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## **When Ideas and Ideals Exclude: Reexamining France's Language Planning and Development of the French Nation**

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## Introduction

The recent wave of electoral victories of populist parties and candidates across Europe and North America has triggered a veritable flood of political commentary and academic texts on “democracy and its discontents” (to use the title of Howard Wiarda’s 1995 volume). There is no shortage of purported causes of the current troubles of liberal democracy. Some pundits and scholars seek them in the economic dislocation associated with globalization and its impact on the white lower-middle class; others blame the populist surge on “hybrid wars” launched by anti-Western authoritarian leaders; still others see it as an electoral revenge of populations in Europe and North America that feel threatened culturally by the migration surge from non-Western countries. Common to these and many other explanations is that they seek the cause of the ongoing crisis of liberal democracy in personalities, events or factors exogenous to the Western liberal democratic model itself. In a sense, Western liberal democracy is treated as a sort of an innocent bystander in her own life.

What most of this commentary and analysis misses is the possibility that the current crisis of democracy may, at least in some measure, be attributed to factors endogenous to modern democracy itself, or more precisely, its current form in the West. In other words, the ongoing crisis may very well be a crisis of legitimacy of democracy itself. Political legitimacy is “too unwieldy and complex concept to be grappled in a frontal assault” (Weatherford, 1992) but most will agree that no matter what we include on the list of its component parts – political trust, participation, a sense of political efficacy, and so on – legitimacy of democracy hinges on inclusion, common membership or citizenship understood both politically and legally. The fact that the punditry and academia have been so quick to attribute the causes of the current crisis to external factors and events instead of promoting some soul-searching and analysis of past failures (to put the current crisis in a perspective) is a sign of complacency about the liberal-democratic model that has swept the West since the purported “end of history” in 1989.

This complacency is reflected in wide currency that certain concepts and theories have gained in social sciences including studies of nationalism. One such concept is the purported dichotomy of “civic” and “ethnic” nations and its geographic corollary, the “Western” and “Eastern” paths to and models of nationhood, respectively. In this view, civic, (unsurprisingly) Western nations are associated with territory- and values-based nationalism, inclusive democratic communities of “political creed” with voluntary membership, while their ethnic counterparts found elsewhere (the “Global East”) are based on culture or ethnicity, thus being intrinsically exclusionary, with community membership “assigned at birth,” and have authoritarian political tendencies (Kohn, 1944 and 1965; Plamenatz, 1975; Smith, 1991; Greenfeld, 1992, Ignatieff 1995, among others).

Although the idea of civic-ethnic dichotomy still enjoys the status of a received wisdom in studies of nationalism, it has been increasingly challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds (Kymlicka, 1995; Yack, 1996; Nielsen, 1996; Brubaker, 1999;

Nieguth, 1999; Smith, 2000; Kuzio, 2002; Clark, 2010). Similar critical attitude to the notion of the dichotomy of civic and ethnic nations has emerged in other fields of social science and humanities, particularly history, sociology of language, culture and literary studies, religious and Catholic studies (Bell, 1995 and 2001; Forde, Johnson, & Murray, 1995; Turville-Petre, 1996; Hastings, 1997; Wells, 1999; Kumar, 2003; Lavazzo, 2004; Sahlins, 2004; to name a few). So far, however, this literature has gone largely unnoticed in the field of studies of nationalism.

Our goal in this paper is to contribute to the ongoing reassessment of the purported dichotomy of civic and ethnic nations by re-examining the language policy in France and its relationship with the republican ideals underlying the French national identity. Since Kohn, the French model has been held as a classic example of the civic inclusive nation based on all-encompassing (territorial), values-based and culture-blind nationalism. It is therefore particularly interesting to examine the French case to see if the liberal and republican governments have pursued discriminatory policies against their citizens on the basis of their ethnic and cultural traits, such as native-spoken language or dialect. By discriminatory we mean a policy aimed at systematically marginalizing individuals in either political-legal sense, effectively disfranchising them, even stripping (or threatening to strip) them of their citizenship, or social sense, by putting them beyond the pale of active, participating citizenry.

Our inquiry draws on the recent scholarship by historians of the French nation, sociologists of the French language, and students of French culture and literary studies. We do not claim to have discovered some previously hidden evidence – the evidence has already been put out there by our colleagues from other fields of social science and humanities. What we intend to do is to bring that evidence and expert opinions to bear on the ongoing debate about veracity and analytic utility of the concept of civic-ethnic dichotomy of nations.

### The dichotomy of “civic” vs. “ethnic” nations: Conceptual issues

The scholarship questioning the empirical accuracy and analytic utility of the civic-ethnic dichotomy of nations is large and growing. We do not attempt to provide a review of that burgeoning literature. Instead, we will briefly sum up the key points made by the critics of the concept and then outline a proposed alternative framework.

One critical point raised in the scholarship concerns the nature of the relationship between civic and ethnic nations. Kohn’s original argument was that these were two different types of nations, the former emerging in the “new monarchies” of Western Europe with their centralized states and (purportedly) culturally and ethnically homogenous populations united in pursuit of civic values and liberal constitutional principles, while the latter emerging in the multinational empires in Central and Eastern Europe and representing communities of culture and descent (Kohn, 1944, in Hutchinson and Smith, 1994). Anthony Smith was the first to question this aspect of the Kohnian historical-conceptual dichotomy of civic-ethnic nations. He argued first that all modern nations including civic ones were based on some pre-modern ethnic core or an “ethnie” (1989). In his subsequent work, Smith suggested that every nationalism and hence national identity based on it contains civic *and* ethnic elements: “No nation, no

nationalism, can be seen as purely one or the other, even if at certain moments one or other of these elements predominate in the ensemble of components of national identity” (Smith, 2000, p. 25). This point has also been reiterated by Clark (2010) who noticed that “nationalisms change shape and identity over time and place and, indeed, in most cases, will incorporate aspects of *both* the civic and ethnic” (p. 47).

The complementary, rather than contradictory, relationship of civic and ethnic elements of the national identity is acknowledged by many students of nationalism. Kuzio has stressed that “*all* states in the West share cultural horizons, values, identities and historical myths in a common identity that is the ‘nation’” (2002, p. 24; emphasis in original). Other scholars have even argued that in fact the Western states, particularly in the nineteenth century, *needed* and *used* various aspects of ethnicity and common culture to create cohesive national (read, civic) communities which otherwise would suffer from weak, anaemic bonds among their members (Weber, 1976; Schoepflin, 2000). Kymlicka has argued that the “non-cultural [and non-ethnic] conception of national membership,” which is said to be the hallmark of a *civic* nation and national identity, is simply “mistaken” (1995, p. 24).

Another criticism of the concept of civic-ethnic dichotomy has focused on the under-specification of the notions of civic and ethnic nations. Both have been used in a highly abstract, value-laden and even moralistic manner. According to Nieguth, the categories civic and ethnic “insufficiently recognize variations within either of the national types they posit” (1999, 156). He pointed out that the ethnic conception of nation may be of little analytic utility since it may mean in practice such different things, as ancestry (putative descent), race, language or culture. Whereas an identity defined in broadly *cultural* terms (e.g., language, national church or religion, household and public culture, etc.) is not necessarily exclusive since it leaves the door open for acceptance of individual “aliens” through cultural or linguistic assimilation or religious conversion, an identity defined in terms of ancestry, place of origin, or race, is exclusive by definition. Reflecting this more nuanced understanding, some scholars have even abandoned the old dichotomous framework in favor of a trichotomous one, distinguishing among civic, ethnic (ancestry-based) *and* cultural elements or types of identity (Shulman, 2002; Janmaat, 2006).

Smith’s attempt to define civic and ethnic nations with at least some degree of analytic precision (1991) has exposed another conceptual weakness of the purported dichotomy. Among several defining features of the civic nation, he listed “the idea of *patria*, a community of laws and institutions with a single political will.” In case of the ethnic nation, the place of *patria* and law is taken by “vernacular culture, usually language and customs” (1991, p. 12). (This distinction almost mirrors Meinecke’s notions of *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation* (1907). The nation defined by Smith as a “community of laws and institutions with a single political will” is essentially Meinecke’s state-nation whereas people bound together primarily by common speech, traditions and customs are the stateless cultural-ethnic nation.) Thus, it seems that the presence or absence of the state accounts for the difference. This puts in question, however, the very idea of dichotomy because civic and ethnic “nations” are not then in the same category: If the former is a civil-political entity, a nation or, more precisely, a state-nation, the latter is a non-state cultural entity or an ethnic group.

One more conceptual problem which we find particularly questionable is the idea that civic nations are inclusive, while their ethnic counterparts are inherently exclusionary. However, the possession of “laws and institutions” or a “single political will” cannot and does not *a priori* mean inclusiveness – laws, institutions, or “political will” may systematically exclude or marginalize some individuals politically and legally on the basis of such features as race, religion, language or speech, national origin. Similarly, language, culture and religion are not inherently socially exclusionary but may in fact provide non-group members with societal acceptance and inclusion through linguistic, cultural assimilation or religious conversion. Whether political institutions, laws and civic ideals or culture, broadly defined, are inclusive or exclusive is an empirical question after all.

A related point has been made in the literature, namely a civic nation may simultaneously display an inclusive attitude in political-legal sense toward some foreigners seeking its membership (residence or citizenship) but not others based on some ethnic criteria. Nieguth (1999) has demonstrated that civic openness of the pre-war Canada was conditioned by a cultural “ideal of Anglo-conformity.” Foreign-born individuals seeking membership of Canada’s civic nation would have to not only pledge their allegiance to the democratic principles of the nation’s government and thus show that they share the nation’s values but would also be expected to “assimilate into the culture of the dominant British group in order to be recognized as members of the nation.” And it was this expectation of cultural assimilation as a precondition for membership in the civic nation that precluded the application of civic openness to immigrants of non-European, “non-White” extraction (Nieguth, 1999, pp. 166-169).

### The alternative analytic framework

Based on the critical scholarship, we propose an alternative analytic framework. First, it would require the abandoning of the idea of dichotomy of civic and ethnic nations. The categories of civic and ethnic as applied to nations should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. In fact, these are two aspects or dimensions of the national identity, civic-political and ethnic-cultural. Thus, the civic ideology of the nation and its national culture including language, customs, symbols and myths complement, not contradict each other.

The second element of the proposed framework requires abandoning the misconception that the categories of civic and ethnic are synonymous with inclusion and exclusion, respectively. Civic ideals, political ideas and values of a nation may close or open up to an individual membership in a nation (citizenship in the legal sense) as well as participation in civic and political affairs of the nation (citizenship understood as active involvement and participation in the affairs of an independent political community). Similarly, ethnic and cultural features of the national identity may hold the possibility of societal acceptance (through linguistic assimilation or acceptance of multiculturalism) or may effectively rule it out (i.e., the emphasis on the shared ancestry or place of origin).

Finally, the third element of the proposed framework is the recognition of the dynamic nature of the national identity which stems in large part from the interplay between its civic-political and ethnic-cultural aspects. The national identity is not static or immutable.

Civic ideals and political ideas, which may appear rather suddenly and attain the status of the nation's political creed as a result of a political or social upheaval, may have an impact on the nation's ethnic-cultural boundary. (Thus, the events in England in the mid- and second half of the seventeenth century and particularly the Revolution of 1688 redefined England not only in political-civic terms as a nation united in attachment to the Parliament, Crown, the Bill of Rights and the trial by jury but also in ethnic-cultural terms, as a "Protestant nation," the one which left Catholic inhabitants of the British Isles (as well as Non-Conformists and Jews) beyond its pale through a variety of civil disabilities and societal ostracism.)

Similarly, the ethnic-cultural aspect of the national identity (which mostly operates on a different – much slower – clock than the civic-political dimension of the identity) may influence the nation's civic ideals and political ideas and thus impact the legal as well as political-territorial boundaries of the nation. (In certain historical periods and circumstances the ethno-cultural aspect of the nation's identity may undergo through an accelerated change, as seems to be the case with the current large-scale migration in many European countries as well as the United States.)

#### Language and identity in France: Some preliminary considerations

It has been frequently argued that in France, language has always been "une affaire d'État," a matter of concern for the state (Ferdinand Brunot quoted in Flaherty, 1987, p. 312). Hence, policies of successive French republican governments aimed at linguistic assimilation were not so much civic-republican as peculiarly French concern, just a modern continuation of the pre-1789 language policies of the Old Regime monarchy. But is it really the case? While it is certainly true that pre- and post-1789 French governments all have been involved in language affairs in one form or another, did they pursue the same goal, namely linguistic assimilation of their first subjects, then citizens? And were their motives essentially the same, forging a nation for initially the royal and subsequently republican French state?

The traditional view has maintained that this indeed has been the case, that, since the Middle Ages already, the French state has pursued a deliberate policy of forging a national unity by imposing on its subjects-citizens a common language. Hence, language policy is seen as some kind of "linguistic colonization" of the "hexagon" by the Parisian monarchy and then Republic (Martin, 1948; Bertaud, 1983; Citron, 1987; Nagy, 2013).

But a closer reading of history of the French state and its language policies calls for a more nuanced argument. While it is certainly true that, throughout its long history, the French state got involved in language affairs on more than one occasion, it was the post-1789 Republics that used language policy as a means of forging "la Nation française, une et indivisible." The Old Regime monarchy had never entertained the idea that it could or should regulate the speech of its "humbler subjects" or somehow homogenize them culturally (Lodge, 1993; Bell, 1995; Cohen, 2003). In a typical statement from that period, an eighteenth-century priest and magistrate wrote, "There is no Power capable of reforming manners of speech consecrated by usage" (Bell, 1995, p. 1410). To the extent that the monarchy felt the need to have the population of the

medieval and early modern France imagine themselves as part of a national community of sorts or to have a common reference object – France as a *patrie* rather than merely a *pays* – it would pursue this goal by promoting the people’s belief in the divine origin of their monarch and sovereign judge and their faith in the “Gallican” Catholic Church, the trinity of “Une foi, une loi, un roi” – “One faith, one law, one king” (Lodge, 1993, pp. 210-11; McCrea 2015, p. 18).

To recognize the different implications of language policies of the Old Regime monarchy and the post-1789 Republics for the collective identity of the inhabitants of France, we have to distinguish among three different aspects of “language planning” which is defined as “deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes (Cooper, 1989, p. 45). Language planning pursued by the state may take several different forms of legislation (Judge, 1993, p. 7; Ager, 1999, p. 1):

- The so-called status policy or functional allocation of a language to specific public domains by means of legislation mandating the use of a particular language in certain public fora (the courts, Parliament, state administration, business, advertising, etc.).
- The corpus policy or planning of the language structure, standardization of grammar, spelling, pronunciation, etc. Historically, in France, this was done through the Académie française to which the French state had “delegated” the power to set the linguistic norms.
- Finally, the acquisition and learning of language is regulated as an aspect of educational policy.

Traditionally, it is the status policy that has attracted the attention of historians of the French nation and state as it has been concerned with the use of language in highly visible public domains such as state administration and the courts. The status policy confers on a language prestige and compels its acceptance by the elites (Ager, 1999, p. 1). Denying a (minority) language or dialect an official recognition or juridical status may effectively disfranchise minority language users, impair their social mobility and economic prospects, even exclude them de facto from political and civic life of the nation. However, the impact of the status of a language on the identity of its bearers may not be particularly consequential, if at all.

It is the acquisition policy and, to a lesser extent, corpus policy that may have far-reaching consequences for the identity of members of a linguistic group. In fact, denying or even outlawing the teaching and learning of a language or dialect, particularly in the context of the modern state with its compulsory and ever-expanding public education, is the surest way to profoundly affect the identity of the linguistic group and its individual members. In an extreme case, it may lead to the disappearance of a language-centered identity in one or two generations.

Similarly, the standardization of a language is more than just re-formatting the population’s oral and written speech. The language quality has always been a way of registering one’s acceptance and status in a society. Ostracism, social marginalization of individuals and groups that do not speak the “proper” language amounts to erecting

of a de facto boundary that would prevent some (who may be citizens in the legal sense) from becoming active, participating citizens of the nation.

Our inquiry will demonstrate that traditionally the Old Regime monarchy worked – for a mostly pragmatic reasons – to elevate the status of French by means of royal edicts (such as Ordonnances de Villers-Cotterêts) and, to some extent, the corpus policy (sub-contracted to the Académie française). Domestically, the status of French was promoted in all public domains, but “particularly those that had been the prerogative of Latin” (Judge, 1993, p. 11), while internationally the monarchy sought the advancement of French vis-à-vis other European languages as the language of the cosmopolitan aristocratic culture and diplomacy. It was hardly concerned with the fact that its “humbler subjects” spoke *patois* and *idiomes* different from the language of Ronsard’s poems and Racine’s dramas.

After 1789, however, successive French republican governments became concerned – for their own ideological reasons – with the private speech of their citizens. To influence the population’s speech, French governments sponsored the diffusion of linguistic norms through “standard” grammars and dictionaries which they would recommend for use in public and private schooling and through educational legislation whose goal was to make the population, particularly the peasants, learn French and unlearn their *patois* and non-French tongues. Thus, while the French state has certainly been involved in language affairs throughout its history, it was the Republican France that sought to align the boundary of the speech community residing in its borders with that of its civic ideal, the French nation.

Any inquiry into national identity of a people is expected to set and explain its temporal parameters, particularly the start date of the inquiry – when did a given nation emerge? In the French case, scholars have often asked instead, when did France emerge or, paraphrasing the title of Gwyn Williams’ book, “when was France?” By conflating history of France or the French state with that of the French nation, these scholars have argued that a fully self-conscious nation forged by the progressive, centralizing monarchy was already present in the late Middle Ages or the early-modern age (Palmer, 1940; Martin, 1948; Beaune, 1991). Others, mindful of the distinction between State and Nation and adopting the modernity of the latter, have maintained that the French nation was the creation of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment or the Revolution (Kohn, 1944; Brubaker, 1989; Greenfeld 1992). Still others argued that the French nation began emerging only in the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries, fostered by the *école républicaine* of the Third Republic (Weber, 1976). As Beaune noted, depending on one’s predefined notion of a nation, “we could find the birth date for the French nation in almost any period at all” (1991, p. 2).

In this paper, we will eschew the question of when was the French nation? As we noted above, an answer to this question depends on one’s definition of nation. For our argument, it is important not when a French nation (variously defined) emerged but when the civic nation of France emerged, a nation whose government’s policies and laws would reflect its civic and political ideals, at least in some measure. The sine qua non condition for civic nation is the doctrine of popular sovereignty and clearly that

doctrine took root in France at the time of the French Revolution. Whether a fully “self-conscious nation” (Martin), “national consciousness” (Bell) or “mental representation of collectivity” (Beaune) existed in France before the Revolution is not critical for our inquiry. Even if there were a French nation under the Old Regime, it was the monarch and not the nation that was sovereign. Hence, the French state’s language planning (whatever it meant in the pre-modern or early modern France) would reflect not the ideals and ideas of the French nation but beliefs and interests of the Valois or Bourbon monarchy. The relationship between the civic-political aspect of the nation’s identity and the ethnic-cultural one, in this case the speech of the population, becomes an issue only in the era of popular sovereignty, that is, following the Revolution of 1789.

But if there were no civic and sovereign French nation before 1789, why to look at the language policy in that period too, as this paper does? The answer is that by examining language measures taken under the Old Regime, we will be able to contrast them with the language and educational policies of the post-1789 republican governments. The benefit of this “before-and-after” research design is that it would make it exceedingly clear that, with regard to language planning, the motives, means, and goals of the Old Regime monarchy and the post-1789 liberal and republican governments were very different. While under the Old Regime, speaking a *patois* or non-French *idiomes* did not denote “foreignness” to the French monarchy and *patrie*, the Republic could not accept such linguistic (and associated with it, cultural) particularism and deliberately worked to extirpate regional non-French languages and dialects. The civic-republican ideal of “one and indivisible” nation was supposed to be made up of individual citizens but never groups of any kind.

Thus, our argument that France is perhaps the best example of how civic ideals or ideology of a nation may impact its ethnic-cultural boundary by marginalizing, depriving or even excluding some of its own legal citizens cannot be countered by the claim that the French case is an exception because language in France has always been “une affaire d’état” – it has been so certainly but for different reasons and different goals.

### Language policy in France before 1789

It is well-known that the pre-modern and even early modern France was characterized by considerable linguistic diversity. Majority of the inhabitants spoke varieties of dialects that emerged from Vulgar Latin following the conquest of the Roman Gaul by the Germanic tribes in the fourth century AD. The principal groups of dialects were Langue d’Oil in the north, in the land of the *trouvères*, and Langue d’Oc in the south, in the land of the *troubadours*. The dialect spoken in the north-central province of Ile-de-France (sometimes referred to as Francien) gradually displaced other Langue d’Oil dialects and eventually evolved into the modern French. Southern dialects were mostly comprised of Occitan and its varieties, and Provençal.

While within these two principal groups, different dialects were more or less comprehensible to each other, the difference between the linguistic north and south was considerable. An often-quoted letter from Jean Racine on his trip to Provence in 1661 illustrates France’s linguistic divide:

Once I had reached Lyon, I could no longer understand the local language and could no longer make myself understood.... Things are even worse in this locality (Uzès). I can assure you that I have as much need of an interpreter as a Moscovite would have in Paris. (Lodge, 1993, p. 194)

In addition to these two groups of dialects or *patois*, the population of what eventually became France spoke in the peripheral areas Western Romance (Catalan and Gascon), Germanic (Flemish, Alsatian), Celtic (Breton, Basque) and Italian (Corsu) languages.

What is less well-known is that many learned contemporaries of the Old Regime not only regarded the linguistic pluralism of the King's realm as natural, but praised it as "beneficial" and a special "gift of the Holy Spirit" to God-elect Kingdom of France. Some even viewed linguistic diversity as a sign of special power of the French kings. "One sixteenth-century writer described the diverse idioms spoken in France as loyal subjects of the monarch, "the languages which the most Catholic King of France commands" ... A medieval historian declared that France was superior to England because [it] was home to more languages" (Cohen, 2003, pp. 167-168).

To the extent that in the pre-modern period the French monarchy was concerned with language matters, it pursued two distinct goals: Raising its own prestige by associating with the glory of French as a learned and cultured language (Bell, 1995, p. 1410) and ensuring that the courts "did not become too remote from the population" (Ager, 1999, p. 21). In both cases the prime target of royal language measures was Latin (or "the bastardized administrative Latin held in contempt by the cultured court of the king," as a French grammarian put it) rather than the regional languages and dialects spoken by the monarchy's "humbler subjects" (Bruneau quoted in Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 112).

The most frequently cited evidence of "language policy" under the Old Regime is the Edict of Villers-Cotterêts (1539), a decree by the King François I ordering the replacement of Latin as the language of judicial proceedings, government and business documentation. It had been traditionally maintained that the purpose of the Ordinance was to impose the language spoken in the royal domain – the region of Île de France – on the polyglot provinces of the kingdom. Some scholars argued that this was evidence of "activist" language policy of the monarchy and even "linguistic imperialism" (Citron, 1987; Fumaroli, 1998; Beaune, 1991). Yet, according to Bell (1995, 2001) and Cohen (2003), the best scholarship on the subject – Peyre (1933), Trudeau (1983) – is far from certain whether the King's directive that judicial proceedings be conducted "en langage maternel François" should be understood as a reference to French and not to locally spoken vernaculars.

This understanding – that the Villers-Cotterêts did not prohibit, if not endorsed, the use of vernaculars to replace the unintelligible Latin – is supported by other evidence as well. Thus, the edict of François' predecessor in 1510 regulating the administration of justice in the province of Languedoc ordered that "investigations, enquiries and criminal proceedings be conducted in the 'common language or the language of the region' (en vulgaire ou langage des Pays)" (Grau, 1992, quoted in Ager, 1999, p. 21; see also Cohen, 2003, p. 186, endnote 20). François' own similar edict for Provence

promulgated in 1535 explicitly authorised the use in the local courts of the spoken language of the region (“vulgaire du pays”) (Cohen, 2003, p. 169). At the very least, according to Certeau and his co-authors, “what counted for the monarchy was less to make French spoken [in private domains] than to make it understood” in certain public domains, such as the courts (Certeau et al., 1987, quoted in Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 111).

Thus, it was the use of Latin rather than provincial dialects or vernaculars that was targeted by the royal edicts in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century France. The emergence of French in this period as the language of the legal profession (the King’s *gens de robes*) owed less to a deliberate royal policy (except for several cases on the periphery discussed below) than to the fact that French was the language of the *Parlement de Paris*, one of the thirteen appeals courts – and certainly the most prestigious one – that had jurisdiction over nearly half of the kingdom.

Indeed, the monarchy’s attitude towards local idioms was sufficiently vague to lead some legal commentators to interpret Villers-Cotterêts to endorse the use of any of France’s regional languages in the place of Latin. When the judges in Toulouse law court endeavored to apply the 1539 law to their own day-to-day operations, they ordered that “all the ordinary notaries of this court must transcribe their rulings and acts of justice in French or in the vernacular tongue. (Cohen, 2003, p. 170, emphasis in original).

In several notable exceptions, the monarchy did resort to a certain degree of coercion to introduce French in the business of regional and local government and courts in some areas of the kingdom. Typically, these were recently acquired peripheral territories (Bearn, Roussillon, Flanders, Alsace, Lorraine, and Corsica), where – with the exception of Bearn – not only commoners but the local elites spoke a “foreign” language.

Bearn, a small autonomous principality in the western Pyrenees, was a different case. By the end of the sixteenth century, its notables had already adopted French for private communication (imitating the increasingly prestigious French court and, at the same time, distinguishing themselves from the lower ranks of the population) but they doggedly insisted on the use of Occitan in courts and official business as a sign of the principality’s autonomous political status. In fact, in Bearn the local notables understood the political significance of language long before it was recognized in Paris (Cohen, 2003, p. 172). When in 1620, the king Louis XIII marched with a small army into Pau, the capital of Bearn, and announced the annexation of the principality, he directed the regional Parlement (appeals court) to abandon Occitan and adopt French. It was the first example of explicit prohibition of the use of a vernacular in courts. As Cohen argues in his insightful case study of the Bearn episode, the royal edict “clearly assigned considerable political weight to the choice of language in public contexts” and “marked a notable shift in [the monarchy’s] attitude towards language.” However, it was an *ad hoc* response to the local defiance of the King rather part of a pre-conceived program. Illustrating the limited purposes of the Old Regime’s language policy, the monarchy did not attempt to stamp out the vernacular in other public fora. In fact, Bearn’s local law code continued to be reprinted in Occitan and the Estates of Bearn were allowed to

continue recording their deliberations in Oc up until the Revolution (Cohen 2003, 175-179).

As in the case of Bearn, the language measures which were introduced later in Roussillon and Flanders (in 1660s), Alsace (in 1685), Lorraine (1748), and Corsica (following its acquisition in 1768) were for limited purposes and were concerned exclusively with the use of French in government and judicial proceedings. It was only in the case of Roussillon that the monarchy did attempt to force a change in the speech of the local population by setting up a system of primary schools where children were to be taught in Catalan *and* French. In Alsace and Flanders, “measures to instill French cultural identity through education along the lines of Louis XIV’s efforts in Roussillon were [totally] absent” (Cohen, 2003, p. 179).

These varying experiences in four peripheral regions [Cohen’s study is limited to the seventeenth century cases only] over an entire century illustrate that the monarchy had no ready-made national-language program in the early modern period. Instead, it contrived a range of policies based on its experiences administering newly acquired territories. (ibid.)

Bell (1996) arrives at a similar conclusion:

[T]here is very little evidence that the monarchy pursued any sort of systematic national language policy at all before 1789. True, under Louis XIV a number of royal edicts insisted upon the administrative use of French in peripheral areas of the kingdom. Yet on closer examination it becomes clear that these acts were directed exclusively at newly conquered areas (Flanders, Alsace, Roussillon), where elites as well as common people spoke a “foreign” tongue. Even here, moreover, coercive measures were nonexistent, and the issuing of edicts ceased within a generation or two of annexation – the time it took for the elites of the new provinces to become bilingual.

The view is also shared by Lodge (1993) who argues that

The *Ancien régime* remained until the end a sprawling multicultural, multilingual community, a federation of provinces which owed the allegiance to the Crown, but jealously guarded their local laws and customs...The King was concerned with the fidelity of the provinces, not their homogeneity...

[While] the state in the *Ancien régime* was engaged to some extent in language planning – status planning with the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts (1539) ... and corpus planning with the setting up of the Académie Française (1635) ... these developments do little to demonstrate the [the monarchy’s] commitment to a conscious policy of linguistic uniformization through the assimilation of the *patois*-speaking provinces. (pp. 210-211)

Flaherty (1987), who argues that the Old Regime monarchy did intend to achieve language uniformity of France, among other means, through education, cites as supporting evidence the opening in 1688 of the College des Quatre Nations, the goal of which was “to further teaching of French” in recently-acquired areas of Alsace, Flanders, Roussillon, and Pignerol (a small part of Savoy). However, the peculiar circumstances of the establishment of the College (three days before his death in March

1661, Cardinal Mazarin bequeathing part of his vast fortune to a new college, whose building would also house the Cardinal's mausoleum!) and the extremely small number (sixty) of students admitted from the four recently-acquired provinces makes highly implausible Flaherty's interpretation of Mazarin's deathbed move as evidence of the state program of diffusion of French.

Gradually, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, France's provincial aristocracy, courtrooms, administrations, educated and propertied urban classes have adopted French in their private speech. However, this did not result from a royal fiat. As Bell argues,

It did not take [royal] legislation, however, to make the position of the local languages distinctly marginal in a secular society. By 1789, increasing communications and literacy, the rising availability of print matter, the prestige of the royal court, and the integration of urban elites throughout the country had all markedly influenced linguistic practices. (Bell, 1995, p. 1411).

But while in the increasingly Paris-centered country local languages and dialects had become "distinctly marginal," they continued to be widely spoken by the lower classes in provincial towns and the countryside. They even enjoyed some space in print (German in Alsace, Occitan in Languedoc and in Bearn), local government (Occitan was permitted for government business in Bearn, in Roussillon and Alsace many local governments continued drafting their official records and documentation in Catalan and German, respectively), and even in courtrooms (some courts in Flanders continuing to keep their records in Flemish well into the eighteenth century). (More on this, see, Bell, 1995, pp. 1409-1411; Bell, 2001, p. 171; Sahlins, 1991, p. 125; Cohen, 2003, p. 180).

As Dieckhoff (2005) aptly summed up the linguistic policy of the eighteenth-century monarchy,

The objective the Bourbons was to promote French as the language of the State as well as that of high culture without seeking to standardize linguistically the country in an authoritative manner. Whether the peasants of Anjou or Burgundy continued to speak patois or that the people of the Roussillon or Navarre spoke Catalan or Basque posed no threat to a power in which the rural masses and the plebeians of the cities had no vocation to participate. (p. 3, emphasis added)

It is safe to conclude that, under the Old Regime, the language policy was aimed almost exclusively at elevating the status of French. This language policy was neither overly coercive nor did it pursue the goal of creating a monolingual society. Hence, it did not affect the multiple particular patois- and idiom-based identities of the inhabitants of France.

As stated earlier, the view of France's linguistic diversity as natural was not limited to the monarchy itself but was shared also by its learned contemporaries. Canvassing educational reform proposals drawn up in a century between 1680 and 1780, Bell found two projects only that aimed at linguistic homogenization of the country. His conclusion is that, "Even treatment of peasant education rarely raised the linguistic question" (Bell, 2001, 275, endnote 9). In fact, when the Catholic Church, as part of its renewal effort in the seventeenth century, carried out a large-scale campaign of re-evangelisation of the

French peasants, “priests [particularly Jesuits] devoted considerable time and energy to learning the many languages of France, speaking them, cataloging them, and above all using them to spread the word of God” (Bell, 1995, p. 1426).

In the premier edition of its Dictionnaire (1694) *Académie française* defined the word “nation” (in which category it included France) as “the inhabitants of a common country, who live under the same laws, and use the same language” (quoted in Bell 2001, 275, emphasis added). But it was not until a century later that the first attempt was made to create a French nation defined, among other things, by this novel, modern idea of monolingualism.

### Language policy and national identity in France in 1789-1799

Between 1789 and 1799, the attitude and policy of successive revolutionary governments toward the linguistic diversity of France went through several permutations. In the earliest stage of the revolution, the new government’s attitude toward the language diversity of its citizens was that of benevolent tolerance and even accommodation. The government’s policy was concerned with “providing the means by which to ensure that practical solutions such as translation could enable the [linguistically diverse] people nonetheless to participate in the new democracy” (Ager, 1999, p. 24). On 14 January 1790, the Constituent Assembly ordered that all decrees be translated and posted in local languages (*idiomes*) rather than limited to French. (There is some disagreement among scholars whether the decree concerned non-French languages only since, as Nagy notes, “revolutionary legislation often differentiated between *idiomes* (languages) and *patois* (dialects)” (2013, p. 139). The title of the decree itself used the word “idiomes” (Décret du 14 janvier 1790 concernant la traduction des décrets dans tous les idiomes de la France). In any case, in its decree of 7 November 1792, the Assembly directed the Ministry of Justice to translate laws “en langues allemande, italienne, catalane, basque et bas-breton” (Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 113).

But pragmatic toleration and accommodation of France’s linguistic diversity proved to be short-lived. Following the departure of the revolutionary leaders, like Mirabeau and Lafayette, who were largely unconcerned with the language question, others began treating the linguistic diversity as an impediment for the realization of their vision of a French nation based on liberal values, attachment to the republican state, and cultural uniformity. Most prominent among them were three individuals. The Abbé (Henry) Grégoire was a progressive priest from Lorraine, who had made his name by advocating the emancipation of Jews and, following the adoption of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, swore an oath of allegiance to the civil government. Bertrand Barère was a former provincial magistrate who turned into one of the most feared members of the Committee of Public Safety. Finally, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand was another progressive cleric, a champion of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and, as his contemporaries described him, a veritable “bishop of the Revolution,” all of this despite being the scion of one of the most ancient and distinguished families of the French nobility. While this cadre of revolutionary reformers disagreed to some extent in their respective understandings of the nature of the problem of linguistic diversity, they

all were in agreement that the solution required attaining linguistic uniformity through legislative fiat. Instead of the Old Regime's trinity of "One faith, one law, one King," the new nation of France would be forged under the motto "One state, one nation, one language" (Judge, 2000, p. 44; McCrea, 2015, p. 18).

Already in summer 1790, when the adoption of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy requiring priests and bishops to take an oath of allegiance to the civil government caused a schism within the French Church and unrest in some rural areas, Grégoire blamed the resistance on the peasants' "ignorance of French" (Bell, 2001, p. 175) and undertook to organise a survey to get a better idea of the linguistic situation in the country (Judge, 1993, p.13). Meanwhile, in September 1791, his colleague, Talleyrand, a member of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Assembly, submitted a Report on reform of education which required, among other things, "the establishment of primary schools in each commune where the teaching would be in French and in which French would be taught as a subject" (Judge, 1993, p. 13). In the ensuing debate, Talleyrand argued that the primary purpose of schooling was to form "good citizens." His proposal turned out to be too radical to the taste of the majority at the Constituent Assembly which chose not to act on it. But as the Revolution became progressively radicalized, two years later, on 21 October 1793, the popularly-elected legislature of the now republican France – the National Convention – put Talleyrand's ideas in a decree establishing a national system of primary schools where the children would be instructed in French and "develop republican values, love of the of the homeland, and the taste for work" (Décret relatif à l'organisation de l'instruction publique, 30 vendémiaire, An II).

After the declaration of war against Austria in April 1792 and the invasion of the Prussian army in August, the skies began darkening over the non-French languages spoken in the peripheral areas of France, particularly Alsatian. A nineteenth-century local historian, Eugene Mühlenbeck, wrote, "The worst crime of the Alsatis was their idiom. They spoke the language of the slaves of Austria." Accordingly, on 17 December 1793, the National Assembly simply banned the use of Alsatian (Ager, 1999, p. 28).

But why stop at Alsatian? On 27 January 1794, Barère delivered his Report to the Assembly targeting all non-French languages of the country's periphery. He did not merely suspect disloyalty of the speakers of Alsatian and other languages – the issue for him lay much deeper. According to Barère, the use of a particular language could "purify" or "harm" and "corrupt" its users. While French, and consequently those who spoke it, had been liberated by the Revolution, non-French tongues "remained languages of slaves and despots" (Flaherty 1987, 319-20). In a widely-quoted passage from his Report, Barère alleged a direct link between the use of these tongues and attacks against the Revolution: "Federalism and superstition speak Breton; emigration and hatred for the Republic speak German; counterrevolution speaks Italian; and fanaticism speaks Basque" (Certeau *et al.*, 1975, pp. 291-299, in Ager, 1999, p. 25; see also Bell, 2001, p. 175 and Nagy, 2013, p. 139). Echoing Talleyrand's views, Barère declared that inculcating of the ideal of republican citizenship must be the "first law of education."

To be a citizen, one must obey the law, and in order to obey law, one must know the laws... The legislator speaks a language that those who must execute and

obey [the laws] do not comprehend... We have revolutionized government, laws, customs and habits, costumes, commerce and even thought; let us also revolutionize language, which is their daily instrument. Let us break these instruments [non-French tongues] of harm and wrong. (Rapport du Comité de salut public sur les idiômes étrangers et l'enseignement de la langue française, 8 pluviôse, An II, emphasis added)

Acting on Barère's report, the National Assembly decreed on the same day that a teacher of French should be appointed to every commune where the population spoke Breton or "foreign languages" to ensure that the population would not be "abused" by the counter-revolutionaries. The latter included departments of Moselle, Haut- and Bas-Rhine (comprising Alsace and parts of Lorraine), Corsica, Alpes-Maritimes, and Basses-Pyrénées (Ager, 1999, p. 25). Thus, the languages targeted, in addition to Breton, included Alsatian German, Corsican, Catalane, and Basque. The teachers would be required to "teach French every day as well as the declaration of the rights of man to all young citizens of both sexes, whom parents or guardians are obliged to send to public school... On *Décadi* days [every tenth day of the revolutionary calendar] teachers [were supposed to] read aloud for adult citizens and translate the laws of the Republic, preferably relating to agriculture and the rights of the people" (Décret qui ordonne l'établissement d'instituteurs de langue française dans les campagnes de plusieurs départements dont les habitants parlent divers idiomes, 8 pluviôse, An II).

While the target of Barère's "overboiled rhetoric" (Bell) were the non-French *idiomes*, Grégoire added to the target list the Romance dialects (*patois*) and particularly Occitan and its varieties in the South. In his own Report submitted on 6 April 1794 and unambiguously titled "On the need and ways to extirpate dialects and universalize the use of French," Grégoire painted a grim picture of the linguistically incoherent nation. He estimated that "at least six million people, particularly in the countryside, are ignorant of French ("la langue nationale"); that an equal number is nearly incapable of sustaining a conversation; [and] as a result, the number of those who speak French does not exceed three million, and probably the number of those who write it correctly still less" (Rapport sur la Necessite et les Moyens d'anéantir les Patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la Langue française, 16 Prairial, An II).

The linguistic proposals of Grégoire, like those of Barère and Talleyrand, were based on the presumed intrinsic link between the use of French and the attaining of the ideals of republican citizenship.

All that has been said calls for the conclusion that in order to extirpate all prejudices, to develop all truths, all talents, all virtues, to melt all citizens into the national mass... to facilitate the functioning of the political machine, one must have a language identity... To enjoy the freedom of the city, were not the Romans obliged to prove that they could read and swim? ... From this moment the language of liberty [i.e., French] should be the order of the day, and the zeal of the citizens should forever proscribe the dialects [*les jargons*], which are the last vestiges of the destroyed feudalism. (ibid., emphasis added)

As Lehning argues, Grégoire's ideal of the republican nation "represented a common unity against a particularism" associated with the Old Regime which the Revolution sought to eliminate (1995, p. 13).

[Patois and French] stood for the countryside and French civilization, respectively. Patois was not only speech but also a primitive, passive, and irrational cultural place... Knowledge, history, and prose, the "discourse of action," were in French. The difference between the French language and the local patois was therefore clearly marked, and membership in the French nation meant use of the French language. Patois was a trace of something that no longer had a place in "France," and the destruction of patois was the necessary price of admission into the French nation. In the responses to the inquiry, there is a shift from language to participation in or exclusion from national identity. (ibid.)

As Bell insightfully remarked about the proposed treatment of the *patois*, what had been material for satire for the Enlightenment authors, now became grist for the mill of the revolutionary policy (Bell, 2001, p. 175). And what a policy! Fired up by Grégoire and Barère, the National Convention passed a decree on 20 July 1794 prohibiting the use of "idiomes ou langues autres que le française" for public or private acts under the penalty of imprisonment and dismissal (Décret sur la langue française, du 2 Thermidor, An II). In Alsace and Roussillon, "something of a limited 'linguistic terror' took place, with non-French publications and commercial signs suppressed, non-French-speaking personnel dismissed, and plans drawn up for forcible transfers of population," in particular, resettling Alsatians elsewhere in France (Bell, 2001, p. 175).

The whirlwind of the Revolution's draconian language measures came largely to an end with the Ninth of Thermidor and the fall of Robespierre and his clique. The next significant legislation adopted by the National Convention on 17 November 1794 (Décret relative aux écoles primaires, 27 Brumaire, An III) permitted the use of the vernacular languages ("idiôme du pays") as a supportive means in primary schooling. The retreat from the previous insistence on sole use of French in public schools "was forced by the sheer impracticality of implementing the original instruction" (Blanchet, 1992, cited in Ager, 1999, p. 28).

An area where Grégoire and his supporters continued to wage a rear-guard action on behalf of French was its proposed use in the Catholic church as the liturgical language instead of Latin. In 1798, the Council of the Gallican Church examined the issue but declined to endorse Grégoire's proposal. A compromise decision was that "prayers and the administering of the sacraments would be in French, while the Latin mass was [to be] retained." Three years later, Napoleon's *Concordat* reversed that decision and returned to the use of Latin for the whole service (Judge, 1993, pp. 13-14).

In a conversation with Emperor Napoleon in 1804, Dominique Garat, a one-time minister of justice and a deputy of the National Convention in charge of its Committee of Public Instruction, remarked about the impact of the Revolution on the minds and habits of the inhabitants of France: "The Revolution passed over them like a great phenomenon which they little understood and which left them what they were before" (Jacob, 1990, p. 51). Garat's observation might be true as indeed, "for millions of French citizens, the French Revolution was conducted in a foreign language" (Lyons,

1981, p. 264). But even it was true, it was also a fact that the Revolution's ideal of the monolingual civic nation "inserted, deeply, into French society a whole centralist linguistic-cultural mentality, which was to produce its effect progressively during the nineteenth, and more brutally, in the twentieth centuries" (Blanchet, 1992, quoted in Ager, 1999, pp. 28-29).

### Language policy and national identity in France in 1800-1940

The dominant view is that after the Revolution, "subsequent regimes remained cognizant of language differences, [but] until the late nineteenth century they mostly gave up on any attempt to eliminate the problem" (Bell, 2001, p. 177). It was the Third Republic that in the 1880s renewed the attempt of its Jacobin forerunners to change the private speech of its citizens and thus to align the ethnic boundary of the French nation with its civic ideal of a monolingual republican nation. This view overlooks, however, some interesting developments in the mid-nineteenth century which are quite pertinent to our argument. Specifically, we have in mind the language practice and policy of the July monarchy and the short-lived Second Republic as opposed to those of the Third Republic.

Between Napoleon's Coup of Eighteenth of Brumaire (1799) and the end of the Bourbon Restoration (July 1830), little happened in terms of language policy. In fact, under Napoleon's institutional reforms some of the linguistic "achievements" of the Revolution were actually rolled back. In particular, the Concordat of 1801 transferred the primary education back to the Church which had never keen on the teaching of French and, even less so, in French. In addition, the use of French in elementary schooling declined further due to the shortage of teachers.

The liberal July Monarchy of the "Citizen-King" Louis Philippe instituted a major reform of the school system setting up in 1832 a dual national system of private and public primary schools. But the Guizot Act, which followed a year later, did not mandate the diffusion of French through schools. The goals of the primary elementary education were defined in a fairly conservative fashion as including "moral and religious instruction, reading, writing, some elements of French and calculus, and the system of weights and measures" (Article I, Loi sur l'Instruction primaire, 28 juin 1833). The goals of the primary upper education did not even include a reference to French. Some scholars cite Weber's interpretation of the Guizot Act, namely that it intended that "the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic [to] furnish essential skills; [while] the teaching of French and the metric system [to] implant or increase [skills] of unity under French nationhood" (Weber, 1976, p. 331, cited in McCrea, 2015, p. 20). However, a closer examination of the Guizot Act does not seem to warrant such a bold interpretation.

Under the Restoration and the July Monarchy, it was the practice of teaching as well as certain changes regarding the corpus policy of French that carried traces of the Revolution's linguistic ambitions. The former was conditioned by the fact that the teaching profession still included large numbers of teachers and education functionaries who had been shaped intellectually and professionally in the era of the Revolution and hence were committed to the goal of "francisation" of their pupils. Changes in the corpus policy came in part from the work of grammarians, such as Charles Chapsal and

François Noël, and the *Académie française*, and in part from the government legislation. Since the early 1820s, the teaching of French rested on perhaps the most authoritative nineteenth-century French grammar text by Noël and Chapsal, *Nouvelle Grammaire Française*, which had gone through no fewer than eighty (!) editions by 1889. Since 1835, it has been supplemented by the new, sixth edition of *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*. This edition marked, according to the online publisher of the French Academy dictionaries, Classiques Garnier, “the change from monarchical language to republican language, the change from the old world to modernity.” Since 1832, the “correct” grammar of *Nouvelle Grammaire Française* and the spelling of the Académie became compulsory for all official documents as well as entry examinations for any civil service job. Thus, “the days when everyone wrote as they wanted were over.” The “bonne orthographe” (just as the “bon usage” of the courtiers of the Old Regime) became a de facto mark of a social “class” separating some parts of the still semi-fictional “one and indivisible” French nation (the aristocracy and bourgeoisie) from others, such as the workers and peasants.

A major change pertaining to the language acquisition policy occurred on the watch of the Second Republic. In March 1850, the Legislative Assembly adopted an act sponsored by the former Minister of Public Instruction, Frederick Falloux, that extended the control of the Church over the national education system. Private, mostly Catholic secondary schools were granted an official status; municipalities were allowed to transfer the administration of public secondary schools (les collèges) to the local curé, and the clergy and male and female members of the ecclesiastical orders were allowed to teach in primary and secondary schools without special educational qualification (Harrigan 2001). The strengthening of the role of the Church in the national education came at a time when the Church, having finally shed most of the liberal prelates and clergy appointed at the time of the Revolution and Napoleon, was experiencing a revival of traditionalism and anti-modernism. A key aspect of the revival of the tradition was the renewed emphasis on the use of the *patois* by the clergy in its guidance and instruction of the faithful, the same *patois* which the Revolution had sought in vain to root out and, which French sociologist Gabriel Le Bras in his *Études de sociologie religieuse* (1955) saw as an essential part of the traditional culture centered on religion “which feeds the Church ... [and] thwarts the invasion of modern ideas” (quoted in Vigier, 1979, p. 199, translation mine).

The mid-nineteenth century resurgence of the vernaculars – owing in some measure to the impact of the Falloux Law but in an even greater measure to their own natural tenacity – could no longer be ignored even by the partisan media of the Second Republic. According to a historian of the French Second Republic,

All historians who studied the patois regions under the Second Republic – be it Alsace, Var, the Alpine region or Limousin – have been struck by the efforts made ... to translate into the local dialect songs, poems, newspapers, almanacs, which conveyed national slogans as well as local claims. While *La commune* of Avignon publishes the Provençal poems of Roumanille, *Le Démocrate du Rhin*, like *Le Démocrate du Var* – both fierce partisan supporters of the “Jacobin vulgate” [French] - offer to their readers, in 1849-1850, chronicles or Sunday items written in Alsatian or Provençal. (Vigier, 1979, p. 201)

A decade later, the 1863 linguistic survey commissioned by Victor Duruy, the Minister of Education of Napoleon III, revealed that almost a quarter of France's population of thirty million were monolingual speakers of patois or non-French peripheral tongues (Lodge, 1993, p. 202). The situation was particularly bad – from the point of view of the French nation champions – in the South and in the peripheral areas. The number of Alsatians living in communes where no French was spoken outnumbered those who lived in communes where French was in use (550,000 against 545,000, respectively). In Brittany, four-fifths of the population of 627,000 in the department of Finistere lived in communes where no French was spoken. In Côtes-du-Nord and Morbihan, the situation was much like in Alsace (Vigier, 1979, p. 202). Country-wide, of some four million school-age children, more than four hundred thousand did not speak the “language of the nation” at all and about one and half million could not write in it properly (Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 115; for more period statistics, see Vigier, 1979, pp. 202-203 and Weber, 1976, pp. 498-501). An 1867 survey of conscripts showed that roughly 70 percent spoke French habitually, some 20 percent spoke quite unsatisfactory (“très imparfaitement”) French, and 10 percent spoke no French at all (Lodge, 1993, p. 202).

Thus, according to the linguistic portrait of the French “nation” on the cusp of the language reforms of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, French was a foreign or second language for roughly half of the pupils who would habitually speak their patois, parlers, and idiomes at home and in their communities. Various degrees of exposure to French at the primary school did not seem to leave any more trace on these children from lower class families, particularly, in the countryside, than Latin left on the more affluent students attending colleges and lycées in towns and cities. As Weber sums up the situation,

The modern [i.e., Renanian] view of a nation as a body of people united according to their own will and having certain attributes in common (not least history) was at best dubiously applicable to the France of 1870. It is clear that France did not conform to [the] model of a nation. It was neither morally nor materially integrated; what unity it had was less cultural than administrative. (Weber, 1976, quoted in Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 114)

A renewed concern with the linguistic diversity of the nation emerged in the Third Republic. Its first decades were the time of an intense and bitter conflict between the Republicans and secularists, on one side, and the Monarchists and clericals, on the other. In this context, just as a century ago, the language divide overlapped with another societal cleavage that was threatening to rip the Republic apart, that between the Church and the increasingly anti-clerical state. The influence of the increasingly anti-modernist Catholic clergy over the peasants was reinforced by the fact that “in many villages, the only individual who could converse (much less read or write) in French was the local priest” (Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 116). In a typical report from 1880s, an inspector-general of the *Académie de Bordeaux* stated upon his visit to the *Pays basque* that “the attitude of the [local] clergy...is eminently national and doubly Basque, hardly favorable to the spread of French which is in its eyes the vehicles of foreign and suspect ideas, of the spirit of insubordination and disbelief” (Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 115).

In this context, the republican camp started seeing again the use of dialects and non-French languages not only as a sign of linguistic heterogeneity and social backwardness but equally, if not more importantly, as a threat to their vision of the “one and indivisible” civic French nation, a threat that, among other remedial measures, would require de-clericalization of education and “civilizing and standardizing instruction from republican schoolmasters and officials” (Bell, 2001, p. 180). Just as the Grégoires and Barères of the Revolution, their spiritual descendants in the Third Republic could not admit that “one could be a French citizen while maintaining a 'primary culture' – Basque, Breton, or Catalan” (Dieckhoff, 2005, p. 4).

Things came to a head first in 1881-82 when the government of Jules Ferry pushed legislation (the Ferry Laws) replacing the previous dual system of private and public schools largely staffed by the clergy and members of ecclesiastical orders by the secular state school system (*école républicaine*) with exclusively lay school teachers. The primary schooling was thus not only thoroughly de-clericalized but also made free and obligatory for all, with French as its sole language of instruction. “Henceforth French identity, as learnt through its language [at school], would be secular and state-oriented” (Ager, 1999, p. 129).

Weber (1976, p. 313) and other historians vividly describe the ruthless methods used by the republican schoolmasters and teachers to stamp out the linguistic diversity among their pupils.

The prohibition of speaking patois, together with spitting on the ground, was first in line among instructions for students which were placed on school walls throughout the country. Any violation of the rule entailed humiliation: the “rebel” had to wear a clog [typically, a wooden shoe with a hole in it or a piece of broken slate] around his neck, which he was only able to get rid of when another unfortunate student inadvertently spoke a word in his vernacular language. The one who wore the symbole at the end of the day could anticipate a punishment task. It comes as a little surprise that humiliating measures related to regional languages are called “*la vergonha*” (shame) in Occitan (Nagy, 2013, p. 140).

Perhaps, the best testimony to the ruthlessness and single-minded determination of the French state administrators to root out the *patois* and non-French tongues were the words of Georges Leygues, the Minister of Education in 1902: “At this point, the duty of the ministers of education and all the teachers, particularly in the primary schools, is not merely to teach in French but to ensure that regional languages and local dialects are systematically excluded from school, even from the school grounds” (quoted in Ager, 1999, pp. 29-30). When in 1901-05, the successive Republican governments of Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes, as part of their assault on the established status of the Catholic Church, banned the use of the vernaculars in religious seminaries, French would finally be imposed throughout the country with no exceptions.

By the 1920s, it appeared that the republican French state’s activist and intrusive language planning policies had finally achieved their goal of rooting out the patois and non-French regional tongues. Weber’s insightful remark sums up best the shift that had taken the place in less than four decades between the passing of the Ferry Laws and the post-World War years: “The situation in 1920 was just the reverse of what it had

been in 1880; bilinguals were more awkward in patois than in French; the majority, and most importantly, the young were [now] on the side of the national language” (Weber, 1976, cited in Jacob and Gordon, 1985, p. 117, fn. 45). Having been de facto “proscribed” in public and private communication by the Ferry Laws and the anti-Church and anti-clerical laws of 1901-05, the patois and regional languages and patois became relegated almost exclusively to the sphere of folklore for the next half a century.

The vernaculars did not go down with a fight, sometimes literally. While earlier their champions had been largely associated with the clerical circles and conservative parties, in the years leading up to World War II some organizations championing the rights of France’s linguistic minorities drifting toward nativism and fascism and under the Occupation and the Vichy Regime some even started collaborating with the Nazis. Thus, the Basque-language periodical *Aintzina* (Forward) launched by Abbe Pierre Lafitte in 1934 took a hard-line stance toward the French government, particularly after the formation of the *Front Populaire*. His followers later collaborated with the Vichy Regime (Laroche 1999, p. 11). In Flanders, Vlaamsch Verbond (Flemish Union) founded by Abbé Gantois, a vocal supporter of Flemish, “imitated the pro-Nazi attitude of some Belgian antidemocratic Flemings.” In fact, Gantois was known for his calls for German annexation of West Flanders (ibid.). *Breiz Atao* (Brittany Forever), which started after World War I as a French-language (!) periodical focusing on Breton cultural identity, gradually drifted toward the kind of “blood and soil” ideology and separatism becoming associated with the Breton Nationalist Party in the early 1930s. Of course, none of these activities could turn around the fortunes of the “proscribed” languages and dialects. They did illustrate though the contemporary discontents of the French civic nation model.

### Language Planning after 1945

France’s language planning policies since the end of World War II illustrate a new set of challenges, as perceived by the champions of monolingual French civic nation. After more than a century and a half during which neither the status of French domestically nor the corpus of the language were not even remotely threatened, the post-war economic, commercial and technological developments suddenly called for the “defense” of the “national language.” In 1964, René Etiemble, professor of comparative languages at the Sorbonne, sounded the alarm by his best-seller *Parlez-vous français?* It did not go unnoticed, as President de Gaulle appointed two years later the “Haut Comité de la langue française” and put his Prime Minister, Georges Pompidou, in charge of it (Vines, 1988, p. 24). The work by the Haut Comité aided by the “Comité interministeriel pour les affaires francophones” (1974) and another thirteen (!) terminology commissions set up in major government departments and agencies culminated eventually in the passage (by a unanimous vote!) of the “Loi relative a l’emploi de la langue française” (the Bas-Lauriol Act named after its co-sponsors) in December 1975. The Act essentially prohibited the use of English in commerce and workplace including business documentation, user manuals, advertising, etc. In all matters affecting consumers, French was the only language to be used and the responsibility for the applying of the Act was given to the Ministry for Consumer Protection (Vines, 1988, p. 25; Ager, 1996, p. 44). The Haut Comité was transformed

into “la Délégation Générale à la langue française et aux langues de France” with the responsibility for the corpus policy of French – particularly, with creating French alternatives for rapidly appearing Anglicisms – shared with the Académie française.

The defense of the status and corpus of French was continued by the amendment of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic in June 1992, inserting in its Article 2 an explicit reference to French as the “language of the Republic.” Two years later, Parliament adopted the Law relating to the Usage of the French Language (named the Toubon Act after Jacques Toubon, the Minister for culture and Francophonie) which made the use of French obligatory in five domains: consumer protection, employment, education, audio-visual communication, and international colloquia, congresses, and events held in France. The Act also made mandatory the use of official terminology by civil servants and anyone exercising a public role. In the best traditions of the Jacobin governments of the First Republic, violations are punishable by fines and even imprisonment (Ager, 44).

How did France’s regional languages and *patois* fare in the post-war period? After the Liberation, the initial reaction of the authorities in Paris to the war-time collaboration of some language nationalists with the Nazis was to raise pressure on the vernaculars and their users. Thus, the use of German was completely prohibited in local schools in Alsace for some time, French was reinstated as the sole language of education at the University of Strasbourg (initially this measure had been introduced in 1924). The half-hearted pre-war measures to relieve pressure on Breton (which was allowed to be used in church schools in 1930 and as an elective class in state primary schools in 1938) were reversed. (More on this period, see Ager, 1996, pp. 45-46.)

In 1951, however, the French state relented allowing non-French languages to return to classrooms, albeit to a very limited extent. The Deixonne Act of 1951 (named after its sponsor in the Chamber of Deputies, a Socialist MP, Maurice Deixonne) was the first important piece of legislation affecting language acquisition and learning policy in public schools since the Jules Ferry Laws. It permitted the teaching of Basque, Breton, Catalan, and Occitan for one hour per week as an elective course. (In 1975, the number of weekly teaching hours was increased to three for senior high school students.) Noticeably, the Deixonne Act did not include Alsatian and Corsican, dismissing dialects of foreign languages, German and Italian. Corsican was finally admitted to the list of regional languages recognized by the law in 1973, while Alsatian had to wait until 1982, when the de-centralization reforms brought by the Mitterrand Socialists opened the way for teaching Alsatian in preschools (Ager, 2003, p. 142). Since 2003, the Education Code, which collected and superseded all previous education laws and decrees, allows the teaching of “langues et cultures regionales” by an agreement between the authorities and the local community where one of the regional languages is in use. Teachers are ever allowed to “use regional languages in primary schools and kindergartens whenever they can benefit from this for the purposes of education, including the study of the French language” (Nagy, 2013, p. 141).

Did the post-1950 limited moves by the French state signify a reconsideration in the attitude of the civic nation toward non-French speech of some of its members? We think that would be too optimistic a conclusion. The view of French as the essential element of the French republic and nation and the treatment of regional languages and *patois* as a threat to the unity of the nation are still very deeply rooted in the republican psyche.

“If we, Frenchmen, retreat from our language, we will simply be swept away. ... It is through [the medium of] our language that we exist in the world other than as one country among others,” declared President Pompidou in 1969 (quoted in Jouhannet 2014, translation ours). Countering the de-centralization reforms of President Mitterrand, which also included the recognition of the regional languages, Michel Debré, the architect of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, argued that it would conflict with

the work of generations who have created France – the Nation; with the secular and republican idea of ... French citizenship; with the great work of public education. [These reforms] confuse the respect we owe to provincial traditions with deliberate attacks on Republican unity; they are in effect a desire to tear the Nation apart. (*Le Figaro*, 9.8.1985, quoted in Ager, 1999, p. 19)

Defending his language bill in 1994, Jacques Toubon proclaimed, “We have duties toward the whole nation: French is the language of the Republic, it is the language of national integration ... French is a language of liberty, of democracy ...” (quoted in Ager, 1999, p. 89).

It would be hard to deny that the language of Pompidou, Debré, Toubon is reminiscent of the defense of French and attacks on the *patois* and regional languages of Barère, Grégoire, Ferry. But the ironic twist of it is that if the latter were representatives the left-wing politics, the former are Gaullists or other right-of-the-center politicians. This is not by chance or deliberate selection of leaders and quotations. As students of French politics and nation noticed, prior to 1950 the centralizing Republican Left regarded the *patois* and regional languages (including Occitan) as symbols of clericalism, anti-centralization and anti-republicanism and consequently abandoned their users electorally to the parties on the Right. However, since the late 1950s and 1960s the new Socialist Left has begun seeing these languages as an “identity-shield” of the economically poorer parts of France against the oppression from the centre symbolized by French (Lodge, 1993, pp. 218-219; Ager, 1999, p. 32). This remarkable twist of history explains why practically all post-1950 language and education legislation continuing the Jacobin tradition of centralization and nation-building has been introduced by the parties to the right of the center, while half-hearted attempts to allow the vernaculars back to the private and public domains, as part of overall de-centralization of the French state, have been typically supported by the parties to the left of the center.

### Tentative conclusions

Two conclusions seem warranted following our brief review of the French state language policies and their impact on the identity of French nation. First, it is quite obvious that the collective identity of the republican France has both civic-political and ethnic-cultural aspects. Even Jacobins realized that a mere associative relationship between individual citizens and the Republican state based exclusively on the formers’ allegiance to republican and liberal creed would be insufficient to bind them into “one and indivisible” national community. “The political link which established membership in the nation had to be reiterated, in reality, by a social link based on a common culture whose epicenter was a national language” (Dieckhoff, 2005, p. 4).

Thus, our proposal to treat the civic and ethnic categories with regard to nations as mutually complementary rather than exclusive seems to be empirically warranted.

Second, despite the rhetoric of universalism, territory- and values-based civic nation, the French nation emerging after 1789 has not been necessarily inclusive and culture-blind. There is ample evidence suggesting that the exclusive use of French in public and private communication was viewed as an indispensable criterion for civic-political inclusion. Unlike the Old Regime, in the republican France of 1792-99 the speech could denote the “foreignness” of the speaker or, even worse, association with counter-revolution and the anti-Nation, anti-Republic forces. The user of a non-French language or *patois* would be disqualified from the membership in the nation or effectively disfranchised. In the Third Republic, we again witness a situation where the civic-political ideal of the nation, shared by the Republicans of all stripes, excluded individuals based on their language or speech. The vernacular users or those who did not speak and write “proper” French were again seen and labeled as anti-republic, anti-national, pro-clerical elements who had to be cast beyond the social pale of the nation, shamed him, denied access to the public domains, first and foremost the school. They could redeem themselves (or whose offspring could be redeemed) only by abandoning their dialects or regional languages and adopting French as the sole medium of communication.

This conclusion is in line with our arguments that civic ideals and political ideas and values are not necessarily inclusive but may exclude individuals from citizenship in the legal sense or political-participatory sense based precisely on ethnic features such as language, race, religion, ancestry or place of birth.

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