regarding citizenship studies, these moments of resistance and failure are important for reminding us that while neoliberal governance has profoundly impacted the ways in which people understand the terms of their citizenship and the limits of their political participation in their home societies, it has not totally reshaped the relationship between citizen and state.

Together, these observations have provided valuable insight into the contexts and

conditions that shape particular neoliberal projects, especially in the realm of education. However, in looking at continental Western Europe and France, assuming that neoliberalism is as equally effective a framework for understanding the evolution of social and economic governance as it is elsewhere can be highly problematic. On the one hand, many of the shifts in the global political economy that have driven neoliberalism over the past several decades have had impacts in the political and economic spaces of France. On the other hand, though, the particular political culture of France means that the ways in which these impacts have been managed domestically differ greatly from those of other global North societies (Dikeç 2007; Jobert and Théret 1994). In particular, while neoliberal reforms have been pursued by French governments since the 1980s, there has never been the kind of convergence of public or elite opinion around the inherent superiority of market-driven public policy as was the case in the United States or Britain over the same time period (Levy 2002, 2001; Schmidt 2002).

The relative lack of appetite for the neoliberalization of social service provision in France can be attributed in part to a different path taken by neoliberalization there than in much of the rest of the industrialized West. The extent of this exceptionalism – the divergence from neoliberal tendencies that have tended to converge across the advanced industrialized West – is described in part by Dikeç (2007). He describes a "hybrid form" (6) of neoliberalism in which the fostering of individualized and entrepreneurialized behavior sits in tandem with the French republican tradition, which itself envisions a relatively unmediated relationship between citizens and state institutions. Schmidt (2002, 2003) likewise argues that the form taken by neoliberalism in France has been relatively muted, representing a shift from "state-led" to "state-enhanced" capitalism while in some areas intensifying its range of social governance programs.

A relative lack of social governance measures directly inspired by market capitalism in

France has meant that scholars have not used a neoliberal lens to understand contemporary political phenomena to the same degree as their Anglo-American counterparts. This is particularly telling in French scholarship on school reforms, which tend to make very little reference to the same phenomena that education scholars use elsewhere in the industrialized West to explain the proliferation of market and quasi-market solutions to perceived failures of the public education system in those places (for exceptions, see e.g. van Zanten and Kosunen 2013; van Zanten 2009, 2006). By turning to the literature tying together the ways in which citizenship has been reformulated in response to ostensibly "new" immigrant populations, we can examine how the neoliberal moment has manifested itself as immigration policy in France in ways that mirror and that diverge from those of other global North societies.

Citizenship and Immigration in the EU and French contexts

Within the migrant-receiving societies of the industrial West, the connection between citizenship and immigration is tightly related to the changes wrought by neoliberal economic and political restructuring. Just as neoliberal economic and political restructuring have placed an increased burden of proof to their "deservingness" on those seeking to access the public goods of the state, so have these same forces had major impacts on the ways in which newcomers in particular are governed and policed as they negotiate the path towards legal citizenship (e.g. Hiemstra 2010; Varsanyi 2008; Mountz 2004). Despite evidence of a convergence towards state-sponsored multiculturalism among global North governments during the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. Kymlicka 1999, 2003), a return to an emphasis on immigrant assimilation seems to have installed itself as the dominant model (Joppke and Morawska 2003; Alba and Nee 2003). As Isin (1999) argues, the constitution of citizenship through history has always depended on "imminent others"; outsiders to the national community who nevertheless are in close enough proximity to

remain in the collective consciousness as those who represent all that the community is not. While the return of assimilation might be seen in the context of a revanchist right-wing resurgence across the global North during the past two decades, in fact its traces can be found in centrist and left-wing critiques of multiculturalism as well (Joppke 2004).

In addition to the more general trends outlined above, the reframing of who and what an ideal citizen is that took place across the industrialized West during late 20th and early 21st century needs to be examined in France in both its national and supranational appearances. It is important to place shifting conceptions of citizenship in France in the context of European integration and cooperation. Commentators have suggested that the fluctuating role of the nation-state within increasingly globalized relationships and the increasing importance of supranational entities in governance has led to anxiety about national sovereignty and values, although this should not necessarily lead us to believe that the role of the nation-state has diminished to insignificance (e.g. Brodie 2004; Isin 2002). In many cases, the increasing uncertainty about how governance should be organized amidst increasing transnational flows of goods, people, and capital has led to strategic reterritorializations of the nation-state in particular ways (Wissen and Brand 2011; Sparke 2004; Demirovic 2011), and this is particularly true of the European Union (Scott and van Houtum 2009).

What appears most striking in terms of the reterritorialization of the core states of the European Union is an overall return to politico-legal models of immigrant incorporation that emphasize assimilation and diminish the importance of multiculturalism at the heart of the liberal democratic nation-state. To distinguish themselves institutionally and culturally, Western European governments have conflated their legal and political traditions with fundamental cultural values and presented those values as requirements for becoming legal citizens (Bowen *et*

al. 2014). However, scholarly assessments of the *meaning* of this "assimilationist turn" diverge: Brubaker (2001), for example, sees in France a discursive rejection of the "right to difference" (*droit à la différence*) movement of the 1980s noted by many other authors, but does not ascribe to it a decisive shift in political attitudes towards cultural difference. Van Houdt et al. (2011), on the other hand, see a "neo-communitarian" shift emerging across several Western European countries through policies that demand that newcomers take it upon themselves to assimilate to their host country's cultural and civic norms.

As a core EU member state, political stances towards immigration and citizens in France have reflected but also diverged from those taking place in other core member states in response to the expansion of the EU. As a migrant destination society, attitudes about racial difference shifted in ways comparable to other Global North migrant destination societies. Nationally, two important elements comprise a "French exception" regarding the ways in which citizenship has been conceived in its own legal and philosophical traditions: First, in contrast to other Western European countries, France has a long history of citizenship laws that include both territorial birthright as well as lineage birthright privileges. Second, citizenship in France has long been thought of in ways that combine – and perhaps conflate – sociocultural qualities that define French national identity with legal status (Feldblum 1999). Looking more specifically about how immigrant assimilation is placed within this overall French model of citizenship, Laborde (2008) notes that in its vision of the creation of national community, what sets France's brand of assimilation apart from some of its neighbors are two things: First, in France, historical and social tradition has long rejected the idea of an "ethnic" nation as a basis for creating a communal bond (174). Instead French republican political philosophy has held the Rousseauean "social contract" as the unifying force in French nationhood, placing special emphasis on the

power of consensual acceptance of a common cultural identity as a vehicle for assuring the formation of a fully-functioning democratic state (178). Such a conception places laïcité as one of many cultural values fundamental to French national culture that must be adhered to not for its own sake, but to secure the possibility for harmonious cohabitation among a theoretically infinitely diverse French population.

Second, while the shift to assimilationist forms of incorporating newcomers into the national community is not unique to France, what is unique is that unlike other Western European countries where it largely occurred as a right-wing reactionary shift in policy and attitude to the perceived danger of immigrant populations, in France assimilation was actively embraced by center-left republicans during the last decades of the 20th century (Laborde 2008, 185; Feldblum 1999). This was done partially to preempt the political aspirations of the anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic *Front National*, which enjoyed electoral success during the 1970s and 80s partially on its strong condemnation of lax immigration policy and nativist ideological stance. Rejecting the *communautarisme* – self-identification with religious, ethnic, or political groups other than the national community – of both the far-right FN and the multiculturalist advocates, republicans tried to reclaim assimilation by positioning it as an aspirational ideal – one that had created the French nation and held it above the social and cultural divisions that both conservative nationalism and group-based identity politics threatened to deepen.

Bertossi's (2012) schema of different models of immigrant integration in France for the period 1983 – 2012 bears out these French idiosyncrasies within the overall arc of evolving attitudes and norms across Europe. At the same time, he notes that what a historical perspective provides is the recognition that while common elements characterize the French republican approach to cultural difference and immigration, the republican model itself is one that is

regularly questioned, negotiated, and redefined through the political process. Favell's (1998) analysis of French immigration policy adds to this narrative of ongoing struggle and compromise by highlighting the contradictions between the "high principles of *intégration*," an almost mythical path that spans the the exterior and interior of the French national community, and the "pragmatics of *insertion*," the brutal banality of actually walking this path in an environment that considers social and cultural difference itself subversive to public order (see also Bleich 2001a). As he notes, the tensions between these the ideological and the material manifestations of integration were somewhat muted through the 1980s and 1990s by a tacit agreement between the center-left and center-right elements of the political establishment to contain the terms of debate in order to marginalize the "nationalist and culturally exclusive rhetoric of the far right, and the multicultural and internationalist ideas of the radical left." (41)

In the post-*Charlie Hebdo* moment of social disunity and conflict, France experienced a visceral breakdown of this agreement and the opening up of political space to offer alternatives to the republican assimilationist view of integration. *La Grande Mobilisation*, with its emphasis on laïcité in addition to the traditional French trifecta of freedom (*liberté*), equality (*égalité*), and social cohesion (*fraternité*), appears to represent a package of curricular reforms aimed at renewing a consensual vision of what it means to integrate into the French cultural and political community. However, it is not an abstract enterprise; it is an attempt to instill these values through a very specific institutional vector – public schooling.

The role of obligatory schooling in youth identity formation

Education scholars have long acknowledged the ideological aims of compulsory national schooling, especially those that are implicit to curricula and evaluation systems (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1986; Apple 2001, 2006). In the contemporary moment, the composition of these

ideological aims are heavily contested. For many Western governments, maintaining a balance between cosmopolitan aspirations and the claims of national minorities is a conflict that plays out through systems of compulsory public education. In many cases this conflict plays out through competing normative visions of the spatial entity to which students are meant to pledge their allegiance. This series of allegiances is ultimately meant to foster loyalty to the "universal" appeal to human rights to individual dignity and sovereignty (see also Jarvis 2000; Kiwan 2008; Turner 2002). Contesting this idealized vision of citizenship formation are the efforts of many Western governments to retool their public education systems to inculcate cosmopolitan competencies over and above multicultural values – that is, educating for a privileged view of membership in national and global communities – to ensure that their citizens secure strategic positions in a deindustrialized, globalized economy (Mitchell 2004, 2003).

Because of its emphasis on laïcité as one of the values most in need of reinforcing, *La Grande Mobilisation* indeed seems targeted at those students whose Muslim identity threatens the current regime of order. Indeed, as Michalowski (2014; see also Ersbøll, Kostakopolou, and Van Oers 2010; Orgad 2010) points out, many immigration policies across Western Europe are designed with Muslim populations in mind as the target audience. In France, laïcité is given considerable air time in formal civics courses for would-be French citizens as a non-negotiable principle. In the context of pedagogical interventions, laïcité stands out as a value that is presented in teacher resources such as *C'est quoi, la laïcité*? as universal and self-evident, while tacitly targeting a certain student population. Such a move seems to fit into another of the most basic uses of national civics curricula – and one examined in depth by geographers: the use of geographic imaginaries to construct a spatially-bounded sense of identity in students (Hanson-Theim 2009; Herb 2004; Morgan 2004).

However, to say that *La Grande Mobilisation* is simply a package of ideologically-driven educational material being imposed on a group of recalcitrant students would be oversimplifying the case. Willis's (1977) seminal work *How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* adds important nuance to the groups of actors positioned within the fields of power that make up compulsory schooling: in addition to those who work to maintain the ideal functioning of the school system according to their perception of their position as representatives of the institution, the ways in which students interpret their own positions as subjects of curriculum are vital as well. Research has revealed that young people constitute their sense of geopolitical belonging in flexible ways, complicating any assumed causal connection between curriculum, political identity, and national allegiance (e.g. Holloway and Valentine 2003; Katz 2004; Mitchell and Parker 2008). On this basis, any normative aspirations for curricular reforms of *La Grande Mobilisastion* are inherently problematic as they posit that the solution to a lack of nationalist solidarity in schools is to simply add more nationalist values to the curriculum.

Therefore, when examining the impact of curriculum on youth, especially involving students from marginalized populations, their own political agency and awareness must be taken into account in order to understand how civic education aspirations is reformulated by those who are their intended subjects. It is here that the question of geographic complexity within a seemingly highly-centralized bureaucracy must be explored as well. In parallel to the geographic imagination described and deployed by education administrators and teachers, is one that students deploy to understand their own place in society and in the institutional environment of the school. However, when examining the link between geopolitical identity and national curricula, geographers have tended to concentrate on how these two elements are linked in post-conflict and especially divided societies – that is, societies in which one or more organized

national groups makes a claim to the space of the state (e.g. Staeheli and Hammett 2013). Less is known about how curricula proposing normative geopolitical identities are received by members of marginalized minority populations.

What is clear, though, is that youth awareness of their own political agency heavily influences attempts to instill a particular vision of national citizenship. As Weller (2003) shows in the English context, for example, middle- and high school-age students are not particularly receptive to narratives of unity that conflict with their own experience. This is especially the case with a large portion of France's youth population, descended from ex-colonial subjects and often marginalized in ways that alienate from the only society they have ever known. As a program like *La Grande Mobilisation* insists on a set of nationally-bounded civic values as the core of its pedagogical approach, it may well run up against cultural difference that resides in the very geographic contexts – particularly, though perhaps not exclusively the *banlieues* – it was devised to address. Therefore, we must look a little further into the ways in which young people who are meant to be the subjects of this curricular intervention see themselves, so that we can understand how they see the state's attempts at teaching them to be French.

As French as Everyone Else? Students Issu-e-s d'Immigration

One critique that might be leveled at the Ministry of Education's efforts is that it is attempting to wrest control of students' transnational identities in forcing them to declare an allegiance to France that does not reflect the reality of their cultural ties. But are the majority of Muslim students in France truly "transnational"? The American literature on educational achievement and equity consistently – and appropriately – makes reference to race as a key axis of social difference that influences student outcomes and access to quality education. While French examinations of similar processes are in no way unaware of the role played by racial difference,

they – and indeed most discussions of social processes in France – run into a fundamental limitation in their analysis: the collection of demographic data by race or ethnicity in France is prohibited by law since 1978.[47] "National origin" is used as a proxy for race and ethnicity, but obvious problems arise from this demographic characteristic: people for whom cultural or family ties to other places are important are quite often French citizens, and so are not counted by this statistic.

The dearth of ethnic or racial data has important implications for the way in which official measures meant to address inequality are designed, beginning with their ideological formulation. As Bleich (2001a, b, 2000) notes, the promotion of substantive equality (i.e. equality of outcome) in France with regards to racial difference has a complex history. He identifies two cultural touchstones that have contributed to the collective French aversion to the explicit identification of groups by race for redistributive purposes: first, the republican tradition that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution emphasized the primacy of an unmediated relationship between the individual and the state as represented by its institutions. Within this framework, any grouping of people based on characteristics not related to their common civic identity as citizens is considered arbitrary and artificial, and appears as an impediment to the state's impartiality. Second, the memory of the Nazi occupation of France and the Vichy puppet regime from 1940 – 1944 has had a powerful effect in stigmatizing any measure that classifies and categorizes ethnic or racial characteristics for any means, regardless of intended outcome. Rightly or not, French political elites are quick to attribute the mass deportation of French Jews to the practice of racial statistics.

Beyond official formulations, however, the French everyday experience of racial

[47] Loi n° 78-17 du 6 janvier 1978 relative à l'informatique, aux fichiers et aux libertés. Available: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000886460

difference is evident in the terms and images used to describe it. Within popular discourse, many terms have emerged to label non-white French citizens in what is considered acceptably politically correct language. Perhaps the most common of these is *issu(e-s) d'immigration*. Like many French terms with seemingly transparent English cognates, the term is nevertheless tricky to satisfactorily render into English language and Anglo-American political culture. A somewhat satisfactory translation could be "originating from immigration," but this does not capture the implicit imagined geographies of the immigration in question; it is not typically used to describe the descendants of immigrants from other European countries, notably Portugal and Italy which furnished much of the non-French population of the pre-WWII era. And yet it is a dominant sociological characterization, both by social scientists as well as the public at large. Some sociological work sensitive to the deeply-embedded connotations of the term has attempted to unpack the unspoken assumptions about what the term means. For example, Brouard and Tiberj's (2006) work on social and political attitudes held by a range of French citizens including those of North- and Sub-Saharan African origin attempts to understand whether those populations can be shown to be empirically different from their co-citizens based on their opinions on a variety of topics, including religiosity and the ever-controversial *communataurisme* that is regarded as the ultimate anti-republican tendency. Their term, "new French," (*nouveaux français*) attempts to capture both the social and political difference of this population while insisting on their legal status as full French citizens.

While a useful insight into the actually-existing political and cultural difference exhibited by the "new French" population as a whole, however, work like Broaurd and Tiberj's that interrogates basic cultural categories is rarer when it comes to investigating the attitudes and aspirations of young people. And yet this is an essential period in political formation; researchers

have shown that efforts toward education for national identity on the basis of cosmopolitanism are both consented to and contested at the everyday level of schooling. In particular Holloway *et al.* (2010) call attention to children's agency during the lived experience of their education as being central to their formation as members of cultural and political communities. The importance of foregrounding examining students' participation in their education for national belonging is born out as children's ability to flexibly constitute their own political identities at multiple scales complicates simple associations between curriculum, national belonging, and political subjectivity (Mitchell and Parker 2008; Holloway and Valentine 2003; Katz 2004). As Staeheli and Hammet (2010, 2013) point out, trying to foster a sense of national identity – even one based on values of multiculturalism and tolerance – can at best fail to address students' experience of living within the divided society and at worst inculcate authoritarian forms of patriotism and nationalism.

Some studies in the French context have attempted to dig into the ways in which French youth of the "new French" population construct their own understandings of political identity and agency. Ribert's (2006) study of French youth is instructive in this regard, revealing three important conclusions that force a rethinking of how youth national identity is formed and maintained. She focuses on a population of youth born in France of foreign parents who were required by a 1993 law to undergo an administrative procedure in order to obtain their permanent French citizenship. The law, like many others relating to citizenship devised during the 1990s, rests on an assumption that political identity derives from nationality; by that understanding, requiring young people to declare a national affiliation would lead them to align their own sense of identity with the values and traditions of the French nation. However, Ribert's research shows that such a link is only weakly present in this group; the young "new French" do not tend to

consider either the French nation or the countries from which their families emigrated as having particular importance in their sense of their own identity. Moreover, as she finds, the traditional conception of national affiliation in which a critical mass of cultural, affective, or social ties tips the balance of a person's loyalty squarely and discretely into one nation's camp or another does not seem to hold; the youth she interviews have multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory ties to the places meaningful to them. Finally, young people whose heritage contains diverse aspects of political and cultural identity are quite adept at managing these interwoven ties, rather than experiencing the kind of existential crisis that might be presumed given the point of psychological and neurological development they are in.

While Ribert's study is, to be sure, limited to a relatively small group of French youth representing only some of the places from which recent newcomers to France have originated, it serves to re-center the experience of laws pertaining to citizenship and national identity onto the people who are the subjects of those laws. Such an approach serves as an important counterpoint to the more abstracted accounts of national political culture that dominate much of the literature of citizenship in the current moment. Although a full consideration of how the *Grande Mobilisation* impacts the student populations it was designed to address is beyond the scope of this work, it seems clear that the intended results will likely run up against youth political agency that does not fully resonate with the nationally-bounded conception of French values that the initiative promotes. It seems obvious as well that the teachers and principals on the ground who are charged with carrying out national education policy will be fully aware of their students' capacity for reworking and interpreting curricular messaging as well. Indeed, much of my empirical work, detailed in chapters 4 and 5, bears out this point. While students' experience of laïcité policies is an essential part of the overall story, it is also important to investigate how the

people responsible for their education understand their charges' experiences and use that understanding to inform their work.

A continuity of interventions: La Grande Mobilization's pedigree in the management of difference

As a ministerial pronouncement addressing a perceived crisis of civic identity in the heart of the *école républicaine*, *La Grande Mobilisation de l'Ecole pour les Valeurs de la République* fits into a lineage of initiatives aimed at redefining and reinvigorating an agreed-upon set of national values in the public education system. Notably, the 2003 joint press release by Minister of Education Luc Ferry and Deputy Minister Xavier Darcos, warning of religiously- and culturally-motivated racism was distributed under an alternate title "10 Measures for Combatting Racism and Anti-Semitism in Schools." This checklist of measures suggested by the Education Ministry, while vaguer and less decisive in tone than the *Grande Mobilisation* twelve years later, is similar in its attempt to distill a set of complex and disparate social issues into an easily-digested set of guidelines.

Indeed, a continuity of French political culture and thought regarding citizenship is at the heart of measures that have been created to address the supposed threats posed by religious communitarianism (Thomas 2006). As Dhume-Sonzogni (2007) notes, a notable continuity between the 1989 and 2003 ministerial actions can be found in the way that they propose to address the problems by establishing infrastructures meant to link the national to the local. In each case special attachés to the Education Ministry were established to establish communication between school principals and the national hierarchy in order to agglomerate a diverse set of local events into a discursive whole that postulated a "problem" to be addressed through decisive action. *La Grande Mobilisation* was similarly based upon and proposed measures to translate

local experiences of student non-compliance with the post-*Charlie* moment of silence and associated behaviors to a national problematic to be addressed through a uniform set of policies. The *assises* ("roundtables") held throughout the country between February and May 2015 on the topic established a more participatory approach to the Ministry's information-gathering than has been typical. In addition, the Ministry established, as in the past, a network of professionals across the country to act as liaisons to *académies*, districts, and schools for *laïcité*.

What unites these examples is their attempt to establish an infrastructure for documenting local incidents and framing them within established discourses about purported dangers to French republican identity, such as a lack of respect for laïcité or an escape into *communautarisme*. Any major incident involving students is heavily shaped by its local context according to tensions stemming from economic dispossession, cultural identity, and resentments born of past and present conflict between communities. However, when aggregating idiosyncratic events for the purposes of articulating a larger-scale issue to be addressed through administrative fiat, such geographic nuance is glossed over. This is consistent with the historical context of measures meant to reinforce laïcité as a cultural value of the French state. Generally, they have been enacted in the French school system periodically during times when French society has undergone a crisis of confidence, and so spatial generalizations have taken precedence over nuance.

Conclusion

Our understanding of the ways in which citizenship as a political and social category is implemented in contemporary Western societies forms an important part of the overall conceptual basis for understanding laïcité policy as a technology of managing social difference. Although overdetermining the ideological functioning of state institutions made up by

individuals with widely diverging motivations and principles can be problematic – indeed, I devote the following two chapters to explaining the ways in which educators exercise considerable autonomy from rigid ideological frameworks – there does exist a set of hegemonic pedagogical frameworks that French administrators and instructional staff alike use to guide their work on a day-to-day basis. Many of these frameworks are ones that are common to compulsory public schooling in advanced capitalist societies; some are unique to France's particular history and geography. *La Grande Mobilisation de l'Ecole pour les Valeurs de la République*, in its conceptual form, sits at the intersection of these geographically more general and more specific pedagogical frameworks.

In particular, France's colonial past has created a present in which widespread understandings of racial and ethnic difference heavily inform the social and cultural categories that are used to describe populations targeted by policies aimed at inculcating a uniform sense of national identity and civic duty. These in turn intersect with the tendencies of national education systems to privilege the figure of an idealized, abstract citizen-in-training. As a result, the priorities of *La Grande Mobilisation* aim both at being a universally-accessible program for all students across the entire space of the French nation, while also targeting those students thought to be at highest risk of coming afoul of laïcité's principles. This dual aim is not, to be sure, without contradictions. Mostly, it reflects the

Scholars have documented and critiqued the contradictions, if not outright implausibility of liberal projects based on a set of supposedly universal principles. In many cases, a figure of "exception" to the norms of the liberal order is a necessary foil to its abstract, idealized subject (Mitchell 2006; Isin 2002). Similarly, the ways in which the French citizen, and particularly the image of the citizen to be educated within the French national education system, has been

politically constituted over the past several decades reveal a set of looming exceptions to the "good" republican. Terms like *issu(e) de l'immigration* reveal a considerable ambiguity in the embodied subject that is meant to be formed by the educational system. In particular, this ambiguity can also be found in the ambivalence with which students are regarded as *youth*. While considering students' perspectives on *La Grande Mobilisation* is beyond the scope of this work, it is interesting to note that French educational discourse, at least at a high level, has focused largely on the creation of citizens while somewhat glossing over the fact that these citizens-in-training are *children*. This is, of course, an oversimplification, but it points to the fact that accounts of the educational process from the ground level – both from the point of view of teachers and students – are somewhat rare in the French education literature.

The following chapter turns to one half of these accounts – from teachers – to begin to unravel some of the mythical narratives that have been built up around the *école républicaine*. I begin to unpack some of the complex geographies that teachers deploy in their daily work and the geopolitical categories they use to make sense of the settings in which they practice their profession.

Chapter 4: Laïcité educational policy at work: from "peculiarly French" bureaucracy to practitioners' competence zones

> In the words of [Minister of Education] Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the emphasis is once again placed upon students' learning and respect of rules of civility and politeness, accompanied by an "educational dialog" with parents and possible punishments. A link is at last established between the "reestablishment of teachers' authority" (which suggests that this authority had disappeared) and the rituals and symbols of the Republic. In so lashing teachers' authority to the transmission of the Republic's values, our political leaders seem to consider that the authority of a teacher is exclusively derived from the fact that he is a teacher ("I'm your teacher, so you have to obey me!") However, any teacher knows that such an assertion is impractical. Relying on calling on one's status as a teacher is not enough. [xiv]
>
> - Bruno Robbes, January 30 2015

Introduction

Writing on the so-called *loi Ferry* of 1882, which largely removed the influence of the Catholic Church over education in France, historian Mona Ozouf (1992) describes the heart of the debates surrounding its passage as consisting of "…neither religious conviction, nor even educational policy, but a certain interpretation of French history, confronted with a rival one." [xv] More precisely, the "interpretations" in question were of the role of religion in French society generally and in its public education system specifically; did French history since the Revolution point towards a natural and gradual fading away of the Church's power, or had that power been usurped by over-zealous legislators wishing to purge the Republic of religion itself?
Kheir (2008) borrows this description in application to the debates over the so-called "headscarf law" passed in 2004, highlighting an important historical parallel between the two situations: in 1882 as in 2004, proponents and opponents alike of the muscular secularization of the state's public institutions claim their intellectual heritage in the term "laïcité," despite presenting widely diverging interpretations of the concept.

In some ways, laïcité and the French public education system exist in a recursive relationship: the *école républicaine* is the institution that teaches fledgling French citizens how to live peacefully and productively together by imparting to them the importance of religious

neutrality in the public sphere, even as this same neutrality is considered essential to the functioning of the system itself. This sort of circular logic can be seen throughout instances of perceived crises of a lack of respect for laïcité: for example, the ostensible precipitating factor in the first headscarf affair, occurring in a middle school in Creil in 1987, was three girls' refusal to remove their hijabs in their classrooms, as had been the school's policy for years. From the points of view of the principal and teachers, removing the veil was necessary to maintain order in the overcrowded, under-resourced school, so that the school could continue to function and teach the students why public acts of religious expression were inappropriate (Thomas 2011).

However, to characterize the application of laïcité as simply a tool of the French state and its education system would be simplistic. While policies meant to enforce laïcité in education are shaped within a national ideological register, they are also negotiated and applied on a day-to-day basis by actors who contribute their own understanding and experience. The local social and political contexts in which actors are situated likewise constitute a key aspect of the application and negotiation of policies related to laïcité. And yet the view expressed by Ozouf – that the French *école républicaine* is primarily an ideological derivation of higher-level national values – remains widespread. Assessments of the *école républicaine* such as the following from Paris-based journalist Peter Gumbel are surprisingly common:

> I believe one of the main problems is the sheer enormity and heavy-handedness of the system…But school works best as a local affair. Teachers and principals on the front lines know better what serves the needs of their pupils than ministry officials in Paris's 7th arrondissement. Yet under the French system, schools are tightly controlled and given no leeway. They are not viewed as standalone entities allowed to make their own choices. Principals have no authority over teachers, and don't form a team. (Gumbel 2015)

Notably, critical studies in both French and English that use policy applications of laïcité in school settings to problematize French political culture have tended to rely solely on the most high-profile events (e.g. Delphy 2006; Dimier 2008; Gabon 2014), missing what Vivarelli (2014) identifies as common-sense solutions meant to maximize dialog and cooperation among all

parties involved (see also Koussens 2009). Indeed, many of these commentaries, which point to the ban on "ostensible religious symbols" to make their case, do so by decontextualizing the ban entirely from its school setting. Similarly, while the deployment of civics measures such as *La Grande Mobilisation* suggest that the same exceptional constitute evidence of a simmering crisis of youth national identity and a rejection of republican ideals, evidence overwhelmingly shows that the supposed masses of Muslim students who agitate in school settings for their identity politics are largely non-existent and that such incidents are the exception, not the rule (Bowen 2007; Brouard and Tiberj 2005; Lorcerie 2010, 2012; Vivarelli 2014; see Grimault-Leprince and Merle 2008 for an analysis of behavioral incidents in school settings).

Overall, what has gone missing so far in discussions of laïctié's application in educational policy is a discussion that examines these policies through their actual applications embedded in local contexts (but see Vigiuer 2006). Such a perspective is especially important, because despite the relative centralization of the French education system, decisions taken at lower levels of governance play a major role in the day-to-day functioning of public schooling. Particularly in the context of a system shaped so strongly by national imaginaries, disparities between any ideal model of the institution and the actual daily practices of personnel form an analytically important aspect of the overall system's functioning. This path dependency is especially critical in the context of the *Grande Mobilisation* initiative that seeks to consolidate a unifying vision of national identity under the aegis of laïcité. In bringing to light the roles played by geographic diversity, ground-level actors' interpretation of policy, and institutional logic in reshaping this initiative, I push back against the portrayal presented by both proponents and critics of *la Grande Mobilisation* as uniform and coherent.

To do this I discuss the testimony of education practitioners to that description to develop my concept of "competence zones" that I argue play a crucial role in reworking the national-level discourses that are developed around the need for enforcing laïcité. Competence zones describe the body of professional experience and intuition that practitioners develop over the course of their career that guides them in their work. Scholars have documented this phenomenon in other areas of state bureaucratic practice: for example, Lipskey's (1980) concept of "street-level bureaucracy," which describes how agents of the state exercise discretion in their work that interacts with the higher-level they are directives they are expected to carry out. Other scholars have added to this concept by enlarging the range of influences that shape practitioners' decision-making processes. For instance, Bowen et al.'s (2014) use the term "practical schemas" to describe how people carrying out state bureaucratic functions at the ground level temper their awareness of how their institution (whether it be education, health care, or so on) *should* function with their own situated knowledge about how things *can* function on a day-to-day basis.

These observations on the autonomy exercised by state practitioners has been applied specifically to the particular institutional structure of the *école républicaine*: Lorcerie (2010), for example, argues that what has occurred between the ideal form of the *école républicaine* and its actual manifestation in the real world is a form of "normative confusion" on the part of school agents. In trying to adhere to a model that is indifferent to the expression of religious or cultural identity, they are confounded by what appear to be students' insistence on nevertheless adhering to such identities. Particularly in the context of the *banlieue*, where social tensions tend to run high and resources are lacking, they are forced to "improvise alone" (70) and cater to their students' needs while maintaining some adherence to the republican model.

What I add to these concepts is the idea that the accumulated experience that practitioners draw upon is *spatial* in being informed by their experience and knowledge of socioeconomic conditions in a specific place. In this chapter, I provide a different and not often explored perspective that centers on the school itself as a geographically grounded institution with its own logic and coherence with respect to policies surrounding laïcité. To do this I draw on semi-structured interviews carried out with practitioners at several levels of the *Education Nationale* hierarchy in order to link together the geoeconomic fractures that run through school districts in the Paris metropolitan region with the localized way in which laïcité is thought of as a pedagogical tool: First, I elaborate on the nature of schools as institutions with their own internal norms, logic, and methods of day-to-day functioning to highlight how they are linked to national-level discourses around citizenship and cultural assimilation, but do not simply reproduce these discourses as-is. Next, I show how school actors are highly aware of the geoeconomic contexts in which their schools are embedded, and how this awareness informs their position at the intersection of being tasked with carrying out ministerial policies while remaining responsive to the populations and communities they serve. Finally, I show how this situated awareness influences educational practitioners' carrying out of elements of the *Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la République*.

On the basis of the evidence that emerges from these interviews at each step in the process, I draw out three major themes that highlight important aspects of the on-the-ground implementation of *La Grande Mobilisation* and its associated goals of reinforcing a laïcité-oriented civic identity for youth: the instrumentalization of laïcité by educators as a tool by which the space of the *école républicaine* can be preserved as a neutral space of encounter; a view of laïcité as common ground amidst sometimes acrimonious class and racial difference; and

a resistance of abstract, large-scale discourses that assimilate national political discourse to individual educators' motivations for carrying out their work. The flexible attitudes expressed in my interviews are especially interesting in that they somewhat contradict typical narratives of how policies are mobilized through the French education bureaucracy. Against assumptions that the French school system operates in a monolithic and undifferentiated way across space, these themes provide a more nuanced structure for understanding how policy moves from the national to local level and is changed as a result.

In the context of an especially acrimonious debate over laïcité as a core facet of French identity and how – if at all – it should be rethought to better accommodate religious and cultural difference, it is especially important to pay close attention to its actually-existing form in education policy and the meanings ascribed to it by the people charged with ensuring its application. Contrary to the often alarmist rhetoric that runs through many government reports on the supposed fragility of laïcité in educational settings, the overwhelming evidence points to a reality where compromise and dialog, not conflict, set the tone. This suggests that while the national-level discourses that fuel educational policy around laïcité may indeed rest upon problematic assumptions about religious and national identity, practitioners at the local level are often seeking to adapt these policies according to their own geographically-informed knowledge about the students they serve and the communities their schools are embedded in.

Institutional culture from national rhetoric to the schoolyard

As discussed in chapter 2, *La Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la Republique* fits into a continuity of French state responses to perceived crises of the breakdown of the republican educational apparatus. Like its American counterpart, the French school system is perennially identified as failing to adequately educate students for the contemporary age. Analyses of the

system's shortcomings are typically accompanied by geopolitical discourses of the danger for France's international competitiveness and the internal threat posed by dispossessed populations who are failed by the national education system. Such was the message in *Un Heritage En Partage* (A Shared Heritage), a Senate report proclaiming a crisis of French national identity published in April 2015:

> [Republican] points of reference are constructed naturally in the first years of life. At the side of the family, the school plays this general role of the "republican stockpot" that it already held in history and must be called upon again to resume its function as a vector of attachment to the nation. *Today, however, because we have ceased paying attention,* "*the link between the school and the nation is being obliterated.*" (Larcher 2015, emphasis added; quoted material from Feuillrade 2012, "The school and freedom: initiative, autonomy, and responsibility.") [xvi]

Such discourse positing a link between a breakdown of national identity and the educative mission of the school is nothing new. As discussed in Chapter 2, *La Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la République* was announced by the French Ministry of Education following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks as a series of measures meant to address a perceived crisis of confidence in the public school system's ability to form citizens well-versed in French values, especially laïcité. This incident is one that finds many echoes of previous episodes of the *école républicaine* being used as a vehicle to address public concerns over youth adherence to civic norms: for example, the ban on "ostensible religious symbols" adopted in 2004, and a requirement for students to study the words and meaning of the national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, in 2005.

In addition to the plethora of high-level values and discourses around citizenship, religion, and race invoked by these incidents, similarities and differences in their governance are instructive for understanding the relationship between national-scale policy prescriptions aimed at youth and their actual implementation on the ground. Writing on the political climate surrounding the 2005 re-insertion of *La Marseillaise* into the school curriculum, Ribert (2006) describes a continuity of "typically French…methods of managing social dissension" (15, cf. Théry 1993; see also Selby 2011) characterizing the management of debates over national

identity. In several cases concerning proposed changes to laws having to do with legal citizenship status and civic adherence, including a law governing the status of children born in France of Algerian parents, the government had appointed an expert commission to study the topic and offer recommendations. In this case in 1988, as in 2004 with the case of the "headscarf affair", these panels of "sages" had offered compromise solutions attempting to forge consensus amidst the diversity of opinions on the issue, only to have their recommendations only partially adopted by the French Parliament. In both cases the more punitive measures proposed by the commissions were enacted, while reconciliation measures were rejected (e.g. in the case of the ban on ostensible religious symbols, a proposed measure to add Eïd al-Fitr[48] to the school calendar was not adopted).

What is notable in these cases is that at a high level an attempt was made to partially depoliticize contentious issues of national identity and values, only to have the issue reabsorbed into political discourses. In the meantime, the actual implementation of these measures – both the 2004 religious symbol ban and the 2005 reintroduction of *La Marseillaise* – went largely overlooked by political and academic discussions on the topic of national belonging and identity. And yet, institutions of all kinds play decisive roles in shaping the dissemination and implementation of policy. Bowen and Bertossi (2014) speak of the "practical schemas" that developed among school and hospital staff in France with regards to laïcité and that have shaped successive waves of policies aimed at accommodating religious difference in these institutions in France. However, while they highlight the dialectic relationship between national political culture and on-the-ground practice in shaping these schemas, they nevertheless generalize the actions of certain schools or hospitals over their entire respective sectors. While the French

[48] *Eïd-al-Fitr*, literally "festival of the fast," is the celebration marking the end of Ramadan's month-long fast imposed on able-bodied Muslims.

education system is relatively centralized in comparison to those of other industrialized countries, it would be inaccurate to characterize its governance as entirely vertical. Practitioners can and do exercise judgment that creates idiosyncratic solutions to local problems.

To theorize the ways in which educators draw upon their immediate experience to carry out their daily responsibilities, I draw on work by Kuus (2011a, 2011b) that documents the ways in which European Union bureaucrats produce and reproduce geopolitical categories in the course of their daily work. Speaking of the European Neighbourhood Policy, she describes how diplomats and bureaucrats constantly form and reform the geopolitical entity of "Europe" with regards to its neighboring states. Although the scale under consideration is quite different, by examining some of the labels deployed by educational practitioners we can see a similar process underway. By looking at the intersection between the state-defined categories of educational space that educators work within and their own understandings of the socioeconomic contexts they work in can help bring to light how geopolitical and geoeconomic discourse arises from and subsequently informs spatial governance policy for those places.

Revisiting the French educational geographic landscape: Practitioners, competence zones, and

I have already described in some detail the organizational structure of the French education system, which charges local authorities at different scales with the implementation of nationally-devised policies. Within this institutional framework, the Ministry of Education's classification of localities adds a socioeconomic element to the geopolitical landscape of educational governance. As noted in chapter 1, the *REP* and *REP+* (réseaux d'éducation prioritaires) are designations given to collections of individual schools to channel increased funding to students in areas considered socioeconomically "sensitive" (*sensible*). A full discussion of the quantitative

and qualitative factors going towards the designation and monitoring of *REP*s is beyond the scope of this work. What is more relevant here is that the *REP* label is simply the latest in a line of geographic designations for areas considered in need of extra funding and attention to correct inequities in educational achievement.

The discursive labels applied to different spaces subject to national educational policy are all the more significant when set against national abstract discussions of such policies. While these discussions take place in a realm somewhat abstracted from the daily realities of experience within the walls of schools, they nevertheless are influenced – and influence – geographic imaginaries produced by on-the-ground agents. While many of these labels have become ubiquitous and somewhat robbed of their significance through overuse, they remain loaded with social meaning, particularly class and racial meaning. Thus, by unpacking some of the common labels used by practitioners, we can understand the real significance of common labels for geoeconomic and geographic space for national debates over laïcité.

In the interview excerpts that follow, I make some comments on the general setting within which the school where I carried out the interview is situated, including its status as of the 2016-2017 year as being in a priority education zone (marked as *Éducation Prioritaire*). However, I want to emphasize that a key aspect of educators' competence zones is *their* conceptualization of the socioeconomic space within which they work. In some cases, their experience of the surrounding community and/or their students contradicts the expectations that state labeling of French educational space would provide. Therefore, I rely primarily on teachers' classifications of their environments to understand how their activities are geared towards a management of social difference that is at the heart of the French education system.

French educational space and student characteristics

One enduring aspect of French educational space that has been borne out by scholars is that residential segregation by social class is tightly mapped to local school choice practices and their impact on school segregation (e.g. Barthon 1987, van Zanten 2006, 2001; Rhein 2004; Oberti 2007; Oberti and Préteceille 2012). While the co-occurrence of these phenomena is by no means unique to France, it occurs within a regulatory context that is quite different compared to that in the United States. With the private education sector in France almost entirely limited to religious education, and curricular offerings determined in theory by the national education ministry, the idea of competition between schools driven by private sector actors is almost entirely absent from the French education scene.

However, this does not mean that public education in France does not exhibit similar dynamics of school choice to those found in other industrialized western countries. Particularly in recent years, the issue of student mobility among schools has become a prominent concern. In 2007, the relaxation of school geographic assignment criteria (*assouplissement de la carte scolaire*) added a degree of choice that has pitted schools against each other to attract the most desirable students, or that drive parents to extraordinary ends to avoid stigmatized schools for their children. The churning of students between schools has had an observable effect by tending to concentrate the poorest and lowest-performing students in establishments themselves located in economically marginalized neighborhoods (Merle 2011; François and Poupeau 2008). In addition, the byzantine process of requesting an out-of-district transfer, has had considerable consequences for many aspects of the French education system and its interaction with the public (Oberti and Rivière 2014).

What is most important for this discussion, though, is to underline the geoeconomic inequity demarcating different schools' immediate environments and the considerable awareness of this variegated landscape that school actors bring to their work. Individual establishments find themselves obligated to manage the social difference – or lack thereof – that comes to their doors. In some cases, this difference reflects that which already exists in the surrounding communities; in others, families' preferences increasingly enabled by liberalizing policies force schools to reflexively modify their practices to meet new populations with particular educational needs. As a result, educational agents must have a capacity to categorize and classify the educational spaces where they work to fulfill their responsibility to provide equitable educational opportunities to the students that they receive in their establishments. It could be argued that classifying and categorizing socioeconomic difference across space would risk falling into racist and classist assumptions and clichés, and indeed as I have noted many national-level discussions of the failings of the French school system do just that. However, what my interviews reveal is that educators tend to use such classifications in practical, not ideological, ways. By labeling the environments that their students hail from, they are attempting to refine their own "practical schemas" that guide their work by developing their competence zones.

One common categorization of educational space among educational agents is to call it *hétérogène*, or heterogeneous. Typically, this evaluation is made in reference to student populations to signify their level of academic preparedness and the relative difficulty of adapting to their needs. For example, in reference to the loosening of restrictions on school assignment policy, one principal spoke of the difficulty in adapting to new student populations coming from adjacent school districts to attend her school:

> It's true that, for example, compared to Ms. ---'s school, we're, it's more difficult [*compliqué*] for us, because we have a much more heterogeneous [*hétérogène*] student population than hers, but without extra funding. But she has a much more consistent [*homogène*] population. So even if she doesn't have a lot of

> funding, because she doesn't have to do any kind of specific [academic] programming, it's less difficult [*compliqué*] for her to manage the situation (author's interview, May 9 2012). [xvii]

Pairing the word *compliqué* (difficult) alongside *hétérogène* underscores the sentiment that for certain schools, accommodating social difference amidst their student population is something that is somewhat outside of their norm. Here the reference is to accommodating a wide variation in students' level of academic preparedness – a difficult task for any teacher who must teach a consistent curriculum. However, that academic difference arises from socioeconomic disparities that characterize the proximate educational landscape.

Mixité (diversity) appears as another common term for characterizing the socioeconomic profile of student populations. Geoeconomic disparities between adjacent school assignment zones become even more visible as they constitute push and pull forces that attract students to better educational opportunities. Both establishments that lose students and those that attract them encounter difficulties in adapting to unplanned increases or decreases in their populations, but for establishments having difficulty retaining their best students, such as the one referenced above, increased flexibility in student mobility has the perverse effect of exacerbating the segregation that it was meant to correct. In one instance, *mixité* was referenced by a principal in charge of a middle school in Clichy-sous-bois, the *banlieue* that had been made infamous for being the flash point of the 2005 urban riots. Referencing a recently-passed policy of relaxed geographic attendance regulations, she lamented the effect that this had on her student populations:

> In fact, everyone keeps advocating for diversity [*mixité*]. Except that, having relaxed geographic attendance regulations [*l'assouplisement de la carte scolaire*], there's no more diversity. You see, our good students want to leave…so that actually means that us, for example, we can lose – like we did last year – an entire class's worth of students. Afterward, you can't say that there's educational diversity if you can't mix really good students with average ones, and with students who are struggling. And then, there's no more diversity. That's the case here and with the [local] high school. Because in fact, there's such a negative representation of the city that everyone wants to leave. (author's interview, July 6 2011; éducation prioritaire) [xviii]

Mentioning a "negative representation" as a factor driving students away from some schools and into others points to an especially important consequence of increased mobility: word-of-mouth perceptions that parents hold of schools. Whether deserved or not, a poor reputation given to a certain establishment travels very quickly among parents and can accelerate a movement of the best students elsewhere. This view was palpable during a conversation with the principal and assistant principal of a high school in a working-class town south of Paris. They expressed frustration with the gap between what they saw as their school's negative image and its actual rather strong performance, compared to another nearby school with a strong, and apparently undeserved, reputation:

> There's a lot of statistics, they're done at the request of each school, [but] parents won't see them. It's all about word of mouth. Which creates, for example, here we have a super modern school, it's extraordinarily modern. Our teachers' pedagogy is pretty avant-garde, that kind of thing. They do all sorts of projects, it's really – compared to La Canale, where I worked last year, they're [the teachers] really, really ahead and La Canale is really, really behind. But parents don't know that. They don't want to know, all that they want to know is that at La Canale there are kids who are rich, come from privileged backgrounds, and they want their own kids to go there because they think that because the other kids are rich and privileged, their own kids will succeed. It's totally crazy! It's totally crazy. There's [at La Canale] alcohol even though the school says there isn't, there's smoking, to say nothing of drugs, whereas I haven't seen any here, and the kids who – there's definitely, it's not as visible although they suffer too…(author's interview, May 11 2012; éducation prioritaire) [xix]

Many interviews expressed the view that segregation and a lack of encounter between social difference was at the root of conflict within schools and the larger community. Given the centrality of this narrative to *communautarisme*, which tends to depoliticize the inequalities at the root of inter-communal tension and locate blame for the lack of social mixing in minority communities, such a perspective is important to unpack. This will be done more thoroughly in the following chapter. For the moment, though, it is interesting to note that the teachers quoted above focused not on Muslim parents who deliberately steer their children away from mainstream republican values as the cause of a lack of social interaction, but on opportunistic middle class parents seeking educational advantage for their children.

Institutional (in)coherence

As discussed previously, Bowen et al.'s (2014) focus on institutions as objects of study in the dissemination of national political culture provides a useful starting point for understanding how the French public school system retains functional autonomy within the larger context of national educational policy. However, while cautioning against a reification of institutional cultures, they nevertheless somewhat gloss over how the actions of individual establishments within institutions also contributes to the elaboration of policy. As the above discussion of the variegated nature of educational space demonstrates, path-dependency down to the level of specific schools can play a decisive role in how practitioners carry out their functions against their knowledge of their mission and local circumstances.

Tracing the responses of individual schools to their immediate contexts is all the more important given that there appears to exist a significant level of disconnect between ministerial policy and direction for its implementation. Amidst a strong awareness of the social and economic disparities that characterize the French educational landscape, local school agents find themselves forced to work through what are appear at times to be staggering lapses of *Education Nationale* authority. For example, speaking with the principal of a highly sought-after school south of Paris, we [49] were told of her attempts to manage a major mismatch between her available space and the number of students she'd been assigned.

> Chris: Is it up to you or the inspection [*inspection académique générale*] to deal with transfer requests [*demandes de dérogation*]?
> Mme. P.: Well, normally it's the inspection that assigns students. However, it doesn't work. And when it doesn't work, it's up to us to figure everything out. We've been working on this for fifteen days. Fifteen days! I was assigned – they assigned me – two classes too many. Two full classrooms of students too many.
> Zoé (incredulous): Can that happen? Is it a mistake…?
> Mme. P.: That's the question I've been asking myself since…
> Zoé: Because that, that's…

[49] The following interview was conducted with Zoé Boularan, then a doctoral student working in a CRNS-funded lab *Géographie-Cités* jointly administered between the University of Paris campuses I and VII.

> Mme. P.: Here. I said I had three hundred thirteen seats, they gave me three hundred fifty students. There it is. (authors' interview, July 11 2011) [xx]

In some cases, to the extent that higher levels of the education ministry do provide direction, this direction is given in the form of responsibilizing individual schools and their staff to make up for oversights or other unforeseen problems arising from policy initiatives. Referencing again the question of providing remedial education to newly-transferred students attracted by the relaxation of geographic assignment criteria, one principal described the attitude of her superiors with regards to addressing the problem:

> We're told "if worst comes to worst, charge it [any costs incurred] to us. Write up a proposal, and ask for additional funding according to the situation." The funding isn't always necessarily given. And what creates a problem for us, is for example – as it [the influx of new students] wasn't foreseen – that means that the time to write a pedagogical proposal, to send it off while saying "okay, we'd like to set this up, we've got students who we need to support with additional funding" and then – except that since it wasn't planned before the start of the school year, it's more difficult to implement. (author's interview, May 9 2012) [xxi]

As a result of a perceived lack of coordination and support at higher levels for local problems, school staff has tended to turn inward for innovative solutions. The same principal noted that she had the good fortune of being able to draw on the talents of a doctoral student from the Sorbonne – who happened to be carrying out research in the school on French as a second language learners – to deliver remedial French courses to students in need of it. However, she acknowledged that this was not at all a sustainable solution and worried what would happen if the Ministry continued to provide sufficient support to manage an influx of students needing additional academic services.

In the context of *La Grande Mobilisation*, school staff seem to likewise be acting on their own initiative to undertake pedagogical programming. Despite the strong centralization of the Ministry's efforts to plan and disseminate the program, there is no mandate for school-level personnel to actually carry out activities that reinforce its principal measures. Indeed, while the creation of *La Grande Mobilisation* involved an expansion and strengthening of the existing

infrastructure for addressing issues of non-compliance with laïcité (notably at the *académie* level), it is at the discretion of local educators to designate incidents as challenges to laïcité or not. As we shall see, this discretion is a vital mechanism in determining the degree to which ground-level outcomes correspond with the higher-level aspirations for the *Grande Mobilisation* as a tool to reestablish a common national identity. And discretion in turn is a function of differences of geographic context within which educators carry out their daily tasks.

Laïcité as the management of spatial difference

The above examples demonstrate two aspects of French education governance that are key to situating schools' implementation of *La Grande Mobilisation*. First, ground-level education practitioners bring a keen awareness of the geoeconomic environments in which their schools are embedded to their work. Second, they are used to operating independently from ministerial direction in order to meet the needs of their students on a day-to-day basis. In this context, individual schools and their staff play a non-negligible role in interpreting *La Grande Mobilisation*'s eleven principal measures prescribed by the Education Ministry in accordance with their own experience and what they perceive as the needs of their students. While the principal measures reflect abstract ambitions to reinforce the *école républicaine* as the cruicible of the French nation, teachers and principals who are tasked with actually carrying out this agenda bring a different perspective to their work.

During my discussions with personnel at various levels of the *Ministre de l'Education National* hierarchy, three themes emerged that revealed motivations that education professionals attached to the elements of *La Grande Mobilisation* having to do with laïcité: 1) Using laïcité as a means of preserving the *école républicaine* as a citizen-forming space where debate and dialog could take place; 2) establishing laïcité as a common touchstone of French identity for the

purposes of defusing class and racial conflict; and 3) downplaying conflicts around laïcité that have typically been cast in the media and by upper echelons of government as existential crises of French identity. All three of these themes contain significant geopolitical discourses that I will analyze more fully in the following chapter. Here I develop the themes as they relate to the first three measures of *La Grande Mobilisation de l'Ecole pour les Valeurs de la République*. As discussed in chapter 1, the first three measures of the *Grande Mobilisation* are those most closely tied to fundamental civic education, and are those that I will reference here:

1. Reinforce the transmission of the Republic's values
2. Reestablish the authority of teachers and republican rituals
3. Create a new "citizen" curriculum program

Protecting the école républicaine as a space of encounter and debate

One common aspect that emerged in educators' testimony was the importance of continuing to hold the *école républicaine* as far as possible from the conflicts of the larger world. In large part, this narrative is in continuity with the long-standing view of the school as an institution established to channel petty cultural and religious differences into a unified French society. The presence of laïcité at the heart of the *école républicaine*'s roots, cited as a prime example of the state's neutrality towards its citizens-in-training, is thought to guarantee that the school itself is a safe space for children of all faiths and identities to encounter one another. Indeed, as many critics of French educational policy have claimed, some proponents of the laïque and neutral school have promoted this idealized view of the French public school to the point of dismissing them entirely, as reflected in Vianès's (2004) contemptuous assessment of communities' "pollut[ing]" influence on the educational process.

In some ways, this opinion was reproduced during interviews, although without the disdainful attitude expressed towards students' communities of origin as negative influences on

their education. What remained similar was the more or less explicit belief that the school was a space where commonality rooted in French republican identity, not cultural difference, should be privileged. Nevertheless, the sense that this unifying mission was fragile and in need of protection was present. As the chief laïcité officer for the *académie* of *Créteil* claimed, regulations concerning the need to monitor students' respect of laïcité and other republican principles were necessary to preserve the civic pedagogical capacity of the school itself:

> What does it mean to construct for oneself a freedom of conscience that allows that person to become a citizen? A citizen that is capable of judging – for all citizens, not just from the point of view of some [cultural / religious] belonging. So it's necessary to remind [students] of all that. It's in that sense that no incident will be left unaddressed, that the object is to not let students be closed off in reactionary attitudes, prejudiced attitudes, *opinions that in the end would make the school into some kind of place where the deaf speak to the deaf in which there'd be on the one hand teaching that would completely ignore students' concerns, and on the other hand dug-in attitudes of resistance, misunderstandings of the very meaning of the* école républicaine… (author's interview, June 24 2016-1, emphasis added)

However, educators in my interviews seemed more concerned in drawing on laïcité and other republican principles as a way of setting aside a space sheltered from whatever conflicts might exist in students' communities. This view seems consistent with their deep understanding of the religious, economic, and cultural makeup of the communities in which their schools are embedded.

An interesting thread related to the possible punitive effects of *La Grande Mobilisation* arose. The second principal measure - promising that "no incident" undermining republican values will be "left unaddressed" – can convey with the uncomfortable sense that student behavior is being surveilled in an authoritarian manner. Indeed it was inspired in part by student incidents following the *Charlie Hebdo* moment of silence. Between the original apparently punitive intention of the measure and its actual implementation, though, there is considerable room for interpretation.

> When the second measure calls for no [incident] to be left unaddressed, that doesn't mean that we're going to automatically proceed with disciplinary measures, as it's sometimes understood, with automatic punishment for a list of infractions…that's not how it should be seen. What [the measure] looks for is any attitude, behavior, or speech that seems to deviate from the way in which students should be incorporated

> into the school. The first step asked for [by the measure] is to take a position of dialog with the student. (author's interview, June 24 2016-1) [xxii]

In her estimation recourse to punishment for an incident without first exhausting all other options was not a desirable outcome. The administrator's framing of the disciplinary process can be seen as offering a more nuanced view of the typical portrayal of the French school as a crucible for republican values: while still maintaining it as a neutral pedagogical space set apart from the messiness of political and cultural conflict in the real world, the measures taken to maintain this status are nevertheless ones based on negotiation and dialogue, with disciplinary action as a last resort. Nevertheless, the idea persists that the apolitical status of the republican school is both self-evident and inviolable.

A common touchstone of French identity amidst difference

Another common theme that emerged in discussions of laïcité was educators' belief that it serves as a common touchstone amidst a divided French society. Like their colleagues cited above, they readily acknowledged the economic disparities and racial tensions running through their communities, but pointed to laïcité as a value that could nevertheless unite people. Interestingly, projects involving laïcité appeared to be quite often designed around the theme of mobilizing it as a vehicle for living together in harmony. One teacher described the progression of devising such a project that had passed from an explicit discussion of religious discrimination to a more general consideration of harmonious living amidst diversity:

> And so, at a certain moment the staff told me, we can't do a debate on Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, we'd have to present it in another way. So they asked me, why not organize a debate on "Living together better," or "How do we use laïcité to live together better"? (author's interview, June 24 2016-3).

This case points to a tendency to view contemporary issues related to laïcité as emotionally charged, which presents an interesting paradox: while recognizing the potential of the concept as a unifying value, educators were nevertheless aware that it must be dealt with delicately to avoid

undermining that unity in the first place. Indeed, one principal's view went so far as to judge that the term itself was so controversial that bringing it up in the absence of a compelling reason could create conflict:

> I don't know what my colleagues do. They do things. They don't necessarily tell me what. But I don't think that they do much in the case of laïcité. It's a sensitive topic. What I did isn't about laïcité. I worked with the Republic's values, and not on laïcité. Because laïcité includes a lot of things, and it's a difficult area. (author's interview, June 24 2016-2).

For educators, balancing the real-world complexities of religious diversity with their mandate to have students respect principles of laïcité in the space of the school can present a dilemma. However, it can also present opportunities to give students a voice. One teacher shared a story with me of a pedagogical project that had been created on the basis of a student survey that discovered that racism in their community was a major concern. around Islamophobia and anti-Semitism was devised in response to students' requests both in person with the school staff and as measured by the results of a survey that the school undertook:

> And, so, there it is – it happened like that, it was just done on the students' request, in fact. It was about a survey we did with the students… [xxiii]

Without speculating on these students' thought processes linking the incidents they witnessed with the survey results indicating a desire to discuss difficult issues of religious difference, it is interesting to note that they apparently felt comfortable enough with their school environment to tell their teachers about what they had seen, and to request that the school undertake a discussion of those issues.

In order to help the students understand laïcité in this case, it was suggested that a chapter of a local youth association, Coéxister (Co-exist), be brought in to present about religious tolerance and living with difference. They came and talked about their association's principles and how they saw the value of laïcité for living with religious difference. What was most

interesting, in the teacher's eyes, was how presenting the same material through different people was required for the students to grasp the concept for themselves:

> There were certain students who told us, in fact, that they didn't understand that in England, things go well, they didn't understand…in fact they personalize laïcité like something, like a straitjacket, and absolute prohibition, well…so that repels them a bit. So because of that I thought it was really interesting that they could have the point of view of Mme. Fumet, who brought them…and then, the whole association. Why the whole association? Because what I noticed during this discussion, was that exchanging among peers, among youth, that works really, really well. So in fact, to see these people from an association that represents – because the association's representatives, who each represent their religion – they really felt a bit among peers. Whereas Mme. Fumet, that's really "the" laïcité. A certain, well, a representation of the institution, in fact. So there, they learned things, but it wasn't at all the same message – for them. Well, for me it was exactly the same. It's exactly the same message that the association gave. It's "living together." (Author's interview, June 24 2016-3) [xxiv]

The teacher connected her earlier concerns about students' misunderstandings around laïcité to her outlook that perhaps it was not the substance of the message, but rather the means of communication, that was flawed. Despite her assessment that the content being expressed by Coéxister and the *Inspection Académique* were essentially identical, she believed that her students could much more easily identify with youth closer to their age and who looked like them in terms of visible signs of ethnic and racial identity.

Curiously, this attitude – that cultural or ethnic identity constitutes an important and potentially powerful basis on which to build solidarity – is anti-republican in its privileging of communities other than the French national one. Indeed, this teacher might be criticized by a republican purist of promoting "*communautarisme*" in her willingness to provide students with a culturally familiar means of communication for the purposes of teaching laïcité. In a less ideological register, an objection could also be raised that inviting an outside group to talk about laïcité was unnecessary and even distracting given that the national education system maintains a dedicated corps of laïcité experts such as Mme. Fumet whose mission is to promote and explain the concept. Nevertheless, the teacher interpreted this move as not only beneficial, but logical in light of the obvious connection that Coéxister was able to forge with students and thereby teach them about the finer points of laïcité in a way that would have been impossible otherwise. She

acknowledged that the benefit of a group like Coéxister was not the content of its message – which she identified as being "exactly the same" as the information available from state official sources – but rather its mode of delivery. Students were able to hear and relate to a message from people more nearly their peers than from someone who would inescapably appear as an authority figure.

An everyday, not existential struggle

One surprising theme that came up across several interviews was educators' bemusement at the media attention given to high-profile cases concerning students' respect of laïcité principles. Over and over, it was emphasized to me that undertaking a project around the principles at the root of laïcité did not automatically imply that such projects were motivated by a particular incident. One teacher conveyed her annoyance to me concerning such an affair:

> There had been no problems concerning laïcité between students and teachers in the school until recently, when a non-event came up. This issue, which was blown out of proportion by journalists, came up months after we'd taken the decision to undertake one-on-one work around laïcité. (Email to author, June 17 2016) [xxv]

The issue in question was one concerning a so-called "long skirt" worn by certain devout Muslim girls that is often cited in French discussions around worn "ostensible religious signs." The girl had been told she could not come to school so dressed, and briefly missed classes while the affair was sorted out. While undoubtedly this case relies on a highly-gendered norm of compliance to laïcité,[50] the teacher nevertheless was expressed her view that the media attention brought to the case exaggerated the degree to which a structural factor – gender – played a role in excluding the student from school as opposed to more mundane factors, such as student behavior and the need to maintain order on a day-to-day basis. Most of all, her irritation at the media

[50] Although boys have been admonished for wearing long robes thought to represent Muslim or other cultural fundamentalism, girls bear the brunt of scrutiny of their clothing choices potentially being classified as "Islamic."

coverage of the incident was attributed to the fact that it obscured the work already occurring on the topic of laïcité. Indeed, she expressed frustration that in the public view her school had been totally ignorant of equity issues related to the application of laïcité – when in fact they had been deliberately working on that very topic for some time (email to author, June 17 2016).

A common view – and one that has been supported by other research (e.g. Vivarelli 2014; Lorcerie 2013) – was that problems arising from students' challenges to laïcité were few and far between, and the main objective lay not in punishing deviance, but in quickly correcting infractions and then getting back to more important issues:

> I don't have aggressive acts [*agréssions*] in the community, I don't have – we can have a student who says something unfortunate, afterwards, we calm them down and then move on to something else…I don't think that people are doing a lot. I don't think so. Not about laïcité, because if the rules are clear, they're established, everyone gets that that's the rule. If there's a problem, someone who uses pressure and stereotypes to try to change others' opinions, then maybe we talk with the parents, but it's done pretty well. (Author's interview, June 24 2016-2[51]).[xxvi]

The educator's statement is especially interesting because it suggests that, for her, student infractions related to discriminatory statements or actions do not really fall under the auspices of laïcité at all. Laïcité, for her, is a relatively straightforward statutory issue instead of a socially mediated form of bodily control. While she may have more complex personal feelings towards the concept, the interpretation that she mobilizes in her work is the one that is the most important for her everyday functioning as an educator.

Perhaps most common in my conversations were educators' efforts to clarify for me the statutory limits of laïcité measures, particularly the 2004 law concerning ostensible religious symbols. I ascribe this to a simple desire to make sure I, as a non-French citizen, understood the legal framework of a controversial regulation whose details would likely be unfamiliar to me. However, what was interesting was the matter-of-fact manner in which the background

[51] I conducted three separate interviews on June 24, 2016. To differentiate them from each other, they are marked with -1, -2, or -3 following the date.

information of the 2004 law was conveyed to me:

> There's not a lot to respect in the school setting as far as laïcité is concerned. We ask that – there's a legal text, a law from 2004, I think – you remember? (Chris: Yes.) – when the problems started, but it's very clear, we have guidelines. That is, you don't cover yourself, you don't veil yourself, you don't wear something really visible or go around differentiating yourself from others. (Author's interview, June 24 2016-2) [xxvii]

Typically, the 2004 law was presented in these terms, as a sort of sidebar not really relevant to the day-to-day functioning of the school and relationships between students. The same principal who laid out the law in the above terms had also noted that at her previous post in a nearby middle school "I didn't have a problem [with laïcité] at all. The rules are known." At the same time that educators claimed that the rules concerning laïcité were clear and uncomplicated, though, they indicated a willingness to apply them with a degree of flexibility. As the same principal told me:

> So I don't have issues, I don't have students who come either veiled [*voilées*] or anything else. Once everyone understands the rule…but a cross, my little -- --, I don't go around with a cross, and I don't go around with a turban [*coif*] – for the [school] personnel, it's clearly not allowed, that something be visible. But when it comes to children, and then you have something small, but something insignificant – if I'm dealing with a little scarf [*foulard*] on a [student's] head, I can say that it's to make her look pretty. It's not necessarily "visible". (Author's interview, June 24 2016-2) [xxviii]

The principal here made it clear that she could exercise her own judgment in declaring something "visible" in the sense of rising to the level of "ostensible religious belonging." While this degree of personal interpretation raises the possibility of an abuse of statutory authority aimed at particular students, in this case at least the principal was clearly exercising her authority towards leniency by letting a potential veil slide on the grounds that it was a fashion article, not a religious statement. In effect, her claim to having no "veiled" students is accurate insomuch as it reflects her authority to loosely interpret the visible manifestation of the practice. She chooses to not "see" students' inconspicuous bandanas or scarves as expressing a religious affiliation, and so she is able to honestly declare that in her school there are no clothing-related challenges to the principles of laïcité.

The degree of professional and personal judgment exercised by teachers and principals in determining if a student's behavior meets the standard for constituting an "attack" on laïcité has obvious potential for abuse, but also affords opportunities for reinterpreting the higher-level conceptual structure in which laïcité policies have been crafted. An interesting element of the downplaying of issues of laïcité in schools was the implication that students were largely practical in their understanding of and adherence to the various rules and regulations concerning things like the ban on religious dress. In fact, some educators indicated that the real issue following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks was overactive vigilance by teachers and principals themselves of potential "ostensible religious signs." In a sense, this flips the logic of the Ministry of Education's *Grande Mobilisation*, which largely identifies students as potential problems and teachers and principals as the ultimate solution.

Conclusion

I have argued that laïcité, and especially its application in French public school policy in Mobilisons les valeurs de la République, is primarily a technique of managing difference across space. In this chapter I elaborated on that argument by examining the point of view of educational practitioners who are involved in devising and applying policies meant to promote laïcité on a daily basis. In addition, the nature of the French education system as an institution with its own operating logic and discontinuities between various levels of authority leads to necessarily localized methods of carrying its own mission. While laïcité at a conceptual register clearly has ideological implications, it is clear that its application through policies – at least from the point of view of Education Nationale officials – is highly complex. In addition, the testimony of on-the-ground practitioners reveals that the motivation for many laïcité projects is proactive pedagogy, not reactive intervention.

To be sure, many of the announcements made by the French Education Ministry, including public communication, internal circulars, and pedagogical materials, convey a sense of unity and conformity as far as the interpretation and implementation of laïcité is concerned. However, as with many of their initiatives, it is at the local level where policy is really created and carried out. Individual schools, and their staff, are called upon to mediate complex the geopolitical and geoeconomic relationships in which they are embedded. For many educators, laïcité serves as a common touchstone for national identity amidst otherwise contentious relationships within communities.

While the educational practitioners cited above are clearly mindful of their day-to-day work and immediate context in their schools and communities, however, they are by no means unreflective on the larger implications of their work. In the next chapter, I examine three well-worn geopolitical discourses that typically circulate around school-based laïcité policies and examine some of the ways in which education practitioners subtly rework those discourses in their daily work. By doing so they remain an important, if until now largely untapped source of knowledge about the "ground-level" impacts of such policies on their students and the communities they work in.

Chapter 5: Reworking Laïcité in the Realm of the Geosocial

Introduction

On July 14, 2016, revelers heading home from Bastille Day celebrations in the southern French city of Nice became victims of France's deadliest terrorist attack since the November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris. Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, a Tunisian who had resided in France for the previous eleven years, plowed a rented 19-ton cargo truck into the crowd on the city's iconic beachfront Promenade des Anglais, killing 86 people and injuring 434. Following this incident, mayors in towns along the Côte d'Azur began issuing bans on the so-called "burkini," a full-body swimsuit with a built-in veil largely marketed to Muslim women.[52] These bans, coming not only in the aftermath of the Nice attack but also at the height of France's tourist season that annually brings millions of visitors to the Mediterranean coast, revived the ongoing debate over public religious expression and French laïcité. As in previous instances, rhetoric was quickly polarized between portraying the burkini as a sign of Islam's regressive attitudes towards women (e.g. Valls 2016) and castigating the ban on the burkini as an equally backward collective punishment of Muslim women for the acts of extremists. Largely lost in the heated discussion were discussions about the more affective issues embedded in the politics of banning the burkini, such as legitimate public anxieties in the face of horrific terrorism and Muslim women's equally legitimate personal reasons for wearing such garments in public.

I mention this incident to illustrate how high-level political and media rhetoric about laïcité and its proper application continue to obscure many of the everyday issues related to it. Nevertheless, below the level of broad-brush discourses that insist on attributing sweeping geopolitical meanings to laïcité, actors on the ground continue to grapple with the conflicts that

[52] The "burkini," as it has been called by the Western press, is a relatively recent invention, devised by Australian-Lebanese fashion designer Aheda Zanetti.

occur between laïcité and challenges to it. And yet those broad strokes have a consequential impact on the ways in which the public expression of religion, especially Islam, is imagined in French society. After all, women had presumably been wearing burkinis or similar garments on the beaches of the Côte d'Azur without major issue for years preceding July 14, 2016; it was only with the advent of a major Islamist terrorist attack that beach attire was aggressively politicized. Similarly, girls' wearing of hijabs and other religiously-inspired garments had occurred relatively unremarked preceding the first "headscarf affair" that took place in Creil in 1989. Even following that event, the perceived need for a national policy regarding religious wear only reached a critical mass over ten years later. Indeed, as Hancock (2015) argues, women's bodies occupy an important place in the "aesthetic" regimes of French society in which visible signs of difference intersect with political circumstances to become symbols of danger and objects of state intervention (cf. Dikeç 2013).

Despite the visceral reactions evoked by apparent challenges to laïcité, however, it would be simplistic to say that all agents of the French state respond to such challenges by taking a reactionary stance. Work at the school level has shown that many educational practitioners have, since at least the introduction of the 2009 law banning ostensible religious symbols, adopted a flexible and practical attitude towards the work of enforcing laïcité (Vivarelli 2014; Lorcerie 2013; Koussens 2009). While cases do exist of school authorities taking a hard line on laïcité, it does not appear that such a response is inevitable or even usual. In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and the backlash generated by student non-compliance to the moment of silence, it is all the more vital to understand how teachers and principals are responding to the French state's renewed efforts to implement an educational laïcité beyond simply assuming that Ministry of Education priorities are being neatly reproduced on the ground.

I have argued that French educators on the ground implement laïcité policies in flexible and variable ways that draw on their own experience and values. At the same time that they are carrying out these policies handed down to them by the national education bureaucracy, however, they are reworking the concept of laïcité itself by generating meanings that become associated with it in novel ways. These meanings are not free of the geopolitical discourses that animate high-level discussions of laïcité, but they nevertheless add nuance drawn from educators' daily experience and intimate experience of local conflicts over students' expression of religious and cultural identity. This nuance is critical to unpacking the multiple geopolitical imaginaries that animate *La Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la Republique*. While the policies and laws concerning enforcement of laïcité in public schooling are bound within the institutional and legal frameworks of the French nation-state, they are driven by global geopolitical imaginations that foreground security, human rights, and immigrant integration as policy priorities. And at the same time, the actual enforcement of these policies is performed by practitioners who are highly attuned to their local social and economic circumstances.

However, practitioners are not only located within local geographies of institutional influence and social difference. The geopolitical discourses that they receive through the *Grande Mobilisation* as part of their professional practice are themselves produced at the intersection of multiple sets of transnational linkages: state-level ties between France and its former colonies, affective relationships among Muslim students and their family networks, and cultural affinities between French Muslims and the larger Islamic faith. To understand more closely the reworked discourses on laïcité produced at the intersection of global and local forces, I use the concept of the geosocial. Mitchell and Kallio (2016) propose geosocial analysis as a set of theories that can illuminate "the dynamic relations by which, on one hand, the borders and territories of the world

order are maintained, challenged, and (re)defined; and on the other hand, people constitute themselves as subjects and communities capable of transformative agency across and within such border-laden realities." In the case of laïcité, such an approach similarly calls on us to look past the taken-for-granted categories of rights, security, and identity that animate official discourse around the topic while recognizing that these same categories have a very real impact on embodied lives. At the same time, though, a geosocial outlook remains curious about the ways in which laïcité is encountered and reformulated daily by those tasked with interpreting and implementing them as policy.

Indeed, thinking about the concrete effects of laïcité policies through a geosocial framework helps resituate them onto a terrain where the political agency of educators is put on an even footing with issues of cosmopolitan human rights or local forms of social inequality. While teachers and principals might not explicitly label their views of how to enforce laïcité "transformative" or even think of themselves as having any agency beyond their daily responsibilities, I argue on the basis of the testimony they offer that it is exactly their practical, mission-oriented outlook that subtly but powerfully reworks existing geopolitical discourses. Importantly, recognizing this mediating role helps reorient the often-bifurcated discussion around the transformative potential of education more generally; critical scholars studying state education systems have typically identified schooling policies and practices as being either hegemonic and oppressive or radical and subversive, with very little room for ambiguity (e.g. Freire 1968; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Apple 2001, 2006, 2015; Giroux 2006; Masta 2016). I argue that this point of view often fails to accurately reflect what practitioners do daily, and treats educational principles, as they are stated by state officials, as equivalent to outcomes. Instead, focusing on the overlapping and intersecting geographies of economic opportunity and

national identity that make up schools and their populations allows us to understand how large-scale objectives translate into on-the-ground practice.

In the contemporary moment, it is more vital than ever to understand how state power, personal agency, and structural positionings of political subjects intertwine to produce new formal definitions of citizenship as well as contestations of those definitions. In an empirical sense, what laïcité offers to this study is its status both as a hallowed element of French national identity – thus giving it a geographic and institutional rootedness that can be traced over time – as well as its constant renegotiation throughout formal and informal political processes in French society. In this chapter I discuss three common discourses that link these two registers through their circulation around issues of laïcité in education: security, women's rights, and immigrant integration, and how they are encountered and reinterpreted by educators who are charged with carrying out the policies conceived to address these issues. Indeed, the daily work of promoting laïcité straddles two very different registers: on the one hand, an aspirational vision of laïcité as an egalitarian force capable of leveling social difference. On the other, the very mundane realities of enforcing compliance with laïcité standards among a student population that often does not have access to the same hegemonic understandings of the term that they bring to their work. As a result, a series of contradictions between official discourse and actual practice arise. Far from being aberrations, however, these contradictions become part of the vital material for understanding how a concept as deeply rooted and politically powerful as laïcité might become displaced through the work of actors who never intended to do so in the first place.

Thinking laïcité in education as geosocial negotiation

In previous chapters, I have developed a perspective on laïcité that takes into account the multiple, overlapping, and contradictory conceptualizations of the concept that drive its

application as state policy as several different geographic scales. The practice of French state secularism does not exist only at the global, national, or local scales but can be found in a continuum that spans all of those. However, making sense of individual manifestations of laïcité policy requires an approach that can temporarily bracket out some of this complexity and nuance. What is perhaps most useful about a geosocial perspective on laïcité as applied in the educational setting is its granting of a spatial vocabulary for understanding relationships between students and education professionals that are simultaneously characterized by professionalized detachment and caring closeness. More than being simply a nationally-conceived policy applied in local settings, *La Grande Mobilisation* can be thought of as a conceptual approach to social difference that spans multiple scales. Both professionals and students experience *La Grande Mobilisation* and other laïcité enforcement policies as a series of geographic contradictions: for practitioners, this contraction arises from their training in large-scale, impersonal geopolitical thinking about student identities running up against their personal relationships negotiate with students – sometimes cooperative, sometimes antagonistic – through which they try to achieve the smooth everyday functioning of the school environment. Students who are the intended subject of policies like *La Grande Mobilisation* live at a different, if no less contradictory, intersection of the global and the intimate: despite being legally French by birth and often having never known any other country, their identity is forced into the transnational realm as *issu(e)s d'immigration* by agents of the school system who have been trained to see them as such.

Mitchell and Kallio (2016) argue that that a geosocial outlook is useful for tracing the social topologies of transnational dynamics where structural power intersects with individual agency to produce new kinds of relationships. This seems especially useful in the realm of education, which in critical literature has typically been portrayed as an environment that neatly

reproduces prevailing power relations from the wider society (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1976; Apple 2001, 2006; see Willis 1977 for an exception). And yet, as my interviews with teachers and principals show, most educators are genuinely interested in *educating*, not oppressing. Although such an observation might seem obvious, it forces us to rethink a field of practice where those educators' good faith sits uneasily alongside the obviously uneven power they wield, and the larger discourses and narratives that they themselves receive as a product of their own education and training.

However, these moments of educators' engagement with the policies they are tasked with carrying out tend to get overlooked. Empirically, very few studies have looked at policies meant to promote laïcité from the point of view of the people actually carrying them out, using as evidence either high-level government pronouncements (e.g. Alouane 2015; Bowen and Bertossi 2014) or the subjects of these policies (e.g. Hancock 2015; Rootham 2015; Davidson 2012; but see Bowen 2007; Dhume-Sonzogni 2007). While these discussions are extremely valuable for understanding the often-overlooked effects of the laïcité "consensus," they often assume that the state apparatus promoting laïcité policies is saturated by that same consensus. In contrast, my concept of "competence zones" shows that the discontinuities between state pronouncements of national priorities and what actually happens on the ground in schools are not incidental; they are structured by a spatially-embedded awareness on the part of educators of the social difference they are being tasked with managing. One, discussed in the previous chapter, is in re-centering the institutions through which civic values are promoted. Through my discussion of the common understandings that educational practitioners produce through their daily engagement with the *Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la République*, I highlighted the productive role of their embeddedness within the institutional context of the public school. While an institutional

perspective is only one part of the overall narrative, it is one that has nevertheless been largely absent from discussions of the real-world impacts of laïcité policy (for exceptions, see Dhume-Sonzogni 2007; Bowen and Bertossi 2014). Focusing on practitioners' accounts of their day-to-day work also offers an outlook that is thoroughly embedded in local geographies of social difference. Although the centralized nature of the French education system means that *La Grande Mobilisation* is meant to be enacted uniformly everywhere, within their competence zones practitioners adapt the initaitive's homogenizing aspirations according to their experience and knowledge in order to most effectively carry out their mission.

However, educators' work is not bound up in just any institutional context. Precisely because of the importance given to the French public school as an institution of national identity and cohesion, teachers and principals find themselves as the objects of societal expectations and fears about the ability of that institution to function in globally uncertain times. It is in this context that the racialization of students thought to be at risk for deviant behavior takes on a new meaning – educators are tasked with managing the social difference represented by their classrooms for the purpose of ensuring French national security and national values. Therefore, a geosocial perspective can help bring together some of the geographically disparate elements of the multiple contexts in which teachers find themselves. It can see them as being forced to confront the complexity of transnational lives while having to function within a nationally-bound institutional framework, all while being aware of local economic and social conditions that profoundly affect the lives of the students and families they serve. In particular, it can help us look again at how citizenship and the category of "citizen" has changed in the current transnational moment, and how those changes intersect with as well as challenge French

educators' ability to see their students' political subjectivity in relation to their efforts to enforce laïcité as a core value.

Revisiting citizenship in a transnational moment

As Kallio and Mitchell 2016 argue in their introduction to a themed issue on transnational citizenship, the ontological category of "citizen" is one that has been both useful and constraining to geographers seeking to understand the evolving ways in which the state interacts with people. As the subject of formal institutions and legal structures, the citizen is an entity that is defined through a transactional rights-for-obligation model in which both the state and the citizen can be held accountable to accepted norms (Brown 2006; cf. Marshall 1950). Such a view allows observers to chart the moments during which anxieties about state sovereignty have led to rapid and sometimes violent reterritorializations of state power at various scales ranging from the global and borderland (Bauder 2011; Sparke 2006, 2004) to the national (Hindess 2000) to the local (Brown 2006). At the same time, however, focusing on the state and its politico-legal obligations to its citizens misses both spaces and subjects of exception to the transactional model. Indeed, the current moment of the migrant crisis across Europe has revealed the costs of non-admission to citizenship, as refugees denied entrance to entry points throughout the continent face destitution and death.

In chapter 3 I described some of the characteristics of formal citizenship regimes in the contemporary moment both in the industrialized West in general and especially in France. In the context of the current migration crisis that is directing unprecedented numbers of people towards European borders, some of these regimes – as well as scholars' understandings of them – can be expected to waver and even crumble. What appears likely is that, as Stokes-Dupass (2017) argues, the way the categories and benefits of citizenship are being framed with respect to

increasing pressure on state systems is shifting from a humanitarian perspective to a security one. Across Europe and in the United States, popular movements have reinforced this phenomenon by clamoring for retrenchments of state authority that clearly delineate the social and cultural boundaries of citizen-hood. And yet, as Kallio and Mitchell (2016) suggest, we should not necessarily fall back upon statist understandings of how citizenship is defined, limiting our understanding to formal rights and roles defined within nation-states' politico-legal frameworks. At the same time that we must be vigilant so as to not cheapen the meaning of political agency by declaring everyone a potential political subject and everywhere a potential political context (cf. Häkli and Kallio 2014), we should work towards an approach that can see how identities and practices inhabit but also transcend different political scales such as the global, national, and local (Häkli 2013; Katz 2004; Agnew 2014).

Bringing an awareness of citizenship formation as a process taking place among many intertwined and co-constituting geographic scales to the study of laïcité has a double benefit: while we can use this perspective to better appreciate how laïcité is constructed across multiple sites of power and negotiated by a diverse set of political actors, thinking through laïcité as a technology of managing social difference can in turn inform our understanding of citizenship formation in a moment of transnational churn and conflict. One area where this intellectual cross-pollination can occur, I argue, is by examining how educators implement a nationally-bounded educational reform – in this case, *La Grande Mobilisation* and its aspirations to reinforce laïcité – as a means of managing social difference born of transnational identities. This requires a closer look at the identities in question, who make up the intended subjects of the *Grande Mobilisation* and other laïcité-enforcement policies. Who are these students, and how are educators trained to see them in relation to their work?

Transnational subjectivities

I have previously described how laïcité and the policies created to reinforce it in educational settings are partially the product of geopolitical imaginations of Islamist risk manifesting at global, national, and local scales. I have also given an account of how educational practitioners situate themselves, their communities, and their students within the institutional demands and constraints of the *Grande Mobilisation pour les Valeurs de la Republique*. These global and local geopolitical visions in turn intersect with the French state's aspirations to use *La Grande Mobilisation* to foster a nationally-bounded sense of youth citizenship embedded in the historical continuity of French civic identity over the past two hundred years. As a result, the civic aspirations for this initiative as well as other laïcité policies – leveling the social difference amongst French youth through reference to a common cultural touchstone – posit a form of citizenship whose spatiality is difficult to precisely locate. Although the ideological aims of civic education tend to promote a nationally-bounded sense of personal identity, the mundane realities of everyday life lead educators to prioritize an approach that better connects with other place-bound identities that students may identify with.

One of the inherent difficulties in discussing the application of laïcité policy through the French education system is understanding how students are conceptualized by school actors according to their civic belonging. At the heart of this problematic is a paradox of racialized thinking that characterizes French public policy. On the one hand, as I have mentioned, French law prohibits the collection of any demographic data that would classify people by "race" or "ethnicity"; on the other, however, urban and educational policy have depended for decades on a spatial designation of "needy" areas that are considered eligible for additional funding (Dikeç 2007; Bleich 2001a; 2000). And as I have shown in the previous chapter, teachers and principals

bring a keen awareness of their students' ethnic and cultural affiliations to their work (see also Dhume-Sonzogni 2007).

Adding to the difficulty of understanding how notions of social difference are operationalized within educational laïcité is the fact that the difference in question – principally, students' Muslim identity – is one that is embedded in both local and global relational geographies. For this reason, speaking of these students in terms of a domestically-defined minority, as is often done in discussions of African-American children in the context of American school reform, is inadequate. Unlike the United States, where due to a lapse of time African Americans are largely unaware of cultural ties to their ancestral homelands, Muslim French citizens are more tightly connected to their North African origins through existing migration channels and familial networks. And yet the very spaces within France where Muslim identity is problematized through laïcité policy are those where Muslim French have been concentrated through the effect of state policy and also where the public imagination has constructed an image of the Muslim "badlands" on the cultural periphery of the French Republic (Giblin et al. 2009; Dikeç 2007; Kepel 1991).

What a geosocial framework can offer to this conceptual ambiguity is a perspective that shows how laïcité policy as the spatial management of difference is simultaneously constituted by multiple geographic imaginaries that situate this difference at different scales. Most importantly, it shows how laïcité's management of difference can be thought of as geopolitical statecraft without privileging the hegemonic framings of that difference that are deployed by the French state. On the basis of its thorough grounding in principles of feminist political geography, a geosocial perspective can also avoid casting local educational practitioners as unwitting conduits who unquestioningly reproduce hegemonic framings of the subjects of laïcité policy

(Williams and Massero 2013; Sharp 2008; Hyndman 2004). Indeed, a geosocial outlook offers the possibility of ontologically recognizing the affective ties that teachers, principals, and other agents of the national education system bring to their work as important elements that have real consequences for their understanding and reframing of the larger-scale geopolitical discourses that inform their work.

State agents and the everyday production of geographic imaginaries

Geographers studying the production and dissemination of geopolitical discourses have documented how high-level geopolitical discourses are actually implemented on the ground, and how implementation in turn reworks those discourses or produces new ones. Mid-level bureaucrats and state agents tasked with carrying out official policy do so by drawing on their own knowledge and imaginaries of the geopolitical categories they encounter on a daily basis. These categories can be applied at a variety of scales, from the nation-state to the human body: for example, Mountz's (2004) examination of immigration procedure on the Canadian border reveals how the category of "refugee" is partially created through the work of border agents who label newcomers as such and interact with them on the basis of their classification. On the other end of the scale spectrum, Kuus (2011, etc.) demonstrates how EU diplomats and other bureaucrats reproduce and rework the geopolitical entity "Europe" in their attempts to implement the EU Neighborhood Policy.

What these and other studies show is that the implementation of state policy depends in part on practitioners' conceptions of different geopolitical and geoeconomic spaces, which is bound up with their own knowledge, identities, and institutional position. French educators are particularly attuned to the characteristics of their local environment, which helps produce path-dependent ways of applying laïcité policies.

Another area where researchers have explored the dialectic between the discourse and actual practice of governance is in policy studies. Stone's (1987) study of Atlanta over the course of several decades led him to identify a phenomenon he calls "regime politics." In his analysis, governing regimes tend to be composed of relatively stable constellations of actors, coalitions, and interests. Crucially, this operation is on the basis of personal relationships among members of the regime, who seek to establish consensus or reestablish it if it has been undermined. While ideology does play important roles in maintaining or disrupting regimes, the values and opinions of individuals often diffuse high-level political rhetoric and produce outcomes that do not simply reproduce it in the world. Beneath the level of governing regimes, individuals involved in complex bureaucracies also exert their own influence, creating outcomes that resemble, but are not perfectly reflective of, organizational mission.

What these and other examples demonstrate is that while high-level discourses that delineate certain kinds of spaces and certain kinds of political subjects are important, the role played by "street-level bureaucrats" (cf. Lipskey 1980) in filtering those discourses through their own geographic imaginaries is crucial. Therefore I turn now to a consideration of how educators work through some of the most influential geopolitical discourses that are used to explain the need for enhanced laïcité policy in schools.

Reworking laïcité's geopolitical discourses

With the announcement of *La Grande Mobilisation de l'Ecole pour les Valeurs de la République*, a new chapter was opened in the perennial emergence of educational interventions to reinforce French civic values and especially laïcité. Three primary discourses that have animated arguments about the need for these interventions reemerged amidst the ministerial pronouncements establishing the *Grande Mobilisation*, and they are discourses that intersect with

educators' testimony about their daily experience in carrying out their laïcité-related duties. Below I outline these discourses by describing how they have manifested in the educational context before moving to some examples of how teachers and principals apply their own understanding and judgment to these received messages.

National security and national symbols

What caused perhaps the most consternation in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks was what appeared to be a wave of children engaging in justifying terrorism (*apologie du terrorisme*). One particular story emerged from Nice, where on January 8, 2015 an 8-year-old boy was allegedly overheard by a teacher remarking "French people should be killed. I'm on the terrorists' side. The Muslims did a good thing, the journalists deserved their fate."[xxix] The case quickly devolved into several rounds of accusations alternately leveled against the school and the boy's family by both sides, while the Ministry of Education defended the actions of the teacher who had observed the alleged infraction and the principal who had followed up with it. A similar case was reported in the Alpes-Maritimes department, where a 10 year-old girl wrote on an otherwise unrelated essay "I agree with the terrorists having killed the journalists, because they made fun of our religion."[xxx]

The *Grande Mobilisation*, which was conceived in part due to children's responses to the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, is one of the most comprehensive educational interventions of its kind in the past thirty years. Nevertheless, as I have discussed, it is not the only program designed to respond to a perceived crisis of young people's allegiance to the French nation. Particularly following the Second Palestinian Intifada (2000) and September 11, 2001, education has been seen as a vector to address potential security threats to the French nation by addressing root issues thought to drive students to religious extremism. This was certainly the case for *La*

Grande Mobilisation, which sought to reinvigorate the capacity of the republican school as an institution to instill a sense of national belonging in French youth. Other interventions have likewise sought to combat a perceived threat from "anti-republican" forces presenting an alternative basis for identity to French youth by doubling down on the national symbols and values seen to be under threat. For instance, following the booing of such of the national anthem *La Marseillaise* at a France-Algeria exhibition soccer match in 2001, schools were required to include in their curriculum the study of the history and lyrics of the revolutionary hymn.

Very characteristic of the post-*Charlie* educational climate was a series of somewhat militarized analogies casting the school as a battlefield in the fight against religious extremism and intolerance. Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem had evoked the image of the school being on the "front line" in her speech to the French Parliament on January 14. Indeed, much of the vocabulary around the *Grande Mobilisation* – beginning with the name of the initiative itself – is curiously reminiscent of military jargon. Besides the overarching title, the Citizen Reserve – the *Réserve Citoyenne* – which recruits people from different walks of life to share their experiences of living republican values with students evokes a reserve volunteer army motivated by patriotic fervor. Various principal measures of the initiative speak of "reestablishing the authority" of teachers and "mobilizing the country's resources."

Nevertheless, appearances that suggest that *La Grande Mobilisation* is conceived as a militarized approach to education at its highest levels do not necessarily go all the way down to the grassroots. Certainly, many teachers reacted to the post-*Charlie* student backlash with horror and disgust, as discussed in Chapter 2. While some commentaries saw in those reactions a sort of reactionary nationalism that viewed noncompliant children as potential terrorists themselves, alternatives motivations might be attributable. One interview suggested that the reason for a

seemingly disproportionate response could be attributed to the somewhat chilling realization that the attackers – themselves rather young – had been in the French public school system not so long ago.

> The first thing that's asked [of teachers] is to enter into a posture of dialog with the student. To understand. To understand what's happening. Understanding that a remark – well, of course, there are remarks that were shocking right after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, extremely violent remarks, extremely anti-republican – the first concern of the school is to ask "how did we get to remarks like this?" The preoccupation of the teaching staff faced with the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks is to see these young people [the attackers] and say to themselves, "these young people who were capable of firing on other people and then who committed these attacks – they came through our schools. What did we mess up? What did we miss? (author's interview, June 24 2016) [xxxi]

For some teachers, then, the reason for a visceral reaction to the "anti-*Charlie*" sentiment expressed after the attacks might not be so much ideological as wondering if their own teaching was not up to the task of turning young people away from the lure of religious extremism. Such a conclusion is, of course, speculative, but the larger point is that an attitude that implicates the failures of the educational system in the creation of extremism is quite different than one that sees deviant behavior as categorically irredeemable and deserving of the harshest punishment. I will return to this point in the conclusion to this chapter.

Women's and girls' rights

Beginning with the 1989 Creil headscarf affair, but especially following the post-2000 uptick in anti-Semitic violence that swept Europe, a pervasive view of the veil has been that it represents a backward, patriarchal symbol of female oppression (Rootham 2015; Davidson 2012; Bowen 2007; see also Mahmood 2005 for non-French examples). While the image of the unveiled, "liberated" Muslim woman embodying resistance to Islamist orthodoxy is one that is has been commonly evoked by the political elite during debates about public veiling (e.g. Valls 2016), it is also deployed by some of the more mainstream radical political organizations, such as the feminist immigrant group Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Neither Whores nor Submissive; Giblin et al

2009). However, there is conceptual slippage around the question with regards to age. The issue of *girls*' control of their bodies and their choice to veil or not is one that is often assimilated to the larger context of gender relations and female liberation within Islam writ large (for exceptions, see e.g. Hamzeh 2011; Enright 2011; Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009[53]) . In the case of schoolgirls showing up to class veiled, educators often claim that forbidding them to wear the veil is in their best interest. By forgoing covering their hair, it is argued, they are demonstrating resistance to gangs of delinquent boys who are often presented as young Islamists-in-training, intimidating girls into conforming to sexist norms of modesty and punishing their lack of compliance with verbal abuse or physical violence ().

Such an interpretation of the *foulard* has been roundly critiqued by feminist observers. In particular, Delphy (2006) argues that the antisexist argument put forward during debates on the 2004 law banning *signes ostensibles* was meant to substitute for a more abstract appeal to secularism that had become worn out among the French public. In this formulation the young female body became portrayed as a terrain of struggle between universal freedom and human dignity represented by the French state's efforts to exclude religious expression and the regressive, backwards efforts of Muslim men and boys to indelibly mark that same body as the property of Islam. As a result, two feminized subjects are in fact presented in order to make the case for laïcité: one in the form of the illogical and arbitrary demands of Muslim men who are counterpoised to a masculine, rational Western emphasis on individual self-determination (Davidson 2012); and one in the form of the girl whose body represents potential to be either dominated by Muslim backwardness or liberated by French values.

[53] Interestingly, a lot of research focusing specifically on *girls*' experience of policies relating to laïcité or other forms of state secularism is coming out of scholarly work in physical education, e.g. Walseth 2015, Muslim girls' experiences in physical education in Norway: what role does religiosity play? *Sport, Education and Society* 20 (3): 304 – 322.

Nevertheless, educational professionals do not always see the work of promoting laïcité in a similarly bifurcated way. I previously pointed to a principal's willingness to be flexible in deciding what sorts of personal expressions of religious faith met the standard of an "ostensible" symbol. Returning to her remark, I want to highlight another, more gendered dimension of what she sees when looking at her students:

> But when it comes to children, and then you have something small, but something insignificant – if I'm dealing with a little scarf [*foulard*] on a [student's] head, I can say that it's to make her[54] look pretty. It's not necessarily religious. (Author's interview, June 24 2016-2)

Interestingly, the principal grants a degree of personal autonomy to the hypothetical girl in her example that neither staunch proponents of laïcité nor critics of laïcité are willing to admit: the former group assumes that young girls wearing the veil are *necessarily* being pressured to do so by their male relatives, and the latter tends to extrapolate adult-level reasoning and a mature understanding of the meanings and implications of religious wear to children. By extension macro-level issues around laïcité such as human rights and personal identity are being projected onto children's bodies regardless of whether this is analytically appropriate.

By the same token, of course, the principal is potentially projecting her own understanding of wearing a headscarf onto the unspecified child in her example. However, she acknowledges that when dealing with children, the standard of deciding whether the choice to wear or not wear a particular garment rises to the level of a political statement should be different than it is with adults. Such a recognition points to a crucial aspect identified by Häkli and Kallio (2014) in properly understanding political agency characterized by the distinction between an acting 'I' and a reflecting 'me." In other words, they argue, not every act by a thinking agent can be reduced to a political act of expressing an intersubjectively-negotiated

[54] Although in French the pronoun here is the indirect, invariable *lui*, the principal is unmistakably using a female student in her hypothetical example as evidenced by her use of *une* to qualify *élève*.

identity. Depending on the context, an actor may or may not choose to express him or herself in such a way as to constitute a political act, and the intersection of setting and behavior is especially crucial when trying to determine the political capacity of children. While a detailed discussion of children's political autonomy is beyond the scope of this work, Häkli and Kallio's observations help to highlight that for people who are directly observing the impact of policies that seek to influence young people's civic identity, political questions become much less clear-cut than they often appear for those looking from the outside-in.

Communautarisme and fostering immigrant integration

In the French context, perhaps no term is more sociologically loaded than *communautarisme*. The emergence of *communautarisme* in the public consciousness in the 2003 ministerial proclamation by Darcos and Ferry was, in a sense, a retroactive label that reframed the origins of years of accumulated tensions on the part of the French Muslim community. Drawing on the discourse popularized by works such as *The Lost Territories of the Republic*, *communautarisme* provided a powerful geographic imaginary of the obstacles to full participation in the promise of French republican equality: often accompanied by the term *repli*, a "folding in," *communautarisme* evokes an image of a literal and wilful turning away from French society. In this widespread geographic imagination, amidst the already-accomplished integration of French society lie the "lost territories" where refusal to abide by republican values is fostered within minority communities.

Coummunautarisme powerfully combines a depoliticization of the causes of Muslim and immigrant anger with a displacement of blame for communautarian closing-in onto the cultural characteristics of excluded groups. This sentiment also pervades educational practitioners' understanding of their students. Dhume-Sonzogni's (2007) investigation of the meanings given

to the term *communautarisme* by teachers, principals, and other education officials in Alsace-Lorraine reveals that one of the most common of these imaginaries is an "ethnicization"[55] of students on the part of educators, who paradoxically rely on ethnic stereotypes to attempt to deliver a culturally neutral education. In an attempt to pre-empt potential behavioral or pedagogical issues in their classrooms, teachers project their expectations that students apparently from Muslim or other minority backgrounds will bring an uncooperative attitude – fostered and cultivated by their families and communities – to school. In turn these ethnicized understandings are tied to perceptions of minority groups' cultural isolation in "communities" that are themselves readily associated with practitioners' knowledge of their local geographies of social and economic inequality.

However, while the negative connotations of self-imposed exile associated with *communautarisme* can be found at all levels of political and popular discourse in French society, educators' daily experiences lead them to both reproduce such imaginaries while simultaneously reworking and sometimes resisting them. When examining educators' activities within the framework of *la Grande Mobilisation*, it seems that a similar reworking of the geopolitical imaginaries that drove the initiative's creation is taking place. While at high levels of political discourse worries about the impact of *communautarisme* on student populations and their subsequent rejection of laïcité are palpable, on the ground these concerns become more muted and adapted to the school's or district's local social geography. This is not to say that teachers or principals deny that *communautarisme* is problematic in the abstract for the smooth functioning of their institutions or their educational mission. However, the degree to which educators identify

[55] In his work Dhume-Sonzogni draws a distinction between "ethnicist" and "racist" understandings of identity; while the latter assigns innate capacities to biological inferiority or superiority, the former more contingently – but perhaps more insidiously – explains supposed cultural deficiencies as a product of choice and the rejection of majority culture.

a presence of *communautarisme* in their local areas is variable, as is the explanatory factors they give to it. For example, one principal's assessment of her local environment identified a positive correlation between social diversity and a lack of closed-off communities:

> A: I'm not in a neighborhood with only whites, it's very mixed [*mélangé*]. But there's no communatarianism [*communautarisme*]! Where I am, I have a little of everything in the district, I've got – let's start with me! I could claim other origins,[56] but we can see right off the bat that it's not a problem for the school's functioning, it's my seventh year here. I've got everything in my schoolyard – blacks, blonds, Arabs…
>
> Chris: So you think that the social diversity [*mixité*] that exists already, that creates…
>
> A: It didn't, it doesn't create communatarianism that could create pressure – yeah? – sometimes, something that creates pressure, something that leads to a situation where conflict is born. I don't have those kinds of conflicts at all. (Author's interview, June 24 2016). [xxxii]

Contrary to higher-level political discourses that posit the presence of *communautarisme* in poor and immigrant-heavy areas as practically a given, this principal offers a much more contingent understanding: while not denying its potential existence, she reads the presence of *communautarisme* off of her daily experience of her students, not their identity (racialized or otherwise). Nevertheless, the lingering traces of a spatialized understanding of *communautarisme* are present: in debates around laïcité, *communataurisme* is often seen as both the cause and effect of failing to respect religious neutrality. In a similarly paradoxical manner, here the principal noted that she is able to avoid having to address laïcité in the first place among her students because they are already well-integrated across racial lines in the communities they come from.

I have previously argued that educators bring a keen awareness of the social and economic landscapes in which their work is embedded to their practice. An interesting point that came up was that although ethnic diversity was mentioned as a possible cause of tensions around

[56] Here the principal is referring to her own visible origin as a black French woman, of either African or Caribbean descent. This remark was not prompted by any questions directly related to her race or national origin that I had provided prior to or during our interview.

laïcité, as above, it was not naturalized as such by *assuming* that the presence of immigrant communities would automatically lead to problems. Indeed, a much more heavily cited root cause of student behavioral problems in schools was their economic, not social, origins. And yet educators emphasized their willingness and ability to engage with such difference. At one point in my interview with the *referent laïcité* for the Académie de Creteil, we both got up to look at the map of the académie. As she indicated places where she was aware of incidents having previously taken place, she noted:

> Anyway, in the "ninety-three", you have this whole area of Saint-Denis, which is, to be sure, a bit well-known for having problems, but paradoxically, the "ninety-three" has such a culture, such a tradition of social issues and of integrating foreign populations that things actually harmonize pretty well, because as much as there's a very serious problem of social mixing, as much as there's there's a serious problem of poverty, there's a real culture within the in the schools, of nuanced work, of integration, of taking into account [students'] social issues – they're actually pretty good. They're able to do fairly extraordinary things. [xxxiii]

Indeed, instead of the narrative casting the *banlieues* as places where schools are more likely to fail due to the socioecomic profiles of their surrounding communities, the *référent* identified this characteristic as a potential strength due to educators' experience of working with diverse – and sometimes difficult – populations.

Interestingly, it appears that many French educators have an *awareness* of the ethnic and socio-economic makeups of their communities but do not necessarily allow this awareness to overdetermine the degree to which one or another group of students might pose a particular educational problem. While the question of "ethnicization" as posed by Dhume-Sonzogni and others needs to be more fully explored, it appears that there is not a necessary link between a keen insight into students' backgrounds and a stereotyping of their potential behavior from those backgrounds.

Conclusion

Given the contentious nature of laïcité policy and the considerable power wielded by educators over their students, it is vital to understand the enforcement of laïcité as it occurs on the ground. The testimony I have provided here is just one part of the overall story – one that also includes the perspectives of the students who are the objects of these policies – but it is one not often told in the acrimonious debate over laïcité in French society. Something that was palpable throughout the interviews I conducted with teachers and principals was a sense of frustration over what they saw as an inability to contribute to the public discourse around educational laïcité, and I hope to have given it a small outlet here.

Indeed, I have often been bemused by the fact that many of the grand narratives that have emerged around laïcité in recent years are directly contradicted by the experiences of my correspondents and interview participants. This is especially the case when examining the broad geopolitical discourses that have been mobilized in support of laïcité policy and the ways in which educators rework those discourses on a daily basis. Whether or not they "buy in" to the ideas that laïcité is a guarantor of security, that it defends girls' rights, or that it aids cultural integration, their everyday priorities appear to be more geared towards good education, not state ideological goals as the "classical" critical education literature would suggest (e.g.). This suggests that more research concerning national identity formation in educational contexts needs to focus on the people who are tasked with actually implementing policies and curricula that are aimed at inculcating a certain sense of civic belonging in young people.

To be sure, I do not mean in this chapter – or elsewhere in this work – to mount a blind defense of educators at the expense of glossing over violence done to children in the name of state ideological priorities. There is still a debate to be had over the proper application of laïcité

and whether or not there *can* be a proper application of laïcité as a principle of social equality in an educational setting. What I do want to suggest, however, is that much discussion of what is happening in French schools seems to overlook what is actually happening in French schools. Especially problematic in this regard is the relative lack of research that focuses specifically on the experience of French *girls* who are subjected to laïcité policies, instead rolling them up into more general feminist critiques of such policies. Another major issue in the current scholarship on laïcité, I would argue, is the lack of attention to what educators bring to the table in terms of professional experience and intentionality in their work. If we are going to mount a rigorous critique of laïcité as a technology that unjustly classifies people, then we cannot ignore the role that people have in constructing it in its everyday manifestations.

What a geosocial approach can offer to our understanding of laïcité is a focus on the points of intersection where societal attitudes and institutional norms intersect with individuals' intuitive sense of social embeddedness to produce political agency and subjectivity. The creativity and spontaneity that educators must necessarily use in their daily work in order to make laïcité legible to their students sits in productive tension with the primary geopolitical discourses that drive contemporary laïcité policy in France. This is in no small part due to laïcité's origins being steeped in the identification and management of social difference.

What remains to be added to this theorization of educators' agency as people who are responsible for enforcing a major ideological priority of the state is how their identity and positionality enters into their professional practice. So far, I have largely considered teachers' accounts of their work within the context of the large-scale discourses about laïcité and the need for policies that reinforce laïcité that are circulated throughout French society and within the national educational hierarchy. I largely take them at their word and interpret what they say they

do as reflecting on practical goals of education based on the demands of their situation, shaped by the socioeconomic characteristics of the places where they work. I have had much less to say about how educators' sense of their own identity enters into their thinking on these discourses and how they translate them into daily interactions with students. Indeed, this is a major lacuna of my work that I will address in future work. For the moment, though, as I turn to the conclusion to this dissertation, I underline the need to focus on educators as active agents who are not simply vectors for the state's education priorities, but who exercise influence over the very discourses that they receive and are expected to reproduce.

Conclusion: What next for laïcité?

In this dissertation I have argued that laïcité, France's particular brand of state secularism, is a thoroughly geopolitical concept. It is geopolitical because it has become the fundamental basis of a French national identity promoting loyalty to an abstract, idealized French society above other identities rooted in places inside and outside the space of the French state. It is also geopolitical because it regulates through a series of associated laws and social norms which aspects of an individual's identity can be revealed in public space and which must be set aside for the sake of social harmony. Finally, as a value that is thought to be a cornerstone of the civic values to be taught through the universal, compulsory public education system, it is at the heart of the aspirations that French society holds for its future citizens.

The study of laïcité is complicated by the fact that it is both somewhat relatable to a non-French observer – it is, after all, a form of state secularism that is comparable to those in other liberal modern democracies – and utterly alien. For many who do not share the historic and geographic frame of reference in which laïcité was developed and struggled over, it can seem arbitrary or even capricious as a value. This perception is strengthened in no small part by anti-French bias born of misconceptions ranging from innocent stereotyping to a fundamental failure to see things from a different perspective. My experience has been that such attitudes are bizarrely entrenched among people of all education levels and political persuasions. For me, as someone with personal ties to France and French people, such an attitude would be a source of amusement at best and a minor annoyance at worst if it were not consistently reproduced not only by people with no real personal or professional experience in that country, but also by respected intellectuals whose opinions are – rightly – influential on social and political matters. In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, I was disappointed – and occasionally angered – to

read opinions that took what I saw as a blasé attitude towards the violence, classifying it as the price of France's intransigent discriminatory and racist attitudes. My position has never been that laïcité – or any other element of French political culture, for that matter – is innocent or not deeply imbricated in structural injustices. It, however, has been my refusal to accept that laïcité is *simply* a matter of racial or cultural prejudice that has motivated my work here. And as a consequence, I believe it is important to think seriously about what might be future avenues for continuing to take laïcité seriously both as a potentially unifying social norm *and* as a technology of control that has been inappropriately applied so as to oppress people not deemed worthy of full membership in French society.

In this conclusion, then, I offer three areas where I have made contributions to our understanding of laïcité, as well as where those contributions can be pushed further than what I have presented in my work. First, I revisit my argument that laïcité is a specifically geopolitical concept in its application as a technology of managing social difference. Next, I offer suggestions for expanding the study of laïcité in its institutional contexts and applications, building upon my concept of "competence zones" as a theorization for the ways in which educators conceptualize their daily work from within the school system. Finally, I point to the ways in which a geopolitical and institutionally-bounded understanding of laïcité – that is, as it exists within a national public school system – can speak back to some of the existing frameworks that are used to understand it as a political phenomenon.

The geopolitics of laïcité revisited

I began this work with the argument that laïcité, in its manifestation as a series of educational policies over the past several decades, has existed at the intersection of two geopolitical scales: a global environment in which French humanist values are seen to be locked in an existential

conflict with Islamist religious extremism, and a local landscape of urban segregation and poverty. Laïcité has been deployed through several institutional structures, including the school system, in order to try and manage the tensions arising from the conflicts circulating at these scales that make their way into the space of the school.

In discussing laïcité as a technology of managing geopolitical difference, I introduced the concept of the geosocial as a means of looking past some of the artificial divisions between geographic scales that can be implied by labeling certain phenomena as being either "global" or "local." In fact, the very line of reasoning in which veiled girls in schools become discursively associated with Islamist violence operating worldwide – one of the primary motivating factors for banning headscarves in the space of the school – depends on a complex interweaving of embodied images of femininity, piousness, and racial identity that transcend any one particular scale. But so can the "practical schema" that educators bring to their work of enforcing laïcité policies be seen to draw on beliefs, training, and experience that are not limited to any particular geographic frame.

Of course, contemporary laïcité is largely – although not exclusively – concerned with the place of Islam and Muslims in French society. There is a tendency among critics of laïcité and policies derived from it to freeze the geopolitical scale within which they situate their critique. Often this is done by addressing only one aspect of laïcité's complex relationship with Islam: for instance, in the context of France's international policy and military operations in Muslim-majority countries, or as a policy having disproportionate impact on locally-deprived populations. Rarely do such critiques acknowledge that the interaction between Islam's integration into France at various scales – and therefore the ways in which laïcité actually exists in relationship to Islam – is complex. As Bowen (2009) describes, fully understanding the place

of Islam in French society requires not only appreciating the long and complex history of Muslims in France, but also seeing past some of the surface-level polemic to realize that many local efforts to offer cultural or religious compromises exist, making the terrain of Muslim integration into French society more variegated than some accounts would suggest.

In particular, it must be recognized that France's encounter with Islam is one that is derived largely from the more-than-colonial relationship between that country and Algeria. While contemporary laïcité policy is being importantly impacted by the overall political climate of a resurgence of white nationalism in reaction to globalization, it is also derived from a 185-year history summed up in Assia Djebar's term *étreinte figée*, a frozen embrace. Using the term to describe the positions of dead French and Algerian soldiers on the battlefield, she lyrically captures the contradiction between hatred and love that exists in the larger relationship between the two societies. Acknowledging laïcité's long and contradictory relationship to Islam means taking this set of contradictory attitudes into account: the way in which Islam is regarded by French society is inflected by turns with fascination and disgust, but these attitudes vary based on the background events that give different dominant meanings to Muslim identity across time.

While I believe it is vital to avoid "fixing" laïcité within one or another political scale, though, I think it is useful to retain a thoroughly critical geopolitical approach when investigating laïcité, in order to understand how its discourses are produced and reproduced in geographically-specific fields of professional practice. For example, the way in which diplomats speak of laïcité when they have conversations with their counterparts during international negotiations or cultural exchanges will have a particular inflection to it, as will the way in which politicians interpret it on the campaign trail in the context of a national election. But rather than assuming that the meanings generated around laïcité for an audience at a particular geographic scale are

natural, we can understand how both the framing of the scale – national, global, or local – as well as the political discourse created – are co-constitutive of each other. This is an approach I have tried to pursue in the current work, although space and time considerations have prevented me from fully exploiting it: understanding how educators whose professional practice is situated at the intersection of national, transnational, and local phenomenon will create similarly geographically intersectional understandings of the core French value they are charged with upholding.

In particular it is important to not lose sight of the French nation-state as a geographic context within which laïcité policy is developed and deployed. Some scholars have recently written in support of moving beyond "statist" political geographies in order to de-naturalize the assumption that the nation-state is an *a priori* legitimate political actor with legitimate access to tools of coercion and violence (e.g. Ince and Barrera de la Torre 2016, Springer 2015). While I am sympathetic to such an approach, it seems to me imprudent to dismiss the simple fact that states – and particularly the French state, in the case of laïcité – have huge impacts on people's daily lives. If the goal is to challenge the state's authority, it does not seem particularly useful to me to set aside the fact that states are, perhaps now more than ever, undertaking massive banishments of "surplus" populations (Mitchell 2009; Beckett and Herbert 2009) historically cast as society's "imminent" others (Isin 2002).

What seems more compelling to me is to examine the ways in which state power is wielded in ways that render geopolitical relationships all the more visible and rework our prior assumptions of the boundaries of sovereign authority. For instance, Kovras and Robin (2016) examine the ways in which migrant deaths on European Mediterranean shores expose the concept of the "borderland" in ways that challenge hegemonic notions of what borders are and

what they accomplish. Even in a world of increased transnational flows of people, information, and capital, there remains a very basically spatial element to the way in which state power is organized and expressed. Given recent election outcomes in the United States and Europe, there is clearly a widespread desire to increase, not decrease, the exercise of that power over borders. It does not seem wise to me to dismiss the fact that for large portions of populations in these places, state authority holds a certain allure – however misguided or biased such an allure may be. Today, during a period of intensified global capitalist relations and the constant threat of Islamist terrorism, *laïcité* has taken on a new set of geopolitical meanings that mark non-compliers to its standard as not only culturally deficient, but also potential security risks. Although Muslim French subjects have experienced several instances of increased scrutiny of their loyalty to the French state over the past several decades, the period following *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, and especially after the November 2015 attacks throughout Paris has seen the most intense policing of Muslims since the Algerian War (1954 – 1962). [57]

Indeed, another element of the political geography of laïcité that needs to be studied in further detail is its relationship to the wave of populist nationalism that is currently taking hold across Europe and the United States. To date, critical geographers have been somewhat reluctant to approach oppressive power structures in these national contexts as being partially enabled by popular electoral will. The recent victory of François Fillon of the center-right party *Les Républicains* (formerly UMP, *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*)'s presidential nomination drives home this point; upending decades of French political consensus, Fillon staked out as part of his campaign a position on laïcité and the deference accorded to Catholic practice further to the right than even the far-right *Front National*'s Marine Le Pen. This suggests that even the

[57] Since writing this, Islamist terrorists have again struck France several times; in particular, the 2016 Bastille Day (July 14) attack in Nice became the second-bloodiest in France's history, with 86 deaths.

current government's hard line taken towards expressions of faith as a matter of state laïcité are considered insufficient by a major portion of the French electorate. Not even the far-right *Front National*, despite its strong base of support from Catholic traditionalists, has seriously considered making the weakening of laïcité a party platform. The electoral geographies of support for different attitudes towards laïcité is an important part of the overall picture that results from the current political moment.

Understanding the sources of popular consent for state policies is important in an era when electoral majorities across the industrialized West are demanding that their governments take increasingly draconian measures to control and surveil marginalized populations in the name of "security" or national identity. Above all, the popular movement to reverse the geopolitical and geoeconomic connections that have been gradually forged since the end of World War II must be investigated in the context of rising support for the suppression of cultural difference. While remaining critical of political and economic elites is vital to working towards a more just world, it seems disingenuous to me to not couple this critique with an honest look at how popular electoral politics have enabled these elites to seize power and claim jingoistic mandates in the name of democracy. In the case of laïcité, it is also important to not simply dismiss the concept as inherently racist, but to understand its genealogy in French political culture that would allow it to be deployed in ways that appear politically neutral or even progressive, while at the same time undermining the possibility for a truly egalitarian society. And this genealogy, as I have argued, is intimately bound up with the establishment and maintenance of control over the religiously and culturally diverse territory of France from at least the 18th century. This context can tell us, for instance, that inculcating a uniform sense of secular identity has long been considered important to the project of the French nation – and that while

economistic understandings of laïcité can get at some of its aspects, what is a more enduring aspect of laïcté is, to paraphrase Penrose and Mole, its role in creating the French nation within the boundaries of the French state, and of imposing the rule of the French state over a territory bound together by a common French national identity.

At the same time, though, revising our geopolitical sensibilities around laïcité is only one part of the overall picture. The institution of state-sponsored education is one that has a decisive impact on the pathways taken by geopolitical discourse and rhetoric as they eventually become policies being put into practice by educators. Among systems of public schooling in the industrialized West, the *école républicaine* stands out for the nearly mythical place it occupies in the idealized notion of the French republic that many French consider their cultural heritage. It is to that sense of exceptionalism, and the institution that inspires it, that I now turn.

Competence zones: an institutionally-grounded investigation of laïcité

In Laurent Cantet's 2008 film *Entre les Murs* (English: *The Class*), François Bégaudeau plays a semi-fictionalized version of himself ("François Marin") as a young teacher in Paris's ethnically diverse 20th arrondissement. The film, which was the first French film to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival since 1987, was universally celebrated by critics for its brutally honest, yet not overly dramatic portrayal of the institution of the *école républicaine* as told through a school year's worth of experiences. Notable in the film is the immediacy of the relationship between Marin and his students, who hail from a variety of backgrounds but are united in their skepticism that what he is teaching them bears any relevance to their lives.[58] One review in *Le*

[58] One scene in the movie revolves around Marin's attempts to teach his class the *subjonctif du imparfait* – the subjunctive mood in the progressive past tense – whose use in everyday speech is practically unheard of and is only rarely seen in elevated registers of writing. Nevertheless, it is a required subject in French schools at the middle school level. As one student puts it, "if we use it, everyone's gonna say 'hoo boy, what's wrong with *him*?"

Monde describes the tension between Marin's efforts to have a positive impact on his students' lives, and the unforeseen consequences of his actions, which range from negligible to life-changing:

> [H]ow do you find your place, be in sync with the people around you, reconcile your inner self and your appearance, mitigate the gap between the dominated and the dominators, remain in the fabric of society without losing your status, remain yourself while adhering to the norm, preserve your identity without being subjected to the harshness of collective judgement?
>
> However, in the context of this school of the Republic – a place of social mixing, a resonance chamber of problems of immigration, of undocumented status – these questions, and the connections between power and resistance to authority that they imply, are being considered by François's students and their parents. In *The Class*, the difficulty of living together, of understanding oneself and of rejecting resignation without provoking violence and exclusion, is experienced on both sides of the dais.
>
> The film tells of how François, despite his talent for improvisation, for putting his students at ease, for speaking with them as equals, for respecting everyone's individuality, runs into indiscipline, refusal, mockery, rebellion, and slips up, forgets the impact of his words, makes a mistake, and forgets the limits of his tolerance. And how he constantly brushes up against the impasse, how his class expresses homophobia or anti-Semitism, how a student of Malian origin kicked out by the school's discipline council is sentenced to be deported. There is a constant observation in the films of Laurent Cantet: of failure, of the individual's defeat in the face of society. [59] [xxxiv]

Although the educators I interviewed did not have dramatized versions of their daily work to offer, their experiences did lead me to a conclusion that is not all that dissimilar from the one that Cantet derives through his interpretation of Bégaudeau's story: teachers operate in a register of personal experience and responsibility that, more than the ideological apparatus they are placed within, structures their professional practice. My term for this register is educators' *competence zones*: practical knowledge that is deeply shaped by the socioeconomic context that they work in and the communities their students represent. What can be drawn from this concept so that we can better understand how educators engage in their daily work in the light of mandates handed down from higher levels of state bureaucracy?

Within scholarly debates about the ways in which national education priorities impact upon students – especially students from marginalized populations – the role of teachers is too

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[59] Douin, Jean-Luc. *Entre les Murs:* La guerre des mots au collège. *Le Monde* September 28, 2008.

often reduced to that of a vector of ideological transmission between the state and its subjects.[60] Through a series of vignettes contrasting the rarefied knowledge that Bégaudeau's character is *supposed* to convey to his students with more effective ways of connecting with his students that he eventually devises, Cantet's film captures what I and others (e.g. Vivarelli 2014; Lorcerie 2012, 2010, etc.) have shown empirically to be the case: educators tasked with carrying out a coherently-stated educational priority of the state often act in ways that appear unpredictable from a centralized point of view but are perfectly logical within the context in which they are operating. Lorcerie's (2012) description of teachers "improvising alone" in their efforts to enforce laïcité offers a powerful image that I develop further through my own concept of competence zones. While Lorcerie's assessment places educators somewhat in the realm of total confusion, I argue instead based on the testimony of my interview correspondents that in spite of a lack of consistent policy and messaging from higher in the hierarchy, they can productively carve out a literal and figurative space within which they carry out their professional duties.

Such a conclusion does not deny that ground-level educators may indeed be implicated in extending oppressive power structures that are characterized by raced, classed, or gendered ideas about what constitutes acceptable adherence to norms of citizenship, but rather points to the possibility that rationalities other than ones based on power and domination enter everyday practice. This is an especially important insight to keep in mind when discussing the *école républicaine*, the school of the Republic, which is held in practically mystical regard by dominant narratives of French national identity. This mysticism can lead both to the kind of contempt expressed by Vianès (2004), who regards any deviation from an idealized role for schooling as an unacceptable aberration, as well as the conceit that anything identified as a crisis

[60] When teachers themselves are not simply baselessly attacked for their supposed willful intransigence in terms of adapting to their students' backgrounds and needs, see e.g. Scott 2007; McRobbie 2011.

of civic identity can and should be dealt with through a doubling down of effort in the school system.

Refocusing our attention on not only the institution of schooling but also the agents who carry out its day-to-day functions can contribute to seeing the entire system and its functioning within French national identity formation more clearly. This can also speak back to the critical education literature by de-instrumentalizing teachers as key aspects of state education systems. Often literature has attempted to connect structural inequalities at the scale of an entire national education infrastructure with impacts on the ground while glossing over the role of ground-level educators in connecting higher-level priorities and imperatives to individual classrooms (e.g. Lipman 2013, 2011); even in cases where educators are more fully taken into account, the focus in often on the impact of larger-scale forces on the teaching profession while not fully theorizing the productive role that educators play in reinterpreting state mandates in curriculum or governance (e.g. Hursh 2008; Valli and Buese 2007; Ball 1994).

One important aspect of teachers' professional practice, and one that I have not taken up in this work, is the positionality of those who enforce laïcité in the school setting. This is a complex question, given that teachers in France have been traditionally recruited from the middle- and upper-middle classes and carry with them class-bound notions of what an ideal attitude towards laïcité is. Given that the students who are considered most at risk of "violating" laïcité typically do not come from similar class backgrounds, there is the potential for a cultural mismatch. This tension is depicted, for instance, in *The Class* through Marin's sometimes savvy, sometimes clumsy attempts to appeal to his students' sensibilities; at times, he is successful in reaching them, and at times his own rather bourgeois background betrays itself. One aspect that makes taking teachers' social characteristics into account tricky is the relative lack of theoretical

work in critical education studies that thinks through educators' positionality beyond situating them as generic state agents. While unquestionably teachers and other educational professionals carry with them some institutional biases as a result of their training and experience, there must be a more thorough inductive investigation of their attitudes and practices that does not impose an *a priori* structural understanding.

At the moment, though, there are a few clues that can point towards educators' positioning with respect to laïcité. I have discussed the "invisible baseline" of Catholic identity that underwrites laïcité in France: the concept of an outwardly religiously neutral subject rests on the assumption that certain aspects of Catholic practice are taken for granted, even by the state (in, for example, the fact that several Catholic holidays are state holidays). Some of my conversations with educators pointed towards an *embodied* invisible baseline for the "properly" laïque subject: for example, one principal who spoke to me about the distinction she draws between a "veil" and a "little scarf" also referred several times to the measures that she herself, as a Catholic, takes to adhere to principles of laïcité. She also referred to her own racial identity (either Carribean or West African) as being part of the overall "diversity" making up the larger community within which her school is located. At the intersection of these two rather offhand comments seems to be emerging a new "baseline" identity of a successful adherent to laïcité: representative of the larger racial and ethnic communities that make up the French nation, but nevertheless willing to give up certain aspects of those communities for the sake of a larger national identity.

The preceding is, of course, speculation, but it bears investigation as an essential element of the overall picture that makes up contemporary laïcité. For the moment, my work re-centers on educators by arguing that as they are working, they are constructing their competence zones

by accumulating spatially-bound experience based on awareness of the local socioeconomic circumstances within which they are located. As I've discussed, the French education system relies on a highly-formalized classification of socioeconomic space for the purposes of distributing funding across the system as a whole; while educators take this into account, they also develop over the course of their work a highly specific, geographically-rooted awareness of the students they work with and those students' origins. That this work takes place within a very specific institutional context – the *école républicaine* – is likewise an essential piece of the overall picture. I now turn to my final conclusions on the significance of this institution for further work on laïcité as well as for geographic thought more largely writ, and discuss how education – uniquely from other state institutions – can tell us about the state, citizenship, and identity more broadly.

Looking outward from geographies of education

In a 2009 paper published in *Progress in Human Geography*, Hanson-Theim offers a succinct review of scholarly work by geographers on education, and provided a call to produce what she called "outward-looking" work on geographies of education. She argues that much work produced in that subdiscipline treats developments in educational outcomes or educational policy as derivative of other social and political phenomena. Instead, she pushes for inquiry that takes seriously the spaces where educative processes occur as sites that generate changes in the larger political culture or political economy.

Such an approach has motivated my own work to date in the field of education. Although the focus of my inquiry has shifted from North American market-style school reform to state secularism expressed through educational policy, I have always approached the educational realm with an eye towards its "exceptionalism." That is, my work is based upon an implicit

understanding that what happens in the classroom, the district office, or the schoolyard – to name just a few sites that are important to educational processes and outcomes – is somewhat unique to those spaces, and does not simply reflect larger trends of social governance or political movements. In other words, I believe that things happen in schools that cannot be fully explained through typical critical theoretical frameworks. For instance, the overall arc of neoliberal governance over the past thirty years in the industrialized West has unquestionably had important and irreversible impacts on public education systems; however, not all of those systems' structures, policies, and procedures are reducible to neoliberalism. Similarly, while educators' enforcement of laïcité laws draw upon gendered and raced understandings of bodily presentation that permeate French society, the way in which they interact with students on a day-to-day basis is particular to the teaching profession and the temperaments of the people who choose to pursue their career in that field.

Focusing on what is unique to education as an institution and teaching as a professional pursuit should push us to consider that trends within state education systems can ultimately have an impact on broader societal structures and forces. My previous work has examined how, for instance, a campaign to bring charter schools [61] to Washington State that relied on generating a critical mass of public consent to this new and relatively untested form of public education (Cohen and Lizotte 2015). By analyzing the ways in which proponents used education-specific tropes to make morally-inflected arguments about public duty to children, we came away with a greater understanding of how market-influenced projects beyond the education realm become publicly palatable. In another set of studies (Mitchell and Lizotte 2016, 2014), I and my co-

[61] Charter schools are a uniquely American phenomenon (although analogues exist in other Anglophone countries), being public schools funded by public funds but that nevertheless operate with more or less autonomy from school districts and their regulations. One key characteristic of charter schools, regardless of district, is the almost complete absence of unionized teaching staff.

author examined the shape taken by philanthropic rationalities of social governance in public education. The language and logic used by wealthy backers of experimental forms of education are unique to their support for deregulated schooling, but also have echoes in other projects funded by contemporary philanthropy in urban renewal, global health, and other areas.

Similarly, I believe that the way in which laïcité is operationalized through education policies can tell us a great deal about not only the institution of public schooling itself in France, but also about the aspirations, contradictions, and conflicts that animate discussions about the meaning of French national identity and civic membership. I have provided, through my concept of "competence zones," a starting point for situating educational laïcité at the heart of these discussions. However, there are several issues that I have not attempted to answer in this dissertation that are consequential for these larger questions. My research on American school choice largely left aside the question of *why* school choice is a politically and culturally dominant force in the contemporary global North to understand *how* it has become so. By the same token, I have remained somewhat intellectually agnostic on a number of considerations about the educational impacts of laïcité in order to focus on the implications for society of the pathways that have been formed by the filtering down of high-level geopolitical discourse to the ground level through teachers and students.

One of these considerations is the racialized nature of education. Schooling in France is, as it is in the US, understood as highly racialized by families and on-the-ground school officials alike. Parents are especially sensitive to the cultural biases of the *école républicaine*. Oberti and Rivière (2014) highlight these racialized understandings especially among non-white French or immigrant parents, who believe in many cases that recent reforms meant to liberalize school choice procedures is simply a way for "native" (*autochone*) or "white" (*blanc*) French families to

gain yet more advantages over them. Other work (e.g. Ribert 2006, Amin and Vinet 2014) has focused on the experience of students *issu(e)s* d'immigration, that is, students of color who may or may not be legally French by birth. There have not yet been concerted attempts to link the experience of these families and students within the racialized schooling regimes of the French education system to more widespread French geopolitical and geoeconomic anxieties – an especially important consideration as immigration to France and the EU increases and the EU itself becomes more and more precarious as a political entity.

Another area that I have not fully considered in this work is the specific curricular content of measures related to *La Grande Mobilisation*. Although the initiative does not prescribe mandatory curricula, it provides a great deal of suggested material through eduscol.fr in the form of lesson plans and activities. Indeed, many of the educators I spoke with indicated that they had undertaken debates, roundtables, panel discussions, and other events. In most cases, these discussions were empirically useful in that they revealed a drive towards emphasizing the "living together" aspects of laïcité and its privileging of a common national identity over confronting some of laïcité's more heavily contested cultural aspects. I did not, however, dive deeply into the specific discursive content of these activities. Numerous studies (e.g. Mitchell and Parker 2008; Niens and Chastenay 2008; Weller 2003) have shown that the specific content of curricular materials for civic education have an important impact on the way in which youth receive them. Therefore, a research question to follow up with would be: How do students construct senses of in-group and out-group membership based on the content of curriculum materials that they encounter? As with the relative lack of research pointing to how teachers specifically carry out larger ideological priorities of the state education apparatus, there is

likewise somewhat of a dearth of studies that engage deeply with students' reactions to the educational programming that is targeted at them.

As the current migrant crisis becomes even more pronounced on the European continent, and a reactionary nationalism continues to deepen, it becomes more important than ever to investigate the non-economic rationalities that direct the ways in which governments respond to social difference. Education is a key site where attempts to incorporate new populations into national communities has always occurred, and where conflicts over the content of curricula take place during times of crisis. We can expect that the attempt to reinforce France's brand of state secularism will continue apace and potentially be taken in new, more stringent directions depending on the outcome of France's 2017 presidential election (as of this writing, two months away). And given that the political currents running through France have extremely consequential echoes throughout the global North, it is extremely important that despite the national specificity of laïcité and its impact on citizenship formation, we be able to extrapolate certain aspects of the situation in France to other places. Education, as both a collection of sites where schooling takes place and as an institution built upon ideologies of the state, is a common thread that unites otherwise diverse societies. And it is through this thread that we can begin to build a common understanding of how to build a counter-narrative to the exclusionary constructions of citizenship that are currently taking hold in the world.

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Appendix A: Data Sources and Classification

Interview Correspondents

- Anouk Aubert, Proviseure Adjointe, Lycée A. Blanqui, Saint-Ouen
- M. Bravan, Collège Romain Rolland, Clichy-sous-Bois
- Benoît Falaize, Référent Laïcité Coordinator, Ministère de l'Education Nationale
- Jeanne-Claire Fumet, Chargée de mission, Valeurs de la République, Acadèmie de Créteil
- Laurence Levy-Delpla, Réctorat de Paris
- Annie Mehou-Loko, Principale, Collège Victor Hugo, Créteil
- M. Josselin, Conseillière Pédagogique d'Education, Lycée Jean Renoir, Bondy
- Béatrice Potier, Principale, Collège Marie Curie, Sceaux
- Blandine Poteaux, Proviseure, Lycée Paul Robert Les Lilas
- David Proult, City councilmember, Saint-Denis
- Dominique Roy, Principale, Collège Romain Rolland, Bagneux
- Françoise Nagy, Proviseure, Antony
- Carole Zerbib, Proviseure Adjointe Lycée A. Blanqui, Saint-Ouen

Map of selected interview locations

Interview Questions

Je voudrais avoir une idée de « l'organigramme » du personnel laïcité.

Est-ce que chaque académie a la possibilité d'élaborer l'organisation de son équipe laïcité ?
Does each académie have the ability to organize its own laïcité personnel?

Quelle est la procédure pour qu'un enseignant ou un autre membre du personnel éducatif fasse appel aux services de la mission laïcité ?
What is the procedure for a teacher or other member of a school's staff to call on the laïcité office's services?

Quels services sont fournies aux équipes éducatives par la mission laïcité ?
What services does the laïcité office provide to educational staff?

Est-ce que les établissements sont tenus à informer le rectorat en cas d'un incident lié au non-respect des principes de la laïcité ? Comment se déroule-t-elle la réponse normale ?
Are schools required to inform the district office of an incident related to non-respect of laïcité principles? What is the normal response procedure?

Comment est le climat dans votre établissement concernant la laïcité chez les élèves et le personnel ?
How is the climate around laïcité in your school with students? With staff?

Pourquoi vous avez décidé de faire votre projet de laïcité? Est-ce qu'il y a eu un incident de non-respect de la laïcité ou est-ce que vous avez voulu faire une intervention proactive?
Why did you decide to do a laïcité project? Was there an incident where laïcité was violated, or did you want to undertake a more proactive intervention?

Est-ce que le processus pour faire appel au référent laïcité au rectorat est simple, clair, et évident? Comment est-ce que vous avez vécu ce processus?
Is the process for appealing to the laïcité officer in the district office simple, clear, and obvious? How did you experience this process?

Est-ce que vous avez eu la participation des parents des élèves pour faire votre projet? Avaient-t-ils des réactions, soit positives ou négatives, à votre projet?
Did you have the participation of parents in doing your project? Were there reactions, whether positive or negative, to the project?

A quel degré avez-vous de suivi de la part du rectorat ou du circonscription après votre projet? Est-ce qu'ils s'intéressent aux résultats?
To what degree did the district office provide follow-up to your project? Were they interested in the results?

Emic research variables

Variable	Conceptualization	Operationalization	How obtained
Race	Terms used by different racial groups to designate both their own group and other groups	*Noir* *Blanc* *Immigré* *Autochone* ("native") Pronouns (*Nous / Eux*) ("Us" / "Them")	Semi-structured interviews
Place	Geographic imagination of different urban environments in the Paris metro region	*Banlieue* *Paris intra muros* *Cités, HLM* (housing projects) *Zone en difficulté*	Semi-structured interviews; official designations by French government
European-ness	Sense of belonging to the larger European community	*Français* *Europe* *Européen* *Union Européenne* Other adjectives	Semi-structured interviews; blogs; official political party statements and platforms

Appendix B: Images and Figures

Figure 1

An aerial shot of the *marche républicanine* in Paris on January 11, 2015. The crowd was the largest public manifestation since the 1944 liberation of Paris during World War II (Charles Platiau, Reuters)

Figure 2

French President François Hollande marches at the head of the *marche républicaine* in Paris on January 11. On his left is German Chancellor Angela Merkel; to his right is Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, or IBK as he is often known.

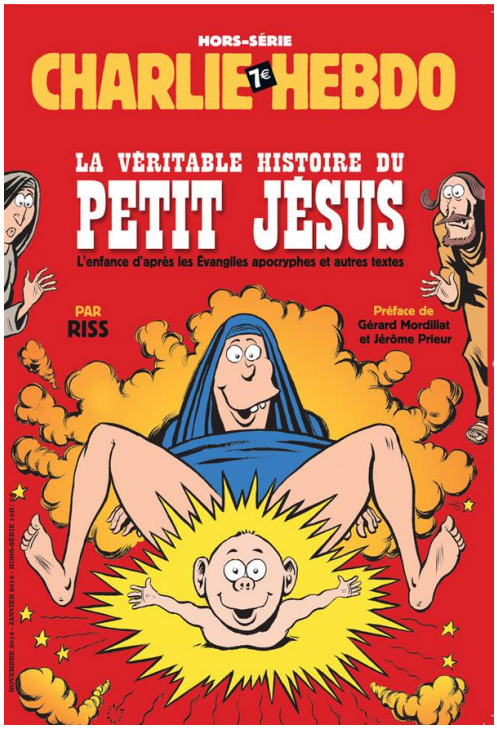

Figure 1

Figure 4

Two *Charlie Hebdo* covers from November 2014 (left) and July 2013 (right). The cover on the left is a "special issue" purporting to tell "The True Story of Lil' Jesus; the one on the right is dedicated to "slaughter in Egypt" and announces "The Koran is shit – it can't stop bullets."

Figure 2

A 2012 issue of *Charlie Hebdo* titled *Sharia Hebdo* referencing the installation of Sharia law in Egypt following the return to power of an Islamist government in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. Mohammed is depicted on the cover, telling the reader "100 blows with the whip if you're not doubled over laughing!"

Figure 3
Some of the victims of the March 12, 2012 attacks in Toulouse. Myriam is furthest right.

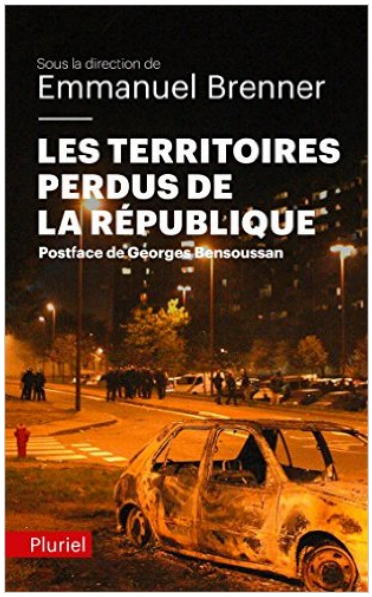

Figure 7

Emmanuel Brenner's 2002 book *Les Territoires Perdus de la République* (The Lost Territories of the Republic), a major influence on public opinion in the early 2000s on the state of the *banlieues*, their schools, and the students supposedly at the root of a vicious wave of anti-Semitic sentiment that swept France at that time.

Figure 8

A view of the *banlieue* Clichy – Montfermeil, with the "Des Bosquets" housing project in the foreground. Such an image is the dominant one in many French people's minds regarding the *banlieues* – endless concrete jungles of oversized, overcrowded housing projects breeding social pathology.

Appendix C: French Source Material

[i] "Il n'y a pas d'un côté les bons Charlies et de l'autre côté les mauvais pas-Charlies…La France n'est pas ça; la France, c'est aussi le débat…on peut être français et ne pas être Charlie." Nadar Alami, from an interview on Télévision France 1, January 14, 2015.

[ii] "…en ce qui me concerne, je me sens que je suis Charlie Coulibaly."

[iii] "Je te bute à la kalache." (Verduzier 2015)

[iv] "Ils l'ont bien cherché. On récolte ce qu'on sème à force de provoquer." (Verduzier 2015)

[v] "Après ces réactions nauséabondes, outrancières, j'ai grave les boules…et tous ces élèves qui disent, « Oui, mais ils ont quand même insulté le prophète ! » Hier une mère avait appelé sa fille au collège pour lui dire de ne pas respecter la minute de silence ! " Tourret, L. 2015. Ne nous étonnons pas de ce que les profs entendent dans les écoles sur Charlie Hebdo (Let's not be surprised at what these teachers hear about Charlie Hebdo in schools). *Slate* January 8, 2015. Available: http://www.slate.fr/story/96689/ecoles-charlie-hebdo.

[vi] "Moi, j'suis pour ceux qui l'ont tué." (Verduzier 2015) Here "l'" is probably referring to "Charlie" from the #jesuischarlie hashtag and slogan as if "he" were a person; as many teachers reported, it was unclear if many of these students knew any details of the events beyond a vague notion that some people had killed "Charlie" because "he" had insulted Islam. Indeed, as one teacher recounted, students who made these kinds of remarks in one breath asked him to see the cartoons that had provoked the violence in the next.

[vii] "Les enseignants dans toute la France ont compris que l'école serait en première ligne pour réagir à ces attentats, pour expliquer aux élèves l'inexplicable, et pour gérer leurs émotions et leurs reactions. Et dans la foulée je leur ai en effet adressé une lettre leur demandant non seulement de faire respecter la minute de silence le lendemain, mais aussi de créer des espaces d'échanges et de dialogue. Ils l'ont fait, je les en remercie. Ca ne s'est pas toujours bien passé. Des incidents ont eu lieu; ils sont même nombreux et ils sont graves et aucun d'entre eux ne doit être traité à la légère. Et aucun d'entre eux ne sera traité à la légère." Video and transcript available: www.najat-vallaud-belkacem.com /2015/01/14/najat-vallaud-belkacem-je-mobilise-la-communaute-educative-pour-repondre-par-des-actes-forts/.

[viii] "L'école est en première ligne, elle sera ferme pour sanctionner, pour créer du dialogue éducatif, y compris avec les parents car les parents sont les acteurs de la coéducation. L'école est en première ligne aussi pour répondre à une autre question car même là où il n'y a eu d'incidents il y a eu de trop nombreux questionnements de la part des élèves, et nous avons tous entendu les "oui je soutiens Charlie, mais…", Les deux poids deux mesures. Pourquoi defender la liberté d'expression ici et pas là ? Ces questions nous sont insupportables, surtout lorsqu'on les entend à l'école qui est chargée de transmettre des valeurs. Et il nous faut interroger sur notre capacité à le faire, c'est ce que le Premier ministre a fait devant les recteurs hier, c'est la raison pour laquelle je mobilise l'ensemble de la communauté éducative pour que nous ne répondions pas que par des discours mais par des actes forts." Video and transcript available: www.najat-vallaud-belkacem.com /2015/01/14/najat-vallaud-belkacem-je-mobilise-la-communaute-educative-pour-repondre-par-des-actes-forts/

[ix] Malgré ces initiatives, les futurs professeurs se sentent toujours mal préparés. "Je sais définir ce que sont les valeurs de la République, mais on ne m'a pas expliqué comment les transmettre", regrette ainsi Caroline Coubard, en M2 Meef d'histoire-géographie à Versailles.

Certains vont toujours jusqu'à refuser d'aborder les questions de laïcité, de liberté d'expression ou des attentats avec leurs élèves, ne sachant pas quoi dire ou par crainte des dérapages. En témoigne Ariel, professeur stagiaire de mathématiques à Toulouse, qui a préféré ne pas parler des attentats du 13 novembre avec ses élèves, malgré l'abondance des ressources mises à sa disposition par le ministère et l'Espé : "Je les ai renvoyés vers le professeur d'histoire, bien plus au fait de ces questions."

[x] Donc, moi n'ayant pas d'outil de…j'ai pris contact en fait avec l'académie de Créteil, donc, j'ai découvert en regardant le site qu'il y avait beaucoup de chargé de mission et donc qu'il y avait un chargé de mission sur les valeurs de la République. Et donc, j'ai pris contact avec elle. Et c'est là qui m'a aiguillée, qui m'a portée, je dirais, beaucoup de méthodes, en fait. Et aussi, moi, ce que j'ai trouvé bien, c'est qu'on a vu avec les professeurs de philosophie, c'est qu'elle a aussi m'a - disons - mis en lumière un certain nombre de choses qui pour beaucoup de professionnels…enfin, j'ai l'impression que, c'est mon experience, hein? Qui pour beaucoup de professionnels, en fait, la laïcité, on sait ce que c'est. Voilà, qu'on avait pas besoin d'en parler parce que ça nous semble évident, en fait. Comme quelque chose de…fin, voilà, qui pose pas de problème en quoi.

[xi] Tout comportement mettant en cause les valeurs de la République ou l'autorité du maître fera l'objet d'un signalement systématique au directeur d'école ou au chef d'établissement, d'un dialogue éducatif associant les parents d'élèves et, le cas échéant, d'une sanction. Aucun incident ne sera laissé sans suite.

[xii] La morale enseignée est une morale civique en ce qu'elle est en lien étroit avec les valeurs de la citoyenneté (connaissance de la République, appropriation de ses valeurs, respect des règles, de l'autre, de ses droits et de ses biens). Il s'agit aussi d'une morale laïque fondée sur la raison critique, respectueuse des croyances confessionnelles et du pluralisme des pensées, affirmant la liberté de conscience. En cela, cette morale laïque se confond avec la morale civique.

[xiii] Le problème, au fond, c'est qu'au lieu de réfléchir posément aux enjeux de la laïcité, on fait comme si certains Français étaient tombés tout petits dans la laïcité comme Obélix dans la potion magique – ils défendraient toujours les valeurs démocratiques et l'égalité hommes-femmes –, alors que les musulmans, eux, devraient en ingurgiter régulièrement quelques cuillerées parce qu'ils ne sont pas naturellement laïques. Comment voulez-vous vous sentir un citoyen comme les autres quand on vous reproche en permanence d'être un mauvais républicain ?

[xiv] Dans les propos de Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, l'accent est à nouveau mis sur l'apprentissage et le respect par les élèves des règles de civilité et de politesse, assorties d'un « dialogue éducatif » avec les parents et d'éventuelles sanctions. Un lien est enfin établi entre le « rétablissement de l'autorité des maîtres » (ce qui laisse entendre qu'elle aurait disparu) et les rites et symboles de la République. En arrimant ainsi l'autorité du maître à la transmission des valeurs de la République, nos responsables politiques semblent considérer que l'autorité d'un enseignant passerait exclusivement par le fait qu'il est le maître (« Je suis votre professeur, donc vous allez m'obéir ! »). Or, tout professeur sait qu'une telle affirmation est insuffisante en pratique. S'en tenir à rappeler son statut d'enseignant ne suffit pas.

[xv] "Ni la conviction religieuse, ni même le projet éducatif, mais une certaine interprétation de l'histoire française, affrontée à une interprétation rivale."

[xvi] Ces repères se construisent naturellement dès les premières années de la vie. Au côté des familles, l'école joue ce rôle général de creuset républicain qu'elle a déjà tenu dans l'histoire et doit être appelée à retrouver sa fonction de vecteur de l'attachement à la nation. Mais, aujourd'hui, puisque l'on n'y prend plus garde, « le lien entre l'école et la nation s'oblitère » (Contribution pour Fondapol sous le pseudonyme de Charles Feuillerade : « L'école de la liberté : initiative, autonomie et responsabilité »).

[xvii] Et c'est vrai que par exemple, par rapport au lycée de Mme. ---, on est, c'est plus difficile pour nous, parce qu'on a un publique beaucoup plus hétérogène, sans moyens. Alors qu'elle a un publique relativement homogène. Donc, même si elle n'a pas beaucoup de moyens, comme elle n'a pas besoin de faire un encadrement spécifique, c'est moins compliqué pour elle de gérer la situation.

[xviii] En fait, on n'arrêt pas de prôner la mixité sociale. Sauf que, en assouplissant la carte scolaire, il y a plus de mixité sociale. Voyez nous, nos bons élèves, veulent partir - en fait par exemple, sur Clichy, il y a trois établissements qui ont une image. Les parents se représentent : Louise Michel, personne veut y aller, tout le monde veut aller à Doisneau, et nous, on est au milieu. Donc en fait les élèves de Louise Michel veulent venir chez nous, et nos élèves veulent aller à Doisneau. [Vous] voyez ? Donc, ça veut dire qu'en fait, nous, on peut, l'année dernière par exemple, on a perdu une division de bons élèves. Après, on peut plus dire qu'il y a de la mixité sociale si on peut pas mélanger de très bons élèves avec des moyens, et les élèves qui sont en difficulté. Donc, il y a plus de mixité. Ici valable aussi pour le lycée. Parce qu'on fait, il y a eu une telle représentation négative de la ville que tout le monde veut en sortir.

[xix] Il y a plein de statistiques, ils font faits sur demande sur les établissements, les parents vont pas voir ça. C'est que du bouche à l'oreille. Ce qui fait, par exemple, on a un établissement super moderne, c'est pour en avoir plusieurs, il est extraordinairement moderne. L'enseignement par les professeurs est assez avant-gardiste, ils ont tous ça. Ils ont les projets, c'est vraiment, ils ont par rapport à La Canale où j'enseignais l'année dernière, ils sont très, très en avance et La Canale, c'est très, très en retard. Mais ça, les parents, ils savent pas, ils veulent pas le savoir, tous ce qu'ils veulent savoir, c'est à La Canale il y a des gamins qui sont riches, et de milieux favorisés, qu'ils veulent pour leurs enfants aillent parmi cela, parce qu'ils considèrent que comme ils sont riches et de milieux favorisés, ils seront dans un milieu où ils réussiront. C'est complètement fou! C'est complètement fou! Il y a de l'alcool dans les établissements qui di[sent] qu'il n'y en a pas, il y a aussi de la cigare en parlant pas de la drogue, alors ici je l'ai pas vu, les gamins qui, il y a certainement, c'est pas aussi visible, quoiqu'il y a une souffrance aussi…

[xx] **Chris** : Est-ce que c'est à vous ou à l'inspection de régler des demandes de dérogation ?

M: Alors, normalement c'est l'inspection qui affecte. Parfois, ça dysfonctionne. Quand il y a un dysfonctionnement, c'est nous qui nous débrouillons tout. Ça fait quinze jours qu'on fait ça. Quinze jours. On m'a affecté, ils m'ont affecté, deux classes de trop. Deux divisions complètes de trop.

Zoé : Ca peut arriver ? C'est des erreurs… ?

M: C'est la question que je me pose quand même vraiment depuis…

Zoé : Parce que là, c'est…

M: Bon. J'ai annoncé trois cent cinquante [trois cent treize] places, on m'a affecté trois cent treize [trois cent cinquante] élèves. Voilà.

[xxi] En fait, parce qu'on nous dit, « à la limite, charge à nous. » Ecrire un projet, et de demander les moyens supplémentaires en fonction de la situation. Les moyens qui ne sont pas obligatoirement donnés. Et ce qui nous a posé la difficulté, nous, c'est par exemple justement, comme c'est pas prévu, ça veut dire que le temps d'écrire un projet pédagogique, de faire remonter en disant, « voilà, on voudrait mettre sur pied, on a des élèves qu'il le faudra accompagner avec les moyens supplémentaires, » et, à ce moment –là, sauf que c'est pas prévu avant la rentrée scolaire, c'est plus compliqué à mettre en œuvre.

[xxii] Donc, lorsque effectivement la seconde mesure prévoit que rien ne soit laissé sans suite, ça veut pas dire qu'on va systématiquement opérer par sanctions si c'est comme ça que c'est parfois entendu, par sanction systématique avec une liste d'infractions…c'est pas comme ça qu'il faut voir des choses. Ce qui est signalé, ce sont toutes les attitudes, les comportements et des discours qui peuvent sembler en amont au regard de la manière dans les élèves s'inscrivent au sein de l'école. La première démarche qui est demandée, c'est d'entrer dans une posture de dialogue avec l'élève.

[xxiii] Et, voilà, ça s'est fait comme ça, c'est juste par rapport une demande des élèves, en fait. Donc, c'est par rapport d'un enquête qu'on a fait avec les élèves…

[xxiv] Il y a certains élèves qui nous ont dit, d'ailleurs, qu'ils comprenaient pas, qu'en Angleterre, par exemple, ça se passait très bien, ils comprenaient pas…en fait ils personnalisent la laïcité en fait comme quelque chose de, un carcan, un interdit absolu, enfin… Donc, ça les repousse un peu, quoi. Donc, c'est pour ça que je pense que c'était très intéressant en fait qu'ils puissent avoir le regard de Mme. Fumet qui leur rapportait…et puis, toute l'association. Alors, pourquoi toute l'association ? Parce que moi, ce que je, j'ai constaté lors de cet échange, c'est que en fait l'échange entre pairs, en fait, entre jeunes, ça passait très, très bien. Donc en fait, le fait de voir les gens d'une association qui représentent, parce que les représentants de cette association, qui représentent une de leurs religions, ils se sentaient un peu entre pairs, quoi. Comme Mme. Fumet, c'était vraiment "la laïcité," quoi. Une certaine, ben, une représentation de l'institution, en fait. Donc là, ils ont appris des choses, mais c'était pas du tout le même message, quoi. Pour eux. Enfin, pour moi c'était exactement le même. C'est exactement le même message que donnait l'association. Ce sont de vivre ensemble.

[xxv] Aucun problème concernant la laïcité entre les élèves et le personnel n'avait émergé au sein de l'établissement jusqu'à ce qu'un non-évènement survienne récemment. Cette histoire montée en épingle par des journalistes s'est déroulée des mois après que l'on prenne la décision de travailler la laïcité en accompagnement personnalisé.

[xxvi] J'ai pas d'agressions dans la communauté, j'ai pas - on peut avoir un, comme ça d'un élève qui dise un truc malheureux. Après, on les calme et puis ça passe à autre chose. Je ne crois pas que les gens fassent beaucoup de choses. Je ne crois pas. Sur la laïcité, non, parce que si les règles sont claires, c'est établi, chacun arrive, ça chante, c'est ça, la règle. C'est s'il y a un distinctionnement ou quelqu'un qui une pression des stéréotypes veut amener à changer d'avis que peut-être on va discuter avec les parents mais, c'est assez bien fait.

[xxvii] Il y a pas beaucoup de choses à respecter dans le cadre scolaire en ce qui concerne la laïcité. On nous demande de – il y a un texte de loi, il y a une loi de 2004, je pense, 2004, vous vous souvenez ? (**Chris** : Oui) – quand les problèmes ont commencé, mais c'était très clair, on a des consignes. C'est-à-dire que on se couvre pas, on se voile pas, on ne met rien d'apparent réellement ou aller se démarquer des autres.

[xxviii] Donc moi, j'ai pas de soucis, j'ai pas d'élèves qui viennent voilées ni rien, une fois que la règle qu'on — — tout le monde sais pas avec tout. Mais une croix, ma petite — — je vais pas avec une croix, et je viens pas avec un coiffe, nous, au niveau du personnel, c'est clairement interdit, que quelque chose soit visible. Mais quand c'est les enfants…mais quelque chose d'insignifiante. Si j'ai un petit foulard sur une tête, je peux considérer que c'est pour faire joli. C'est pas forcément visible.

[xxix] Il faut tuer les français. Je suis dans le camp des terroristes. Les musulmans ont bien fait, les journalistes méritaient leur sort. As reported in *Le Monde* January 29, 2015 according to *Nice Matin*, which declined to provide its source.

[xxx] Je suis d'accord avec les terroristes d'avoir tué les journalistes, car ils se sont moqués de notre religion.

[xxxi] La première démarche qui est demandée, c'est d'entrer dans une posture de dialogue avec l'élève. C'est de comprendre. C'est de comprendre ce qui se passe. Sachant qu'un propos, alors, bien sûr, il y a des propos qui ont choqué, au lendemain des attentats contre *Charlie Hebdo,* des propos extrêmement violents, extrêmement antirépublicain, la première préoccupation de l'école, c'est de demander "comment se fait-il qu'on arrive à des propos comme ça?" La préoccupation du corps enseignant devant les attentats de *Charlie Hebdo* c'est de voir ces jeunes gens et de se dire, "ces jeunes gens qui ont été capable de tirer sur — — et puis, qui ensuite ont commis des attentats —, ils sont passés par nos écoles. Qu'est-ce qu'on a loupé? Qu'est-ce qu'on a raté?

[xxxii] **A:** Je ne suis pas non plus dans un quartier qui problème (?) gêné, c'est très mélangé…mais il y a pas de communautarisme. Où je suis, j'ai un peu de tout dans le bassin, j'ai des — — à commencer par moi! Qui pourrais prétendre à d'autres origines, si on peut voir en arrivant, c'est pas gênant pour le fonctionnement de l'établissement, c'est mon septième année ici. Moi, j'ai du tout dans ma cour, du noir, du blond, les arabes, du…

Chris: Donc, vous considérez que le mixité social qui existe déjà, ça fait en sorte que…

A: Ça n'a, fin, ça ne fait pas de communautarisme ou quelque chose qui puisse faire pression - oui? - parfois, quelque chose qui fasse pression, quelque chose qui fasse en sorte qu'un conflit naisse. Je n'ai pas de conflits de cet ordre-là du tout.

[xxxiii] Alors, dans le quatre-vingt-treize, … vous avez tous ce secteur de Saint-Denis, hein ? Qui est, quand même, un petit peu connu, pour les difficultés, mais, alors, paradoxalement le 93 a une telle culture, une tradition de la difficulté sociale et de l'intégration des populations d'origines étrangères que les choses consonnent plutôt bien, parce que autant il y a un problème de mixité sociale très forte, un problème de pauvreté très fort, autant il y a une vraie culture au niveau éventuel d'école, de travail différencié, d'intégration, de prise en compte des difficultés, et ils sont assez forts quand même. Ça arrive de faire des choses assez extraordinaires. En particular …côté de St.-Ouen vous avez des … très dures mais des équipes qui font un travail … bon, c'est vraiment, c'est vraiment extraordinaire.

[xxxiv] [C]omment trouver sa place, être en phase avec les gens qui vous entourent, conjuguer l'être et le paraître, atténuer l'écart entre dominés et dominant, résister au corps social sans déchoir, rester soi-même en paraissant dans la norme, préserver son identité sans subir les foudres du jugement collectif ?

Mais dans le cadre de cette école de la République, lieu de mixité sociale, caisse de résonance des problèmes d'immigration, de sans-papiers, ces questions, et les rapports de pouvoir et de résistance à l'autorité qu'elles sous-entendent, les élèves de François et leurs parents se les posent aussi. Dans *Entre les murs*, la difficulté à être ensemble, à se comprendre et à refuser la résignation sans provoquer la violence et l'exclusion, est vécue des deux côtés de l'estrade.

Le film raconte comment François, en dépit de son talent à improviser, à mettre ses élèves à l'aise, à converser d'égal à égal, à respecter la subjectivité de chacun, se heurte à l'indiscipline, à l'insolence, au refus, à la vanne, à la rébellion, et dérape, oublie le poids des mots, fait un faux pas, brouille son seuil de tolérance. Et comment il frôle sans cesse l'impasse, comment sa classe véhicule homophobie ou antisémitisme, comment un élève d'origine malienne renvoyé après conseil de discipline est condamné à retourner dans son pays. Il y a une constante dans le cinéma de Laurent Cantet : celle de l'échec, de la défaite de l'individu face au corps social.