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The Weaponization of French and Rejection of Maghrebi Arabic in a French High School: Effects on Franco-Maghrebi Students

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Abstract

This article draws on a four-month ethnography in a rural French high school. Through analysis of ten Franco-Maghrebi students' communicative resources, experiences of schooling, and narratives, along with educators' perspectives, the study shows that the students' home languages were rejected and perceived as a threat to France's hegemony. At the same time, French was weaponized and imposed as the legitimate language. However, the results indicate that these youths had a desire to maintain a link with their heritage language and culture, and that Islam, with its related socioliteracy practices, could represent an alternative discourse. Through a postcolonial lens, the article examines how policies to ensure the dominance of French culture and language have delegitimized the cultures and languages of its minorities, of which immigrants from the Maghreb constitute the largest and most marginalized non-European minority. Further, it demonstrates how institutional practices and sociopolitical discourses contribute to discrimination, inequity, and an exclusive school environment.

Keywords: Language policies, negotiation of identities, linguistic discrimination, language weaponization

Introduction

Over centuries, France has reinforced, through policies and discourses, a vision of its society as "monocultural, monolingual, monoethnic and monoideological" (Doran, 2004, p. 93). Writing forty years ago, Balibar (1985)—a French philosopher—argued that

> France is today the only nation in the world with legislation requiring (since 1794) the exclusive use of the national language in all public and private acts ... France is the most extreme case (*le cas limite*) of a nation totally identified with one language. (p. 9)

Since these words were written, France has remained an extreme case, and it is not only protective of its language, but also of its social, cultural, and religious practices. This can be illustrated by the law

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France passed in 2004 banning religious symbols and clothing, notably headscarves, in public schools. During the 2017 presidential campaign, Macron, the centrist liberal candidate who was elected President that year, sent a "letter to the French people" in which he shared his wish for French society to be "once more proud to be French, thanks to our culture, our international influence and our language" (see Appendix A). Macron's use of the singular form for both *culture* and *language*, reveals his vision of France as a nation-state associated with one language and one culture. This letter sets out a vision for what Anderson (1991) called an *imagined community*, in contrast to the reality that the population of France is culturally diverse and multilingual.

This national discourse plays out, at a local level, in very real and personal ways. French institutions have enacted this model of integration wherein, for example, school policies have reinforced the exclusive usage of French and have banned Muslim female students from wearing the veil.[1] In this model, often referred to as the assimilation model (Simon, 2012), language has played a major role. In the school where this study was undertaken, for example, there was a French-only policy in the school's 'life's principles.' Out of 10 principles, principle number 6 specifies: "Students must speak the French language outside of foreign language classes" (see Appendix B).

This ethnographic study highlights how policies enacted at the national and local levels to ensure the dominance of French culture and language have delegitimized the cultures and languages of minoritized individuals, such as immigrants from the Maghreb, who constitute the largest and most marginalized non-European minority in the country. By the Maghreb, I am referring to three former French colonies in North Africa: Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. Because of the violence and colonial relations of power in the historical relationship between France and its former colonies in the Maghreb, this research needs to be seen through the lens of postcolonialism. Thus, the study analyzes (a) the rationale for language policies at school and national levels; (b) the systemic rejection of Maghrebi Arabic;[2] and (c) the effects on Franco-Maghrebi students and how they resist dominant (French) discourses. Findings demonstrate how institutional practices and sociopolitical discourses contribute to discrimination, inequity, and an exclusive school environment.

Literature Review: France and its Monolingual Tradition

The construction and maintenance of France as a nation-state lies in the values attributed to the French language and its role in achieving national cohesion. Key policies and institutions, which illustrate France's long monolingual tradition, are rooted deep in its history and national identity.

The first relevant policy, known as the ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts, dates back to 1539 and posits that all legal, official, and administrative documents must be pronounced, registered, and delivered in the French language only. This policy can be understood as an assertion of centralized authority, enacted in a context where there were many living regional languages and dialects, as well as the use of Latin in official and religious contexts. A century later, the *Académie Française* was created in 1636 to establish what is considered 'proper French,' and to protect the purity of the French language, especially against the influence of other languages. This institution, still active today, acts as the official authority and custodian of the French language. As Heller (2006) describes, it undertakes "the work of linguistic regimentation" and "the production and reproduction of linguistic norm" (p. 11).

[1] The participants in my research used the term 'voile' in French to refer to the different types of veils such as Hijab, Niqab, and Chador. In order to be faithful to their own words, I will use the term veil in English.
[2] Maghrebi Arabic is a vernacular Arabic dialectal continuum spoken in the Maghreb region (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia).

A century after the French Revolution, the policies of Jules Ferry[3] not only established compulsory schooling, but also ensured the supremacy of the French language. Indeed, from 1881 on, compulsory education was established solely through the French language, thereby imposing a monolingual policy throughout the nation.

Another key policy is Section 2 of the 1958 Constitution, which states that "The language of the Republic is French" (Gouvernement Français, 1958). This section was reaffirmed in the first Section of the 1992 Constitution, in the light of the Maëstricht treaty signed by the European members to further European integration. At the time, this policy came in response to the 'threat' the English language posed to French within Europe, and its aim was to assert the position of the French language.

In contrast to these policies, Cerquiglini, a French linguist and the former director of the National Institute for the French language, was tasked with creating a list of languages that were commonly spoken in France at that time, in order to accurately depict the diversity of the linguistic landscape. The report was completed in preparation for a vote to ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. In his work, Cerquiglini showed 75 languages actively in use in France at that time (Cerquiglini, 1999). However, when faced with this reality, the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages was not ratified by France on constitutional grounds, stating it was seen as "contrary to the 'principles of indivisibility of the Republic,'" and that it was "contrary to the rule established … under which 'the language of the Republic is French'" (Décision, cited in Moïse, 2007, p. 222). This decision, again, reflected a perception that the founding principles of the French Republic were under threat from multiculturalism and multilingualism; in particular, the principle that "France is an indivisible secular, democratic, and social Republic" (Gouvernement Français, 1958, Section 1).

In line with these practices, schools play a central part in ensuring the maintenance and dominance of standard French, that is, a formal written form of the language. In doing so, schools devalue the legitimacy of the languages of its minoritized individuals, with Arabic being the second most widely spoken language in France after French (Talon, 2012). The French education system has, indeed, been a reproducer of the republican values and language policies cited above, and schools have played a major role in the reproduction of social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1966). As demonstrated in this study, schools not only favor French, the language of the dominant group, but also reject Maghrebi Arabic, thereby excluding an important aspect of Franco-Maghrebi students' identities.

Theoretical Framework

By enforcing an ideology of linguistic and cultural uniformity, French society has denied its changing social realities and the cultural and linguistic reality of its diverse peoples, leading to exclusion and rising tensions. As a consequence, although immigrants from the Maghreb constitute the largest non-European population (30% of the immigrant population in France, second to 36% of immigrants who originate from European countries), they have been the most minoritized population (INSEE, 2012). Significantly, while 19% of French people admitted having been victims of discrimination based on their origins, this proportion reached 86% for people with Maghrebi origins. Societal discourses and the living conditions of people of Maghrebi origin in France have led to increasing tension and reactions both inside and outside that community—and, at times, violence, as recently illustrated by

[3] Jules Ferry was a French statesman from 1870 to 1895. He is remembered for installing free, compulsory, secular education in 1882, and for extending the French colonial empire.

the Charlie Hebdo events in 2015. Though it has manifested directly in reaction to contemporary events, this tension is rooted in France's colonial past.

According to Mehta (2010), France's colonial past and the fact that its society has not adopted a postcolonial discourse might be at the core of the issue, and the reason why France "locates Arab-Muslims as permanent outsiders [in] an attempt to disengage with its violent past" (p. 175). Because of the violence of the historical relationship between France and its former colonies in the Maghreb, this research needs to be seen through the lens of postcolonialism.

In addition, as Begag (2007) wrote, while decolonization in the Maghreb ended "institutionalized racism" in this region, "no comparable measures were taken to address racism in the North, in France itself" (p. 27). Indeed, when immigrants started to move to France during the 1960s, French politicians "denied or minimized the existence of ethnic discrimination" (p. 27), and as a result, colonial relations of power were reproduced. The present study will confirm how this denial reinforces a damaging power dynamic that continues to diminish people from Franco-Maghrebi communities for expressing their identity, and to exclude them from full and equal participation in French society.

Methods

The Research Site

The Town

I conducted this research in a town of about 36,000 inhabitants, which I call Vire (pseudonym). Vire is the largest town in an otherwise rural department one hour from Lyon, the second biggest city in France. Vire is, therefore, strategically situated close to a major city while providing the characteristics of a more rural lifestyle. In 2014, the inhabitants of Vire elected a right-wing mayor, and the extreme right party (i.e., Front National) received 15% of the votes. In the 2017 presidential election, Le Pen—the candidate from the Front National—came second after Macron, with close to 22% of the votes.

Vire is a typical, nondescript market town in rural France; it is neither a tourist attraction, nor thriving, nor particularly well-known. The site contrasts with the work of several researchers (Doran, 2004; Killian, 2006; Mehta, 2010) who have previously studied the Franco-Maghrebi population in Parisian suburban ghettos or *banlieues*. In France, there is a sense that Paris is the main economic, cultural, and political focus, and that the rest of the country is ignored. During my time in Vire, several people commented about how living in a small town is harder than living in a city because they could not identify with a community, and that they felt more isolated in Vire.

The School

The study site, which I call Charles Dupuy (pseudonym), is a high school that prepares students for the mainstream *baccalauréat général* (the national exams students take at the end of high school) as well as a community college, in the sense that it also offers technical *baccaleuréat* and pre- and post-*baccalauréat* technical courses. There are about 800 students, who are typically aged between 16 and 22. It is a public school with the reputation, according to the principal, of having the most ethnically diverse population of students of all the schools in Vire. As I explain in the next section, no statistics were available to confirm the principal's statement; however, the principal claimed that 28 nationalities were represented in the school. Charles Dupuy has a high rate of failure on the *baccaleauréat* and other national exams, again according to the principal, but statistical data was not found to confirm it.

The Students

The students of Maghrebi origin represented the main focus of this study. According to Galland (2015), a contemporary French sociologist, this group constitutes the "blind spot of social sciences" (para. 1). It is important to acknowledge that the lack of research among this population is due to the 1978 law called Loi Information et Liberté. This law forbids data collection and analysis related to ethnicity, race, and other demographic information (i.e., sexual orientation, religion, political opinions, etc.) in France. For Azouz Begag, French Minister of Equal Opportunities from 2005–2007, this lack of data on ethnic origins prevents France from dealing with inequalities and providing equal opportunities. Begag (2007) wrote that, "as victims of multiple forms of color-based discriminations, young ethnics will have to be identified statistically in terms of the features by which they are handicapped in the field of equal opportunities" and that consequently, France "needs the technical and legal means with which to compile statistics on ethnic origins" (p. 117).

I recruited a total of ten student participants; Table 1 shows the names (all pseudonyms) and relevant information for all of them.

Table 1. *Information for student participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Generation	Origin	Track/classroom
Khaled	16	M	1st	Morocco (Berber)	Technical/STMG
Leila	18	F	2nd	Algeria	Technical/STMG
Jasmine	17	F	2nd	Algeria (Kabilie)	Technical/STMG
Azouz	18	M	3rd	Algeria	Technical/STMG
Asmae	17	F	1st	Morocco	General/ES
Abdel	16	M	1st	Morocco	General/ES
Nora	17	F	2nd	Morocco	General/ES
Salima	16	F	2nd	Algeria	General/ES
Farid	15	M	2nd	Morocco	General/ES
Soukaina	16	F	3rd	Morocco	General/ES

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect data, I conducted an ethnography in a French high school. Over four months, I observed French literature classes taught by two different teachers, interviewed teachers, students, and administrators, and conducted focus groups. The data collected consist primarily of scripts of interviews and focus groups, field notes, classroom observations, and school and state documents. The first round of interviews was semistructured, and as I established a relationship with participants, the interviews became unstructured. The data was collected in French, but for the purpose of this article, due to word limits, I am sharing the data in English.

I analyzed the data through several cycles of coding using MAXQDA, an analytical software for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research projects. During the first cycle of coding, I coded chunks of data, which allowed me to identify major recurring themes. For the second cycle, I used "pattern coding" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236) as a method to examine social patterns and processes and to

form theoretical constructs. I looked at how these patterns were connected and what their relationships were. I examined how the individual components could be integrated or woven together to create a narrative based on the data.

Findings

Franco-Maghrebi Students' Communicative Resources

To learn about the students' communicative resources, I asked them, "What languages do you use, where and with whom do you use them?" The answers to that question varied greatly according to their family histories and current circumstances. The two main criteria that affected their linguistic practices were the length of time they and their families had been living in France and the ties they had maintained with their countries of origin. Indeed, there was a noticeable difference of practices among the students of first, second, and third generations.

Before I interviewed the students, I had already observed them inside and outside the classroom. During all this time, I had only heard them speak a few words in Arabic with their Franco-Maghrebi friends, but these were rare occurrences, which only took place during recess. The rest of the time, they spoke French, which explains why, before asking them this question, I did not know that they were able to use any other language besides French. I was then impressed by the linguistic diversity and the students' wide communicative repertoires, which I understand as "the collection of ways individuals use language and other means of communication […] to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate" (Rymes, 2014, p. 4). Indeed, the majority reported moving between languages, which they strategically deployed according to their communicative needs and their interlocutors; what García (2009) referred to as *translanguaging,* and which she characterized as the "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds" (p. 45). This was especially the case for first-generation students.

Translanguaging Practices

Abdel is a first-generation immigrant. His parents were born in Morocco, but he was born in Italy and lived there until he was 10. Abdel had been in France for five years when I first met him. He reported using multiple languages: French, Italian, Arabic, and Darija—or what the students referred to interchangeably as "Moroccan" or "dialect," which is a variety of Arabic and the most commonly spoken language in daily life in Morocco.[4] After Abdel listed the languages he uses, I asked him to walk me through a typical day of how these languages are deployed:

> **Abdel:** Ok, it's … at home: Arabic, well Darija. Outside: French. It's going to be like this … the morning I wake up, hmm … I perform my ablutions, I do my morning prayer, I eat breakfast, I speak with my family, always in Arabic, I go out, from the elevator: French. When I open the door: "Good morning, Sir; good morning, Madam." There I go out: "Good morning, caretaker [Sir]," and I go on the road and there is my Moroccan friend, the entire way in Arabic, in Arabic … after he is in another school "As-Salaam-Alaikum, ok, see you this afternoon." I go to school, sometimes I meet French classmates, I arrive, Farid: "As-Salaam-Alaikum, ok, cool everything is going well," so I go to class, I see Arabic, Tunisian, Algerian friends, "ok, you're well …"
>
> **Sandrine:** In French, there?
>
> **Abdel:** Yes, there in French.

[4] According to Sadiqi (2006), *Darija* is the lingua franca in Morocco because it allows for intercomprehensibil-ity between the many Moroccan Arabic dialects spoken in different regions of the country.

This quote shows how skilled Abdel is at using his multiple discursive practices and captures the complexity of translanguaging where, from the perspective of a bilingual, languages are not bounded entities but constitute a unitary repertoire.

Asmae's story is very similar to Abdel's. She is also a first-generation immigrant, and her parents were born in Morocco. She was born in Italy, and she lived there until she was nine, when she and her family moved to Morocco. She lived in Morocco for four years before moving to France with her parents and two brothers. She had been in France for five years when I met her. When I asked if she spoke Arabic at home with her parents, she said she speaks Darija and Italian with her parents because they would not understand her if she spoke French, but that she speaks French with her brothers. Asmae, like Abdel, is constantly and simultaneously adapting to different contexts by using these languages or varieties of languages from her repertoire. Not every participant, however, had this experience with languages. Some students had a much narrower communicative repertoire.

Language Shift or Loss

Leila is a second-generation immigrant, and Azouz and Soukaina are both third-generation immigrants. All three of them reported speaking very little or no Arabic. During our interviews, I asked these three students if they knew or understood why they did not speak Arabic. Azouz and Leila explained that their parents used to talk to them in Arabic when they were young but that once they started school, their parents thought it would be better for their academic success to only speak French, therefore describing a clear sense of the linguistic shift in time. Leila said she remembered that her mother used to speak to her in Arabic and that she "knew the basics since I was little, so she spoke Arabic, but then we did not broaden this language after [starting] school." Leila then clearly explained this shift, "because we were in France, we had to speak French at school" (Interview 3, May 6, 2016).

In the same way, Azouz explained that he used to speak Arabic but no longer did: "When I was little and until I was two, and then, yes, I spoke French. Since I [have been] at school, in fact, since I started school. But before, no, I spoke Arabic" (Interview 2, September 28, 2015). Azouz could put a definite date to when he stopped speaking Arabic, or rather, when his mother stopped speaking Arabic to him, which is when he started school. In all three cases (Azouz, Leila, and Soukaina), starting school meant stopping bilingual practices and shifting to monolingualism. The students' parents had incorporated the common myth that learning more than one language at a time can be confusing for children and that it is in their best interest (academic and later economic) to speak only the dominant language. Indeed, Azouz said his mother chose to speak to him only in French "for my future, I think, so that I would have more opportunities, and more open doors," illustrating the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) accorded to languages, with French being seen as vital to opening doors.

While Azouz was clearly aware of this language shift in his family practices, he did not express regrets. Besides, Azouz said he was not at all interested in learning Arabic. In contrast, Leila and Soukaina expressed regrets about this shift, and to them, it felt more like a loss. Leila said, "Yes, it's true that I would really like to know how to write, read and speak well" (Interview 3, May 6, 2016). Various feelings resulted from this language loss. Leila and Soukaina explained how difficult it was for them when they visited their families in Algeria and Morocco. Soukaina explained that when she visited her family in Morocco, she felt like a stranger. I asked her why, and she said, "It's above all the language. Sometimes I can't say what I want in Arabic like in French, and that makes me angry" (Interview 2, September 28, 2015). For both Soukaina and Leila, this language loss prevented them from fully communicating with their families, and this situation creates some feelings which go beyond regret to shame and anger. After looking at students' communicative resources and how these were

constrained in school, I wanted to understand the rationale behind Regulation Number 6 enforced in their school (see Appendix B).

Rationale for Language Policies

I asked the principal and the student counselor why Regulation 6 had been implemented. The principal said, "It's more this desire that first, they do not speak between each other, saying that the teacher is a big moron in Arabic, that no" (Interview 1, May 17, 2016). The counselor also mentioned the desire to avoid allowing students of similar origins to gather and use their language to insult staff members, "Yes, it was done precisely to avoid, mmm … this gathering and that … or that sometimes insults of this kind of thing towards a teacher, a supervisor, a counselor" (Interview 1, May 13, 2016). When I asked if she was thinking of a language in particular, she said yes, that Arabic would be the most common one. Although the school regulation does not specify that Arabic should not be spoken, when asked about it, administrators and the school counselor admitted that Arabic (in particular) was in their minds when writing Regulation 6. Their answers reflected an implicit prejudice and the stigmatization of a particular group. I would argue that Pavlenko's (2003) concept of the "language of the enemy," which the school counselor used to demonstrate how sociopolitical and ideological considerations may affect foreign language policies, applies to this particular school policy.

What is also concerning about Regulation 6 and its underlying agenda is that Arabic is not among the foreign languages taught at Charles Dupuy. It would make sense indeed that the second most widely spoken language in France (Talon, 2012) was taught in one of the biggest schools in Vire. Vire is the biggest town in an otherwise rural area and, as Nora said in one of our interviews, Arabic "is becoming a power, well, like Saudi Arabia, so it would not be a bad thing to learn it" (Interview 4, May 4, 2016). Nora and Asmae were the first participants who drew my attention to why Arabic was not taught in their school. They would have personally liked to be able to continue studying Arabic in a formal way. They had previously studied Arabic at the mosque in Vire, but there were no longer any courses. Asmae and Nora both listed all the languages that had been taught in the school for a long time (e.g., Spanish, German, English, Portuguese), and Asmae said that Arabic is a language like any other, suggesting it should be taught like any other language. As they continued to reflect on the matter, Asmae said:

> Besides, we are right next to them [Arabic-speaking countries], first we are already inside, they have to adapt to us as well a little bit, we adapt here but only one way and also us in Morocco, it's the Francophone countries, we speak French … it must happen both ways. (Interview 4, May 4, 2016)

Asmae's comments are valid: first, when she says "we are already inside," Arabic is the second most spoken language after French; second, when she says "we are right next to them," countries where Arabic is spoken are geographically, historically and culturally close; and finally, as she points out, in Morocco French is widely used and taught. For all these reasons, Asmae feels French people could also adapt to these youths; it should not be a one-way system where they are the only ones who have to integrate. After this conversation with Nora and Asmae, I wondered how the school staff would explain why Arabic was not taught in the school. I was surprised to see how their answers varied according to their roles within the institution, and how much they were willing to be critical of this decision.

Systemic Rejection of Maghrebi Arabic

M. Leroy, the school principal, explained at length that Arabic was not offered in their school because there was no demand for it. These are the three comments he made during our interview, which all repeat the same idea: "but it was not a big success because, in fact, there were very few fans for this

option;" "it was not met with an audience. Very few students were interested;" and "But when a few years ago this option was offered, it did not get any customers."

Without giving any specific statistics, M. Leroy used many different terms to express this idea that the course had no "audience, no fans, no customers" and concluded that "even the youth of Maghrebi origins who would have liked to learn their own language did not take this step [of enrolling in Arabic courses when they were offered]. There was nobody, so as a result, it was the end." The 'option' or elective that M. Leroy referred to is called 'Mediterranean basin language and culture.' This course was introduced in 2011, and as described on the French Ministry of Education website (Éduscol, 2017), its goal is to teach Arabic, Latin, and Greek languages and cultures, "the wealth of cultural and scientific work and projects of the Mediterranean basin (archeology, museography, agronomy)" (para. 2). Therefore, this elective is not a language class and was not designed to teach Arabic as a living language, but rather, the ancient culture of a region of which France is a part. Its focus on other languages such as Greek and Latin, as well as the historical approach, frames Arabic as an ancient language, and not as a vibrant language spoken in the modern world. This might explain why even people of Maghrebi origins did not show any interest in this course and why the school's attempts to offer it were not successful.

The school counselor, Mme. Durantet, remembered that the previous principal had tried to offer Arabic as a Foreign Language, but that the regional education authority had declined this request, although she could not remember what reasons were given. Mme. Durantet said that in spite of this, some students studied Arabic through a national independent learning course (known as CNED in France), and some chose it as a subject for the *baccalauréat*. Some of the students knew of this possibility but also realized that it was very hard to study by themselves. Contrary to M. Leroy, Mme. Durantet addressed the teaching of Arabic, and she was aware that there was a demand, but could not comment on why it was not offered in the school.

As for M. Lambert, a French teacher, first, he wondered if it was "our history it remains in our heads, and yes, always there is always this difficulty to move forward, to accept" (Interview 2, May 12, 2016). M. Lambert did not say exactly what part of "our history" would prevent students in France from accepting Arabic as any other language, but I believe he was referring to France's colonial past with the Maghreb.

I argue that this resistance to the teaching of Arabic in Charles Dupuy School, and in French schools in general, is the result of a deliberate historical and political decision. As Nora and Asmae said, immigrants who come from the Maghreb have to integrate and adapt. However, France is not willing or ready to accept that its culture and the Maghreb's cultures and history are connected, and that there should be a two-way relationship. If this perception could be changed, France would see Arabic not as a threat, but as a legitimate, valid language that both Franco-French and Franco-Maghrebi people would benefit from learning and understanding. However, as I discuss below, this is still a controversial topic.

Arabic in French Schools

M. Jahid was the French as a Second Language teacher. He was born in France, and his parents were Moroccan. His comments provide a comprehensive description of the wider picture, starting with a history of the teaching of Arabic in France and the more current trend; for this reason, I will cite an extensive part of his comments:

> Yes, for Arabic, so for the teaching of the so-called standard Arabic, hmm … there have been a lot of failures, that is to say, it's when we began, when the appointment, the decision to open an Arabic section, or the teaching of Arabic was no longer at the Ministry level, was dependent on the heads of schools,

> many heads of schools, who closed Arabic for budget reasons or other reasons … I don't want to get into the details, but the problem is that, hmm … me I know that at the time, it's already been more than 15 years, when the teaching of Arabic started to decline, some colleagues said, that it is either the teaching of Arabic in a secular context, by trained people, or it is the mosques, and we see sometimes what that leads to … We have changed our minds now to try to plug the gaps … (Interview 1, May 26, 2016)

M. Jahid was initially trained to be an Arabic teacher He has been involved in the discussion for a long time, and his comments bring more depth and are intriguing answers in relation to what was said by different staff members of the school. He agreed that there had been many failures in the attempt to teach Arabic but, contrary to M. Leroy, who saw the lack of interest as the main reason for failure, M. Jahid introduced an interesting point about decision-making levels. Indeed, what used to be a ministerial decision was now left to the head of the school, which, according to M. Jahid, was one of the main reasons for all the failures.

Once it became up to the heads of schools to keep offering Arabic as a foreign language or not, many decided to eliminate Arabic classes. M. Jahid first listed funding as a possible issue, but he also said there were other reasons, and that he did not want to get into the details, thereby choosing not to comment on what would probably be too contentious or political. Later, during our interview, he actually said more about this, by talking about the suppression of Maghrebi Arabic as an elective for the *baccalauréat*, a decision made by the Ministry of Education, which could be seen as a political decision, and which highlights the lack of recognition of this language:

> There is no recognition of the dialect [Maghrebi Arabic] as such. There was a time when we could present it as an elective to the bac [baccalauréat]. The Maghrebi dialect and then after, hmm … there was an interview with the teacher, hmm … without knowing how to read. After we moved on the … another stage where they needed to read the text, but the text was transcribed in Latin characters (laughs), and now the candidate needs to read Arabic, so we went from … we can give him a text in Maghrebi Arabic, but written in [Latin] characters. We have fewer candidates … and then on top of this, we have to ask them questions in a so-called median ['standard'] Arabic, that is to say between Maghrebi Arabic and literary Arabic. So there too, at the institutional level the move to Arabic for the bac [baccalauréat], it's hmm … confusing. (Interview 1, May 26, 2016)

In the excerpt above, M. Jahid succinctly summarizes what has happened with Maghrebi Arabic in France during the 1990s. In 1995, the Ministry of Education decided to add written Maghrebi Arabic as an elective for the *baccalauréat*. Before this, the Arabic test was only in oral form. Contrary to what M. Leroy suggested, this option rapidly became very popular. Indeed, in 1999, candidates could take an optional test for nontaught languages, and out of 28 possible languages, 76.6% of these candidates (a total of 9,886 students) chose Maghrebi Arabic (Barontini & Caubet, 2008). In spite of this success, the Ministry of Education decided to remove Maghrebi Arabic from the approved list of nontaught languages, forcing students to show proficiency in written standard Arabic.

Although there are no exact numbers, Caubet (2000), a French sociolinguist specializing in Maghrebi Arabic, reckoned that a few years after this decision by the Ministry of Education, the number of students who chose Maghrebi Arabic as an elective dropped from almost 10,000 to 2,000. According to him, this decision was based on the idea that the extra points students could get were worthless because "points gained in Maghrebi Arabic are points too easily gained, as though the knowledge of this language had no value" (translated from French). Caubet argued that what is actually at the core of the decision is a will to not recognize nor value the Maghrebi Arabic language, a language learned and used at home, outside of the school context. I find in this political decision an answer to the question of why Arabic is so rarely taught in France—by reinforcing standard Arabic as the only

option, the government deliberately devalued and rejected the language that is actually used on a daily basis by the Maghrebi and Franco-Maghrebi populations.

Finally, M. Jahid commented on the issue France is now facing with regard to students learning Arabic. After schools stopped teaching it, the only place students could learn it was in mosques, not necessarily by trained educators and, more importantly, with a heavier focus on religion. As a matter of fact, M. Jahid implied that in some cases, political or radical ideologies were transmitted during these classes. According to him, as France faces Islamic radicalism, it is trying to find a compromise, and he believes that the situation is likely to change, and that Arabic may be taught more widely in French schools. His optimism is, therefore, tainted with France's motivation, which would not be an openness to Arabic but rather a reaction to the fear the rise of Islam has created in France.

M. Jahid's statements resonate with the current discourses on the teaching of Arabic in France. Indeed, in September 2018, the Institut Montaigne[5] published a report about Islamic fundamentalism in Europe and France (El Karoui, 2018). The author, Hakim El Karoui, lamented that the number of students learning Arabic in French schools had halved in the past twenty years. Only 0.2 percent of students in public secondary schools took Arabic classes in the 2017–2018 school year, putting the language far behind the widely taught English, Spanish, and German. However, El Karoui also reported that the number of students studying Arabic in mosques had multiplied tenfold. Thus, he recommended that Arabic be taught in French schools as a way of fighting the rise of fundamentalism.

El Karoui's (2018) recommendation reignited a contentious public discourse about Arabic in French public schools. A few days after the publication of the report, the Minister of Education, Blanquer (2018), said on a radio program that Arabic, alongside Russian and Chinese, had to be taught more commonly and be given more prestige: but especially Arabic, which should be learned not only by students of Maghrebi origins, but by other students as well. This announcement provoked violent reactions, especially among the right and extreme right political parties. For example, Marine Le Pen—the leader of the French extreme right party—immediately argued that she wanted people to learn French culture in France. Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (2018)—a right-wing lawmaker—said on a radio program that this would be the "beginning of the Islamization of France," which would lead to "communitarisme," and that instead, young people who come from Arabic-speaking countries should assimilate.

Faced with these criticisms, a few days after his first statement in favor of the teaching of Arabic in schools, the Minister of Education had to backtrack, explaining that he never said he wanted to make Arabic compulsory. These reactions indicate that France is not yet ready to accept Arabic as a language that could be taught routinely in public schools. As a matter of fact, even if the Minister of Education were in favor of the teaching of Arabic, I see his recommendation as a reaction to El Karoui's (2018) report and, therefore, more as part of France's fight against Islamic extremism than a true recognition of Arabic as a legitimate language in French society.

Regulation Number 6's Effect on Franco-Maghrebi Students

To find out how this regulation affected the students, I asked them if they wished they could use their home language more freely in school. Abdel replied with this powerful image: "When there is a Moroccan with a Moroccan, even if, I don't know, we are on top of the mountain, we are going to speak Arabic" (Interview 4, May 13, 2016). Abdel explains that when two Moroccan people meet, it is obvious that they will speak Arabic, no matter the circumstances; it is, as he had previously told me,

[5] The Institut Montaigne is a transpartisan organization whose purpose is to suggest public policy to ultimately improve social cohesion.

"in your blood." According to Abdel, speaking Arabic is how he connects, how he enacts a shared identity. Despite this powerful image, giving the impression that two Moroccan people cannot *not* speak Arabic, when I asked if that was still the case in the classroom, he answered: "in class, it's a bit tricky." He then explained that because of the Regulation [Regulation 6] students were not allowed and that, as a result, he only said very few words [in Arabic]. This regulation prevented students from using their full linguistic repertoire the way they reported doing outside of school. This means that it affected more particularly students who were used to translanguaging and who would have had the opportunity to maintain this practice at school.

Nora, Abdel, Farid, and Asmae usually sat together and they all shared a common language. Asmae and Nora shared Abdel's point of view, both wishing they could use Arabic. Nora explained that "in fact, there are words in French we can't say, we can only understand them; in Arabic there are direct words" (Interview 1, September 21, 2015). Nora's quote demonstrates how, for bilinguals, there is the need and ability to be more efficient and that some words are more "direct" or have a stronger meaning in one language than the other. Regulation 6, then, prevents students from being more efficient and truly understanding each other on a deeper level.

For Asmae, this regulation was even more of an issue because Arabic was her dominant language, and she was not confident in using French. For her, the regulation meant she could not be as expressive as she would like to be because, as she explained, "in Arabic, I loosen up, I speak fast and all. But in French, I hold back a bit. I'm scared to make mistakes or stuff like that." This feeling of not being able to express herself the way she would in Arabic, together with her fear of making mistakes in French, justify why sometimes in class she admitted, "I try to be discreet, but there are just some expressions, I can't say them in French, at the time I am forced to say them in Arabic" (Interview 1, September 21, 2015). In this quote, Asmae suggests that the need to speak Arabic is beyond her control; she feels she has no choice.

I argue that Regulation 6 has affected the students' linguistic practices, and although Canagarajah (2011) reported that the majority of studies among bilinguals showed that "acts of translanguaging are produced unbidden" and that they cannot "be completely restrained by monolingual educational policies" (p. 402), the data show that languages cannot always be used freely, not when there is a regulation that forbids students from using their full linguistic repertoire. For the participants, stepping into school meant stepping into a (forced) monolingual sphere, with French being used as a tool—and a weapon—to assert control. What is more, from an identity perspective, Charles Dupuy School's monolingual policies are forcing the students to repress an aspect of who they are, because their home language is part of their identity. This policy reinforces the symbolic power of French, the language of the colonizer. To some extent, some of the student-participants complied with the symbolic power of the dominant group, but they also resisted that power through linguistic practices directly in opposition to the dominant discourse.

Arabic as a Way to Connect with Islam

Several students expressed their desire to reconnect with the language of their parents or grandparents. The students' desire echoes what Barontini (2016) referred to as "ressurgissment" (resurgence) among young Franco-Maghrebi whose language had been "enfouie" (buried) or suppressed. Indeed, nine out of ten students cited the importance of Islam and its sociolinguistic practices in their lives. For example, Abdel explained, "I speak classical Arabic; my parents taught me to read and also to write Arabic, for a purpose, for the Muslim religion." This represents Abdel's and his parents' investment in Islam and its sociolinguistic practices, and the link between Islam and the Arabic language, which is perceived by Muslims as the language of God (Sadiqi, 2006). Actually, six students out of ten (Salima,

Leila, Jasmine, Nora, Asmae, and Abdel) reported currently attending or having attended evening classes at the mosque to learn classical Arabic and study the Qur'an. As Suleiman (2003) pointed out, the Qur'an encourages Muslims to read in Arabic because the language of the Qur'an is said to "be devoid of any crookedness" (p. 43). In addition to being the recommended medium to read and study the Qur'an, Arabic is also the unifying language of the Arab world. The concept of *Ummah,* which means 'mother' in Arabic, provides Muslims with a "super-ordinate identity to an otherwise hugely diverse community" (Shah, 2006, p. 218), transcending political boundaries.

Several student-participants referred to their religion and its related community as an important part of their identity, one that France had prevented them from enacting. Nora explained how learning Arabic could give her access to a wider Muslim community, "I would like to learn literary Arabic since I don't want to stay in France, and I would like to move to the countries of Saudi Arabia … somewhere other than Morocco or France. I would like to go to Dubai. Settle in Dubai or Qatar." Nora clearly wanted to distance herself from both France and Morocco, two countries that have positioned her as a foreigner. As a matter of fact, Nora explained that once a classmate had told her to "go back to her country." She felt angry about this because, as she said, "Morocco is not my country; I was born in Vire." She then lamented, "when I am in my parents' hometown [Morocco] I am [considered] French, and when I am in France, I am [considered] Moroccan! Where am I from, in fact, in the end?" (Interview 4, May 4, 2016). In her work in the UK on Muslim youth identity, Shah (2006) wrote, "to a young teenager's self-esteem, an association with a 'powerful' cosmic identity would be more appealing as compared to a negative racialized identity" (p. 229). All the countries Nora would like to live in have in common Islam as a religion and represent this more "powerful" cosmic identity. In this sense, Islam, as shared in the section below, offers Franco-Maghrebi students an identity they can all safely share, one that bridges their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences.

Islam as a Third Space

During my fieldwork, I became more aware of the role Islam played in the students' lives and I asked them if they wanted me to add the word 'Muslim' to Franco-Maghrebi students in the title of my research. Nine students out of ten said they would prefer if I added Muslim to identify them. Azouz, however, was the only one who said he would rather not be identified with a religion, although he said otherwise during a conversation with his best friend (shared below). Five students said they would like "Muslim" to come first, implying it was the most salient trait of their identity or, as Khaled said, "it's in my personality, in fact." When positioning themselves as Muslims I could feel a sense of pride, which Abdel clearly stated, "I am Moroccan, Maghrebi and Muslim and proud."

In addition, students often explained that their religion was a deciding factor as far as friendships were concerned. For example, the discussion below took place between Azouz and his best friend, a first-generation immigrant from Turkey. Just before this excerpt, they had been talking about their friendship:

> **Friend:** Yeah, you say Arab or Turk, it's the same culture, in fact, the same religion.
> **Sandrine:** Really? For the French, then?
> **Ami:** For the French, but also for us, no? I think that it's the same.
> **Azouz:** Yes, for me, it's the same.
> **Sandrine:** You feel close?
> **Friend:** Uh yes, the culture and especially the religion … only the language changes, in fact, but otherwise we are more the same. (Interview 1, September 20, 2015)

Azouz and his friend agree that their religion is what makes them feel close but, in their case, religion is presented as the main deciding identity factor, even if they do not share a home language or a

country of origin. Azouz's friend's usage of the comparative adjective "more" suggests an implicit comparison with other people who are not Muslim. I was surprised that Azouz agreed with his friend's statement because he had initially said he did not want to be identified with a religion, and nothing in what he said implied he was practicing his religion the way the other students did by going to the mosque or reading the Qur'an. However, as Shah (2006) reported, "there is abundant research claiming that even when the Muslims may not be practicing faith in many matters, they tend to emphasize their religious identity," and this identification is no longer connected to the practice of the religion but rather to a "political opposition to racism" (p. 223). I believe Azouz's affiliation to Islam acted as a way of resisting the racism he had been exposed to; specifically, to a traumatic event Azouz and his friend faced in their history class in which the teacher asked them to comment on the 'good deeds' of colonialization. This experience of "shared exclusion" (Shah, 2006, p. 223) may have contributed to their need to distance themselves from 'the French or the non-Muslim' and to create a shared identity as an expression of collective resistance.

The data suggest Islam allowed Franco-Maghrebi students to enact identities which diverge from the French hegemony. Bowen (2010) made similar claims in his book *Can Islam be French?* He argued that Islam provides French Muslim youth with "a third possibility for constructing a subjective identity, beyond the undesirable 'North-African,'" or in my data 'Arab,' and "the unattainable 'French'" (p. 22). I argue, then, that for most student-participants, Islam represented "a third space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2), which initiates the creation of new identities, as well as sites of collaboration and contestation. With its related social and literacy practices, Islam represents an alternative discourse or a third space through which participants can align with their peers while resisting the dominant monolingual, monocultural, and monoideological discourses of the school environment that marginalize Franco-Maghrebi students and their cultural backgrounds and perpetuates colonial relations of power.

Discussion

The findings in this article demonstrate that a majority of the students have a wide linguistic repertoire from which they can draw to adapt to their various needs, depending on the contexts and their interlocutors. The first-generation immigrants tend to use all the languages in their repertoires more freely, and a pattern of gradual linguistic loss was identified in the second and third generations. Further, the data showed that these rich and dynamic practices clash with the school's monolingual and monoglossic discourses and policies, illustrated by Regulation Number 6 (see Appendix B). French is the language of hegemony within the school, often weaponized to control students' use of their home languages, which are stigmatized and rejected. Arabic is perceived as a threat, and the decision to not teach it in schools has been, and still is, a political one.

Therefore, I argue that the school did not provide the supportive environment students needed to thrive as emergent bilinguals. The school could have acknowledged the students' languages and could have allowed for their full linguistic resources to be visible in the school. This inclusive practice would have allowed student-participants to use their languages to build on their knowledge and express a side of their identity that, under the present practices and policies, they must repress. Instead, their home practices were devalued, stigmatized, and discriminated against. This represents a violation of human rights, of the dignity of humans, for according to Skutnabb-Kangas (2009), "language is one of the most important of those human characteristics on the basis of which people are not supposed to be discriminated against" (p. 223). For this reason, no individual should be forced to give up languages, which are integral to their identities.

From a postcolonial perspective, I interpret the weaponization of these languages, more specifically the imposition of French as the only legitimate language and the rejection of Arabic, as a residue of colonialism which, as Begag (2007) noted, did not end with the decolonization of the Maghreb and has been carried over from the former French colonies to France. This study highlights how France, through numerous policies, has maintained colonial relations of power with the Franco-Maghrebi communities. More specifically, it uncovers how institutional racism in schools continues to exclude Franco-Maghrebi students from expression of their full identities, and ultimately equal participation in French society.

Implications and Final Thoughts

Given the disconnect between Franco-Maghrebi students' communicative practices inside and outside the school, the first implication is for teachers and leaders to acknowledge, accept, and value the linguistic and cultural diversity and resources of every student. Administrators and teachers need to be aware of the negative effects French-only policies have on bilinguals—how it limits not only their cognitive abilities, but also the expression of their identities.

Additionally, given that Arabic is the second most widely spoken language in France, I support the case for bilingual education in French and Arabic, in alignment with trends to include the languages of minority populations that are increasingly prevalent in many countries, as, for example, in many parts of the USA with Spanish. I am aware of the debate over which variety of Arabic should be taught in schools, and I argue in favor of teaching the varieties of Arabic most commonly used by Franco-Maghrebi youth. Bilingual education would further legitimize Franco-Maghrebi students' linguistic and cultural home practices. In addition, as Hélot and Erfurt (2016) claimed, bilingual education is the only type of education that is really equitable. Because bilingual education implies sharing the education space with another language, it would result in a more inclusive environment where several languages coexist, granting them equal status, while leading to greater equity and empowerment for all students.

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Appendix A: Letter from Emmanuel Macron

CITOYENNES, CITOYENS,

J'ai décidé de me présenter à l'élection présidentielle car je veux construire une vraie alternance, redonner à chaque Française et chaque Français confiance en soi, confiance en la France et dans notre capacité collective à relever nos défis. Ce faisant, nous redonnerons à l'Europe et au reste du monde confiance en notre pays.

"Le projet que je vous propose, c'est de bâtir avec vous une France nouvelle."

Depuis plus de trente ans, nous ne parvenons pas à régler le problème du chômage de masse, de la sécurité ni celui de l'intégration.

Des transformations radicales nouvelles bouleversent nos vies et nos certitudes.

La révolution numérique change nos manières de produire, de consommer et de vivre ensemble.

Le changement climatique nous oblige à repenser notre organisation et nos modes de vie.

Le terrorisme djihadiste a frappé notre pays ces dernières années et demeure la première menace. Le monde est de plus en plus incertain.

Pour faire face à ces transformations et ces défis, je propose de bâtir avec vous une France nouvelle qui crée et entreprend, une France de sécurité et de progrès pour chacun. Une France plus forte dans une Europe plus efficace. Une France qui répare les injustices de départ et protège les plus faibles. Une France qui dépasse les vieux clivages pour mettre en place les solutions qui marchent, et qui conduit enfin une vraie moralisation de sa vie politique.

Je veux que nous soyons à nouveau fiers d'être français, grâce à notre culture, notre rayonnement international et notre langue.

Je veux que nous soyons libres d'entreprendre, d'innover, de réussir quel que soit notre milieu d'origine.

Je veux que nous soyons solidaires car la réussite de quelques-uns ne peut pas être le projet pour tout notre pays.

Je veux auprès de vous prendre des engagements clairs sur les chantiers essentiels pour l'avenir de notre pays. Car présider, ce n'est pas s'occuper de tout. Ce sont ces mêmes engagements que je demanderai à l'ensemble des parlementaires qui constitueront la majorité présidentielle, parce que nous avons besoin de transformations innovantes et radicales, pas de petits ajustements.

Je veux qu'ensemble nous retrouvions l'énergie du peuple français : être fiers, libres et solidaires. Car la France est une chance.

Emmanuel Macron

Appendix B: Principes de vie dans l'établissement (Principles of life in the establis

Principes de vie dans l'établissement

①☞ L'élève doit **assister** à tous les cours et activités prévues.

②☞ L'élève doit **faire**, en classe et à la maison, l'intégralité du travail demandé par les professeurs.

③☞ L'élève doit **posséder** l'ensemble de son matériel scolaire (livres, cahiers, calculatrice, tenue de sport…).

④☞ L'élève ne doit, durant les cours, ni bavarder, ni se déplacer, ni utiliser des objets inutiles à la scolarité.

⑤☞ L'élève ne doit pas quitter la salle de cours avant la sonnerie.

⑥☞ L'élève doit parler la **langue française** en dehors des cours de langues vivantes.

⑦☞ L'élève doit pouvoir présenter à tout moment son **carnet de correspondance** à tous les personnels adultes de l'établissement.

⑧☞ L'élève doit avoir une **attitude respectueuse** des biens et des personnes, et bannir de son vocabulaire les injures et les grossièretés.

⑨☞ Tout **comportement perturbateur** est passible de punitions et de sanctions. Les déplacements au sein de l'établissement doivent s'effectuer dans le calme.

⑩☞ L'élève doit **justifier** ses absences et retards auprès de la vie scolaire.

Signature de l'élève :
(Précédée de la mention : *Je m'engage à respecter les principes de vie dans l'établissement*)