



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism

Jansen, H.Y.M.

Publication date
2006

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Jansen, H. Y. M. (2006). *Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

1

Assimilation in Theories of Immigrant Incorporation in France

Partir du présent pour en déduire le passé est une façon d'alimenter l'histoire des vainqueurs au détriment des vaincus, l'histoire de ceux qui ont laissé une trace de leur passage au détriment des invisibles, des sans-voix. (...) la grande majorité des étrangers qui ont immigré vers la France dans le passé n'y sont pas restés. Ces dizaines de millions de personnes ont donné leur opinion sur le 'modèle républicain' avec le seul moyen d'expression que la République leur a laissé : en fuyant vers des contrées plus accueillantes—c'est-à-dire en 'votant avec les pieds' (Noiriel 2002: 2).

[To depart from the present in order to deduce the past from it, is a way to feed the history of the winners at the cost of the vanquished, the history of those who have left a trace of their passage at the cost of the invisible, of those without voice. (...) the large majority of foreigners who have immigrated to France in the past have not stayed. These tens of millions of people have given their opinion on 'the republican model' through the only means of expression that the Republic has left to them: by fleeing to other, more hospitable regions—that is to say, by 'voting with their feet' (my translation).]

1.1 Why reintroduce assimilation?

Assimilation is a quite unfriendly concept when used in a social context. In French, it generally means 'an act of the mind that considers (something) as similar (to something else)'. A relevant secondary meaning is: 'The action of making (something) similar (to something else) by integration/absorption'. This meaning has existed in physiology from 1495 onwards. Around 1840, the concept was related to social processes for the first time: 'The act of assimilating persons, peoples; the process through which these persons, these peoples, assimilate (themselves)'. This connotation saturates terms like 'américanisation' and 'francisation'.¹

Literature has its ways of dealing with the relationship between becoming similar and being absorbed. In Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1989), the story of the adolescent Indian Salahuddin Chamcha's arrival at an English boarding school provides a cruel and ironic summary of 'assimilation'. The first thing we are told about Salahuddin's contacts with 'the English' is that his classmates giggle at his accent and exclude him from their secrets. Yet these exclusions only increase Saladin's determination to become English. He begins 'to act, to find masks that these fellows would recognise, paleface masks (...) until he fooled them into thinking he was *okay*, he was *people-like-us*' (Rushdie 1989: 44).

On one of Salahuddin's first days at boarding school, a kipper is served for breakfast. Salahuddin soon has a mouthful of bones, but nobody shows him how to eat the kipper. He must finish it before he is allowed to leave the table, which takes him ninety minutes. Finally, Salahuddin realises that he has been taught a lesson: 'England was a peculiar-tasting smoked fish full of spikes and bones, and nobody would ever tell him how to eat it' (44).

After a few years in England, Salahuddin has experienced, to some extent, 'culture' as Zygmunt Bauman once described it: 'Is not contempt, that license to snub and despise and kill, what culture is about?' (Bauman 1998: 344-45).

¹ I quote from the lemma 'assimilation' in the French dictionary *Le Petit Robert*. All translations are my own. I give the French originals here. The first meaning of assimilation reads: 'Acte de l'esprit qui considère (une chose) comme semblable (à une autre)'. The second meaning: 'Action de rendre semblable (à quelque chose) par intégration.' And the social meaning: 'Action d'assimiler des hommes, des peuples; processus par lequel ces hommes, ces peuples, s'assimilent.' In physiology, assimilation specifically meant the process 'par lequel les êtres organisés transforment en leur propre substance les matières qu'ils absorbent' [through which organised beings transform the materials they absorb into their own substance]. The older physiological connotation shines through in early politico-sociological discourse. Witness, for example, André Siegfried, one of the first French political scientists to occupy himself with immigration in the mid twentieth century: 'l'assimilation de ces immigrants, insérés dans l'organisme américain en doses massives' [the assimilation of these immigrants, inserted into the American organism in massive doses].

Salahuddin's reaction is to have become, outwardly, a fish himself. His face is described as 'handsome in a somewhat sour, patrician fashion, with long, thick, downturned lips like those of a disgusted turbot, and thin eyebrows arching sharply over eyes that watched the world with a kind of alert contempt' (Rushdie 1989: 33).

The quote from the French historian of immigration Gérard Noiriel, with which I started this chapter, makes clear that he does not idealise the Republican way of incorporating migrants. So what brings someone as critical as that to argue that we need to reintroduce a concept of assimilation? Noiriel understands assimilation as 'le processus social qui conduit à l'homogénéisation (linguistique, culturelle, politique) plus ou moins poussée des membres du groupe [the social process that leads to the more or less forced homogenisation (linguistic, cultural, political) of the members of a group]' (Noiriel 1992: 86, my translation). How can we interpret the relationship between the empirical and the normative aspects of this use of the concept?

Analysing Noiriel's views can help us to understand the complexities of assimilation's relation to multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is based on the claim, made in the footsteps of the social movements and philosophies of difference and recognition that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century, that it is unjust and unnecessary to abide by institutional arrangements and mentalities that require assimilation from migrants (and the members of other minorities), insofar as this means adaptation to 'models of normalcy' for citizenship based on the attributes of the 'able-bodied, heterosexual, white male'; an adaptation that is refused 'at the price of exclusion, marginalization or silencing' (Kymlicka 2002: 327). If we acknowledge that this claim is quite just and reasonable within liberal democracies, what can bring someone to nevertheless defend the concept of assimilation and to be critical of multiculturalism in practice, as we will see Noiriel is? Is there any way to mediate the options here?

Writing the 'history of power' in the context of debates on integration

Noiriel develops his concept of assimilation within a larger project of tracing the 'history of power' within the modern nation-state. When he analyses the process of what he calls 'national assimilation' (Noiriel 1996a: 265), it is in order to understand 'how we can account for the success of dominant, national cultural norms in supplanting those local and immigrant cultures that were the wealth and diversity of French society' (Noiriel 1996a: 265). Hence, migration is a central issue in Noiriel's account of the history of power in the nation-state. His primary focus, however, is not on migrants as a special group, but rather on

the ways in which migration has been involved in the 'social history of politics' in which other minorities (linguistic, regional), have also been centrally involved (Noiriel 2001: 41).

The fact that assimilation is the central concept of Noiriel's analysis of migration to France does not imply, as we have seen, that he defends the republican model of assimilation, for which France is well-known abroad, and which is often invoked as a counterexample to the politics of ethnicity and multiculturalism upheld in the Anglophone world. In actuality, however, as much as in many other European countries, the republican model of assimilation, insofar as this implies a politics of national homogenisation, was officially rejected as a goal of French social politics from the 1980s onwards. Thus, the fact that Noiriel does not defend it is not exceptional, but rather common.² A brief sketch of these developments in France may help to situate Noiriel's concept of assimilation.

In the 1970s and 1980s, it became a common view among French intellectuals and politicians that the assimilation of earlier generations of immigrants and regional minorities had only taken place because it had been forced upon them in the same manner in which it had been forced on entire populations within the colonies, and that assimilation should be rejected as a viable concept for immigration policies as well as for policies pertaining to regional languages. A preoccupation with respecting and preserving differences emerged among left-wing French politicians and also within the diverse French committees dealing with the incorporation of immigrants.³ In the policy advice of such committees, concepts like equality, solidarity, and social coherence, which appear to hark back to former French policies of national homogenisation, were nearly always surrounded and preceded by extensive declarations on the necessity of 'preserving' differences. In 1989, for example, the 'commisariat général du plan' stated that for social policies the most important object was to:

favoriser le développement d'une dynamique d'échanges qui, tout en préservant les spécificités culturelles des différentes composantes de la société contribue à l'émergence de nouveaux liens sociaux et instaure un

² However, some others, like Jeanne-Hélène Kaltenbach and Michèle Tribalat (2002), who are not incidentally fierce opponents of the headscarf, do defend assimilation. They want to 'return' to earlier policies of Republican incorporation. I have chosen to discuss Noiriel's more critical, less polemical, and less 'assimilationist' view.

³ Already since the 1970's, intellectuals had preoccupied themselves with the future of regional languages and cultures, which had also suffered from severe assimilation policies that had, for example, prohibited the use of Breton and Occitan as public languages (speaking these languages was banned altogether in the 1950s). Articles about these issues appeared quite frequently in 'Les Temps Modernes' and 'L'Arc' (see Van der Poel 1992: 70, 121, 152).

espace social suffisamment coherent (quoted from Kaltenbach and Tribalat 2002: 35).

[favour the development of a dynamics of exchange that, while preserving the cultural specificities of the different components of society, contributes to the emergence of new social ties and installs a social space that is sufficiently coherent (my translation).]⁴

In 1991, the Haut Conseil de l'Intégration once more defined integration as a set of policies that should:

susciter la participation active à la société nationale d'éléments variés et différents, tout en acceptant la subsistance de spécificités culturelles, sociales et morales et en tenant pour vrai que l'ensemble s'enrichit de cette variété, de cette complexité (quoted from Kaltenbach and Tribalat 2002: 36).

[encourage active participation in the national society by varied and different elements, while accepting the subsistence of cultural, social and moral specificities and accepting as truth that the whole enriches itself through this variety and complexity (my translation).]⁵

'Integration' was presented as an alternative to assimilation and in order to explain the difference between the two, the committee emphasised the necessity for organised support for the 'subsistence' of immigrant cultures. Anticipating my upcoming argument about the French understanding of multiculturalism, I would like to note that a perceived difficulty in mediating between cultural difference on the one hand, and social coherence and equality on the other, is at the centre of these definitions. This perceived difficulty frequently leads to an understanding of pluralism or multiculturalism as an ideology that wants the state to aid immigrants in 'preserving differences' as opposed to an assimilationist ideology that merely wants to create social cohesion and stimulate social mobility and integration. I call this understanding of pluralism 'top-down differentialism', responding to a presupposed *communautarisme* from

⁴ The commissariat preferred 'insertion' as a concept for understanding migration to 'integration,' 'adaptation,' or 'assimilation,' because it was the 'least connotated term.' In its view, all the other candidate concepts were too suggestive of hierarchical and organic thinking (Kaltenbach and Tribalat 2002: 35).

⁵ Only to stress in the next sentence that we should not 'exalt' these differences and that a politics of integration should put the emphasis on 'resemblances' and 'convergences' (quoted from Kaltenbach and Tribalat 2002: 36).

below, and I will argue that this understanding frequently inhibits more fruitful interpretations of pluralism.⁶

One of the reasons for the growing suspicion that differentialism might not be the ideal policy after all, was the way the emphasis on difference was gradually usurped by the Front National over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, in a manner quite shocking to those who, with the best of intentions, had been advocating the right to difference. The Front National also started to plea for the right to be different, but then only back in 'one's own country'.⁷ The respect for differences infused into political discourse seemed to lead to the belief that immigrants (and their children) 'are' different and that they should therefore never have left their countries of origin in the first place. This right-wing discourse took up the old discourses of *inassimilabilité* [inassimilability] that had stood at the basis of anti-immigration and xenophobic policies from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Moreover, in the 1980s and 1990s, the discourse surrounding the specific problems with immigrants from the Maghreb increasingly began to present Islam as a factor causing their *inassimilabilité* (Noiriel 1996).⁸

⁶ For an extensive commentary on these debates, see Kaltenbach and Tribalat (2002: chapter 1). They mention that the HCI report was inspired by Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux' *De l'immigré au citoyen* from 1989. In 2003, Costa-Lascoux was a member of the Stasi committee, whose report on *laïcité* will be discussed in chapter six of this book.

⁷ See Rogers Brubaker (2001), Birnbaum (1998). The FN had already hijacked Claude Lévi-Strauss' famous speech about 'race et histoire' given at the United Nations in 1951.

⁸ These fears of *inassimilabilité* have a long history and they kept resurfacing over the course of the twentieth century, not just in extreme right-wing political parties. The origins of the discourse of an unbridgeable 'cultural distance' can be found in French nineteenth-century intellectual discourses, such as, for example, that of the writer Maurice Barrès, the historian Georges Vacher de Lapouge, and the geographer Vidal de la Blache. Almost all categories of immigrants have at one time in French history been considered inassimilable: Germans who immigrated into the East of France before World War I; Polish, Armenian, Russian and East-European Jewish immigrants in the interbellum period; and immigrants from North-Africa after the 1960s. (Sarah Kofman gives a moving—autobiographical—account of the position of poor Eastern-European Jews in Paris in the thirties in her *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*). Discourses on *inassimilabilité* occur in the context of war and revolution: strong xenophobia existed against Germans after the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war; against Russians after the Russian Revolution; and against Maghrébins after the process of decolonisation in North-Africa in the 1960s. Anti-Muslim reactions after September 11, 2001 seem to follow this trend. Although religion is the main focus here, there is clearly an imaginary of ethnic enmity underlying the reactions to Muslims, who are often conflated with Arabs. Theories of inassimilability did not remain the exclusive domain of the right or even extreme right. The left has contributed to these theories as well. Georges Mauco, the migration expert of the Front Populaire—the left-wing united front against fascism in the 1930s—advised keeping the *inassimilables* out of the country: 'ceux qui portent en eux, dans leurs coutumes, dans leur tournure d'esprit, des goûts, des passions et le poids d'habitudes séculaires qui contredisent l'orientation profonde de notre civilisation [Those who carry within them, in their customs and in their mindsets, tastes, passions, and the weight

Not only right-wing politicians worried about immigration. Increasingly, problems of socio-economic marginalisation and related problems within the French *banlieues* came to be explained in terms of the problematic integration of Arabs or Muslims. From the end of the 1980s onwards, a new current in sociology and political science, often explicitly referring to the heritage of republicanism, started to problematise what they saw as the Americanisation of French politics, namely its increasing tendency towards *communautarisme* and identity politics. In 1987, for example, Riva Kastoryano wrote that: 'les différentes appartenances régionales, nationales, ethniques des populations immigrées menacent l'homogénéité de l'État-nation' (Kastoryano 1987, quoted from Noiriél 2001: 44) [the different regional, national, and ethnic ways of belonging on the part of the immigrant populations *threaten* the homogeneity of the nation-State' (my translation)], and that 'les revendications, identitaires ou non, de la religion menacent l'unité culturelle de l'espace national' (44) ['the claims, whether identitarian or not, of religion *threaten* the cultural unity of the national space (my translation)].

Noiriél develops his socio-historical concept of assimilation against these kinds of fears, which assume that the ethnically, religiously or regionally different backgrounds of migrant populations pose a threat to the coherence of the nation-state. These fears have produced mixed feelings, as remarked on earlier, for many participants in French debates about the transition from assimilation to integration. The debates on the headscarf affairs, to which I will return extensively in chapter six, testify to the fact that major social conflicts were increasingly explained in terms of their being produced by a too soft, ideologically and practically inappropriate differentialist philosophy of multicultural integration.

1.2 Gérard Noiriél's intervention

One of the main outcomes of Noiriél's historical research is to demonstrate that fears of *inassimilabilité* have proven and continue to prove exaggerated, as well as based on an inaccurate theory of (ethnic) belonging. However, Noiriél's concept of assimilation is not only an answer to right-wing xenophobia. It is also pitted against both the old republican view of assimilation and the state-organised differentialism of the 1980s. At first sight, these appear to be each other's opposites. On the one hand, we have the 'republican view of the nation, [that] continually idealised the assimilation of successive waves of immigrants

of ancient habits that contradict the profound orientation of our civilisation]. For this reason, Mauco considered Asians, Africans and the so-called 'levantins' [orientals] as 'indésirables' [undesirable] (quoted from Noiriél 2001: 39, my translations).

without inquiring about either the nature of that integration or its costs' (1996b: 162), and that had often pleaded for strong assimilationist policies in order to speed up this process.⁹ On the other hand, we have the anti-assimilationist view that was developed in the 1980s; a view that was once defended by Noiriel himself. However, according to him, the ideological differences expressed in these views are founded on the same error, namely their espousal of an overly political view of assimilation (Noiriel 1988: 263).

According to Noiriel, a historical reconstruction of the processes undergone by the various waves of immigrants to France and the United States, shows that assimilation is something that is both 'endured' and 'enacted' by immigrants practically independently of the specific policies forced upon them, because it forms part of the larger processes of cultural homogenisation that accompany the formation of the nation-state. We should recognise that assimilation is an inevitable process that migrants, and particularly their children, are destined to undergo, often at a great psychological cost. This ought to be recognised by the receiving state and its majorities, and should be 'rewarded' with unequivocal and full citizenship. Noiriel deploys his analysis of this underlying assimilation process to criticise what he sees as various myths about migration and the various policies that have ensued from them. In order to explain the way he understands assimilation, he draws on the sociological theories of Émile Durkheim and Norbert Elias, on American sociology, and on empirical research conducted among immigrants in France.

Émile Durkheim, Norbert Elias and the concept of 'national assimilation'

Noiriel's resistance to theories of the *inassimilabilité* of certain categories of immigrants is rooted in a long tradition within sociology that was founded by Durkheim. Durkheim's own theory of 'belonging' in modernity resulted from his struggle with right-wing French theories of national belonging. These stressed the ethnic ties of the French to either the Franks or the *Gaulois* and presented the members of other ethnic groups as *inassimilables*, for a few generations at least, if not indefinitely. Thus, they excluded people of different descent from the possibility of being loyal French citizens. Durkheim sought a possibility to refute these biologicistic or 'geographistic' theories without having

⁹ For example the early political scientist André Siegfried, who, in the 1950s, argued that a thorough 'de-racination' (for example by means of housing policies) and an accompanying advocacy of possibilities of integration among immigrants, was the best way to deal with immigrants (Noiriel 2001: 38). Proposals similar to Siegfried's are being made in the Netherlands today by politicians and policymakers from all parties except for the Green Left (Groen Links).

to rely on the abstract contract theory of citizenship which the republicans had taken from Rousseau at the beginning of the nineteenth century and which, by the end of the nineteenth century, had proven insufficient in dealing with questions of belonging and loyalty (Noiriel 2001: 43).

From Durkheim, Noiriel adopts the idea that the modern nation-state profoundly shapes the ways in which individuals are related to each other and that this leads to a strong relativisation of the force of familial and ethnic ties. Durkheim thought that modern society, through the increasing importance of institutions like written language and law, had largely replaced the traditional 'mechanical' solidarity transmitted from parents or immediate (local) relatives to children with what he called 'organic solidarity'. In the modern state, earlier generations do not leave us their heritage by means of an immediate passing on of beliefs and practices, but this heritage is passed largely through objective and material 'institutional' and collective forms. Hence, the materiality of the past is not denied, as in overly republican understandings of collectivity in modern society, but the ways in which past forms are transmitted to individuals are reinterpreted. Heritage is no longer primarily ethnic, but becomes national: it is 'interiorised', partly unconsciously, by the children living with these past forms in their environments, and by the way public schools inculcate in their pupils these abstract ways of defining who belongs to the 'group'—i.e. the nation-state. This explains the enormous importance of schooling in republican thought (see also Noiriel 2001: 43).¹⁰

Durkheim's theory was not developed in a politically neutral scientific climate. It was, at least partly, an attempt to argue, through solid theoretical argument, against the right-wing theories of what we could call 'mono-loyalty'. Durkheim, who was the son of an Alsatian rabbi, did not escape being questioned about his own loyalty. The insolence of these suspicions becomes clear when we read that in *La libre parole* from 1916, Durkheim is described as 'un boche avec un faux-nez représentant le Kriegministerium dont les agents essaient à travers la France' [a German with a false nose who represents the Kriegsministerium, agents of which are swarming all over France].¹¹ Yet, notwithstanding this personal motive, I think it is exaggerated to suggest, as the French sociologist Jean-Claude Chamboredon did in 1984, that Durkheim's

¹⁰ I will return to Durkheim's theory of 'modern solidarity' in chapter five when discussing *laïcité*.

¹¹ Somewhat later, the senator Gaudin de Vilaine asked the committee charged with the reconsideration of permits for foreign residents to examine the situation of the 'Français d'ascendance étrangère, comme M. Durkheim, un professeur de notre Sorbonne, représentant sans doute, comme cela a été affirmé, le Kriegministerium' [French people of foreign descent like Mr. Durkheim, a professor at our Sorbonne who, as has been confirmed, perhaps represents the (German) War Ministry] (quoted in Noiriel and Beaud 1991: 86, my translation).

work can be read as 'une méditation sur les bonnes manières d'être un juif assimilé dans la France contemporaine' [a meditation on the correct way to be an assimilated Jew in contemporary France] (quoted in Noiriel and Beaud 1991: 69, my translation). Such a view reduces the theoretical impetus of Durkheim's work to a position 'caused' by his own social placement. But I do think that the historical context links up Durkheim's sensitivity to the fallacies of ethnicity and the inadequacy of purely republican answers to right-wing ideas, to a similar sensitivity in his contemporary Marcel Proust, whose narrative of 'assimilation' we will trace in later chapters.

While Durkheim's understanding of the changed role of cultural heritage in modern society contributed to undermining the theories of the *inassimilabilité* of ethnic or ethno-religious 'others' held by the French right, Elias made it possible to understand the concept of assimilation in the context of a historical analysis of the social psychology of modern society. According to him, from the Renaissance onwards, the monopolisation of taxes and public force by central authorities resulted in the pacification of society and the gradual development of 'civilisation'. In court society, codes of proper conduct were elaborated which spread through society as a whole as the result of a mutual assimilation process between aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The aristocracy incorporated bourgeois elements and adopted some of their values; conversely, the bourgeoisie assimilated aristocratic culture, which, after the Revolution, it started to spread across the rest of society. This happened particularly in France, where the mutual cultural assimilation processes between nobility and bourgeoisie (and subsequently also the popular classes) were very strong. In the course of these processes, external prohibitions and rules were increasingly internalised by individuals that had to acquire a place in increasingly long chains of interdependence, where people could start to move from one social circle to another. In Noiriel's view, this did not happen without conflict altogether, but in the end it did lead to homogenisation:

The relations of necessity by which people were conflictually united, given the weight of norms and the cruelty of social judgements, forced them to control their urges, to 'interiorise' good manners; consciously at first, and increasingly unconsciously from one generation to the next, through reflexes acquired in the early stages of childhood (Noiriel 1996a [1989]: 268).

The force of this historical process led to the development that an education as a French person/subject came to profoundly influence individual behaviour, to the point of affecting people's body language and their affective, unconscious life. This provides a 'deep' explanation of how the nation, with its hierarchical systems and their heritage, forms us, and it also provides an argument for

understanding assimilation at a level where it has not only to do with the conscious adoption of dominant cultural values but also with the partly unconscious and largely uncontrollable wish to be recognised as 'one of them' at a deeper level.¹²

Immigrant assimilation

The frame provided by Durkheim's and Elias's theories of the assimilation processes at work in modern society as a whole, results in three theoretical starting points for Noiriél's understanding of immigrant assimilation. First, assimilation is something that immigrants, their children, and long-time residents partially share: although immigrant assimilation is a process marked by some peculiarities, the process also shares many characteristics with the assimilation of any single individual or resident group into national society. Understanding the process in this way enables us to analyse the primary 'coexistence' between the French and immigrants, which would help, according to Noiriél, to 'transcend the litanies on 'cultural differences' and the ambiguities of 'ethnicity' (Noiriél 1996a: 269). Second, this frame makes clear that assimilation should be understood as a process that operates both ways and that changes all the groups involved, while, at the same time, it makes us recognise that there exist dominant norms and subaltern norms. Such an understanding ascribes a certain measure of agency to those in non-dominant positions, without idealising this agency and neglecting the force of unequal power relations. Third, this frame can help us to understand the depth of experiences of national belonging, without recurring to naturalising explanations in terms of race, culture, or national character: it explains the constitutive factors of these experiences in terms of history alone.

Regarding the particularities of the assimilation process relating to immigrants, these starting points lead Noiriél to distinguish strictly between what assimilation means for immigrants themselves and what it means for their children. Immigrants themselves did not go through the internalisation process of the social hierarchies of French society at a young age. Hence, the process is

¹² A last source quoted by Noiriél is Marcel Mauss, whose concept of *habitus* inspired, famously, Pierre Bourdieu, and French structuralist sociology. It has also inspired, in various ways, critics of secularism such as Asad and Bader, to whose views I will return in chapter six. Mauss observed during World War I that the British army could not use the French spades, so that each division had to have its 8000 spades replaced. He observes that 'the very way a Frenchman walks resembles less that of a British subject than an Algonquin's walk resembles that of a Californian Indian,' and this observation leads Noiriél to emphasise once more the enormous force with which the nation imprints itself on individual behaviour (Mauss quoted from Noiriél 1989: 271).

by no means as effective as it is in those who do grow up in France. Immigrants may or may not try to actively assimilate themselves as much as possible, but the full force of the psychological process of assimilation does not touch them in the same way as it does their children. This is a reason for Noiriel's great reluctance towards assimilationism aimed at first-generation migrants and for his emphasis on the importance of the recognition of migrant's memories within the historiography of the nation-state. For first generation migrants, the problems of 'uprootedness' and social isolation are aggravated by an assimilationism that includes, for example, the refusal to understand the wish of immigrants to live in neighbourhoods with people of the same ethnic background.¹³

Noiriel also severely criticises the Republic's 'amnesia' and 'repression' of immigrants' histories. The republican image of the immigrant as either a (future) citizen or a foreigner has determined the way French public memory and official history have hardly ever shown much interest in the history of immigration or in the origins of immigrants. Historiography should be opened up to the memory of immigration and should fully acknowledge immigrants' contributions to the wealth of the country.¹⁴

For the children of immigrants, the situation is entirely different according to Noiriel. They grow up in the new country and there is the potential for conflict in someone's early years between the values and habits transmitted by the parents and those the child is confronted with outside her or his own home. Because the norms 'from outside' are those of the dominant group, which also often rejects the culture of the parents, he or she may undergo severe inner

¹³ On this point, Noiriel reminds us, we might learn from the early American sociologists of assimilation, who were not as *assimilationist* as we might think. In an article written together with Stéphane Beaud, he refers to sociological research conducted in the 1920s by a group of sociologists from Chicago (Robert Park and Henry Miller, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki) among Polish immigrants who moved to the United States. These sociologists already saw that it is important for immigrants—particularly for those who have not yet learned to participate in a cosmopolitan, globalised culture—to have a collective life among those whose cultural background they share. This is not because they want to remain a separate group, but because only this makes their ultimate integration into larger society possible. Immigrant assimilation, in this view, can only be articulated in terms of a passage from a 'start-culture' to an 'arrival-culture'. There is no direct passage from isolated migrants to universalised citizenship. Social bonds mediating between the individual and society are necessary. A second important view that Noiriel adopts from the Chicago school is that conflicts between minority cultures and the larger society do not block assimilation; instead, they increase self-consciousness among minorities, which in turn conditions the possibility of integration (Noiriel and Beaud 1991).

¹⁴ Attempting to release the writing of the history of France from its national orientation in a more fundamental sense is an option not considered by Noiriel, possibly because it is still relatively inconceivable within the French context.

conflict, since children (and adolescents) have a strong tendency to identify with dominant norms. Noiriél quotes many narratives of French immigrants' children about their wish to be recognised as belonging to the dominant group. One of these stories, for example, is told by an architect of North African origin and French nationality, who tells of his dramatic experiences when he and others like him 'discovered our difference from other children' and

became aware of the way in which the other children saw our parents. And since that image was often negative, we rejected our own parents and tried to make friends with the other kids. These problems continued throughout our school years, culminating at around 14 or 15 years of age, in adolescence, a time that for me felt something like insanity (quoted from Noiriél 1996b: 170).

This and other accounts of these inner conflicts lead Noiriél to notice that the wish to be accepted by the dominant group is interiorised partly unconsciously and involuntarily. This unconscious, involuntary 'appropriation of a dominant culture' is the most structural understanding of assimilation (Noiriél 1996b: 171). Here, assimilation is not a matter of pedagogy or attitude. Noiriél thinks that stigmatisation due to 'not being like the others' may constitute an important factor of assimilation: by interiorising the disavowing gaze of the other from one's early years onwards, individuals often develop modes of behaviour designed to prove their belonging to the dominant majority; more or less like we saw in the story told by Rushdie's narrator in the anecdote opening this chapter.

The emotional price individuals have to pay for assimilation, particularly the members of the second generation, should bring to mind, according to Noiriél, the 'odiousness' of all political measures or suggestions, even those made with good intentions, that promote the idea that members of the second generation are not like the others (Noiriél and Beaud 1991: 277). This is where the debate on multiculturalism starts. Noiriél thinks that things went into the wrong direction in the 1980s and 1990s when, together with the rise of anti-racism, ethnicity came more and more into focus as the location of the perceived specific problems with migrants from the Maghreb. This was the time, Noiriél argues, that 'culturalism' arose, which isolated culture from its concrete context and suggested that immigrants and their children could retain practically complete cultures, even though this is in fact impossible both under the conditions of the uprootedness of the first generation and of the deep

assimilation of the second (1996b: 167).¹⁵

Critique of 'ethnicity'

In Noiriel's view, the widely perceived specific problems surrounding the integration of persons from North-African origin are not caused by any specificity of this group, but by the changes in policies and perceptions with regard to immigration in general.¹⁶ At the end of the 1980s, immigrants from the Maghreb had largely been divided into two groups: one which had known important social emancipation and had often developed into elites representing those less integrated; and another one which had been formed by individuals who had known important social degradation, mostly because of the social effects of the perception that Arabs were a 'problem'. This bi-polarisation was caused by the fact that unemployment and social problems were less and less explained in socio-economic terms and that attention was being focused more and more on the problems of the so-called 'second generation'. Here, factors like the introduction of the social category of 'youth'; the way big urbanisation projects lent this 'youth' more visibility; the rise of media attention for immigration as a fundamental problem within society; the installation of the welfare state; the introduction of welfare workers specialised in 'migrants'; and, finally, the loss of power of the workers' movement, all contributed to this new focus on immigrants' children, who came to be stigmatised as 'Beurs', people from North-Africa.

The importance of their 'integration' into French society has spurred the investment of serious resources into the emancipation of immigrants and the most privileged among them have profited from this investment. But the perception of immigration as a problem, in particular with regard to 'Arabs', has encouraged the stereotyping of children of North-African origin as members of a problematic group, which is an important cause of contemporary

¹⁵ Noiriel's argument here is close to the criticisms made in the context of British cultural studies of the essentialist aspects of multiculturalism, when it relies on a reified concept of culture. Constructivists like Gerd Baumann (1996) fulminate against the reified concept of culture assumed, in his view, by those multiculturalists who refuse to take it as a purely analytical concept. For an extensive debate on the ontological status of 'culture', see Bader (2001) and Baumann (2001).

¹⁶ Noiriel argues that the factor that determines the level of integration of the descendants of immigrants is not their ethnic background but the geographic place where their parents come to live. For example, quantitative research among French immigrants conducted by I.N.S.E.E. in 1986 and 1987 (published in 1990), made clear that in industrial regions such as Nord/Pas de Calais, social-economic integration has proven difficult, whereas in Paris descendants of all ethnic backgrounds have achieved upward trajectories.

racism. Those who have not achieved socially successful trajectories, for example because of unemployment, are confined to the category that defines them as (problematic) 'Beurs', even if they are 'perfectly assimilated' (Noiriel 1996: 178). This has resulted in a major social problem of combined discrimination and marginalisation:

Constamment renvoyés à leur origine ethnique, à une religion que la majorité d'entre eux ne pratiquent pas, à des enjeux politiques internationaux qui ne les concernent pas plus que les autres Français, ils sont victimes d'une ségrégation qui n'est pas juridique, mais administrative, économique, sociale et culturelle (Noiriel 2002: 5).

[Continuously redirected to their ethnic origins, to a religion which the majority among them do not practice, to international political issues which concern them no more than the other French people, they are victims of a segregation that is not juridical but administrative, economic, social and cultural (my translation).]

The children of North-African immigrants who came to France—who were actually invited to come at a time of great economic prosperity—are also, Noiriel keeps reminding us, nearly all working-class, a fact that is structurally forgotten. They have come to learn to explain their problems in terms of racism rather than in terms of exploitation or unemployment. Moreover, Islam, as an ethno-religious identity marker, has come to be considered a primary resource for the possibility of revolt, just because its political invocation is an 'available vocabulary' (Noiriel 1996b: 178).

However, as Noiriel argued already in 1992, 'doing' Islam for political reasons only weakens the position of immigrants' children, because defining oneself in ethnic or religious terms in a secularised and disenchanted country like France has a much less powerful political meaning than defining oneself in terms of (social-professional) class—and, we might add, this is the case even when doing so may intimidate or impress people. According to Noiriel, the resulting lack of a concrete political organisation of the unemployed 'working' class, which would channel dissidence and lead to integration, turns today's small popular uprisings against inequality into auto-destructive violence against the own group (2002).

Following this line of reasoning, Noiriel, together with his colleague Beaud, has explained the Republic's troubles with the headscarf in terms of racialisation and ethnicisation. Right-wing France, interested in presenting immigration as a problem, has succeeded in setting the agenda also of those considering themselves 'republicans', by generalising the fear that France may

become a country separated between different *communautés ethniques*. All serious sociological research, Noiriel and Beaud argue, demonstrates that no immigrant community has ever posed a real threat to any western nation-state. However, the fear that this will happen results in the fact that no sufficient efforts are made where it is really necessary, namely in the area of social mobility. All the different kinds of policies that stress ethno-cultural 'difference' instead of economic and social inequality and segregation, even a policy like affirmative action, can only increase the long-term effects of racialisation and marginalisation (Noiriel and Beaud 2004).

1.3 Normative consequences and comments

Notwithstanding this rejection of affirmative action, explicit normative judgements hardly appear in Noiriel's historical analysis of migration to France. As we have seen, he uses his socio-historical concept of assimilation to debunk what he perceives as the myths underlying certain overly political views of assimilation. In summary, we have seen that Noiriel opposes right-wing arguments of *inassimilabilité*; republican assimilationism, and a 'culturalism' that suggests that migrants can take their cultures with them and that thinks in terms of ethnic belonging also with regard to the second generation. This implies that his analysis of assimilation does have normative implications, and I will problematise some of these in what follows.

Noiriel's historical analysis of the assimilation of immigrants within a larger context of the processes of assimilation occurring in all nation-states (and perhaps particularly in centralised France), provides convincing arguments against fears of the *inassimilabilité* of immigrants. Moreover, it is also a powerful antidote against the contemporary version of that fear, which suggests the likelihood of immigrant 'culturalism' causing them either to stubbornly stick to old-time cultural practices without flexibility or adaptation, or to actively construct an 'otherness' that would threaten the coherence of the nation-state. Lastly, recognising the force of assimilation as a social process may also convince Europeans to adopt a less restrictive admission policy for migrants, since its current restrictiveness is at least partly caused by an unnecessary fear that migrants will not 'assimilate' —or 'integrate', for that matter.

However, Noiriel may have drawn some too abstract and too general conclusions from his analysis, conclusions which remain indebted to the republican tradition that idealised full assimilation, or so I will try to show. My central concern is with Noiriel's suggestion that his analysis of immigrant assimilation should lead us to reject nearly all immigrant claims in terms of ethnicity, as well as to a rather general rejection of what he calls 'culturalism'.

Though as a historian, he only comments on those forms of 'culturalism' that have actually occurred in France, drawing no conclusions about multiculturalism or pluralism in general, Noiriel's interpretation of the assimilation process implies that references to ethnicity or claims of culture can only be based on a faulty theory of ethnic belonging—with the exception of some claims, based on actual cultural memory, made by first-generation immigrants. In his interpretation, culturalism leads, and has led, to social conflicts based on illusionary identifications. It therefore risks undermining the social position of the weakest groups among the descendants of immigrants.

A problematisation of Noiriel's normative conclusions does not, in the first place, need to be based on a normative standpoint. Instead, it can rely on a questioning of the suggested necessary course of the assimilation process. Is the assimilation process undergone by the members of the second generation necessarily as violent and as 'perfect' as Noiriel suggests, leading to a *profond désir de reconnaissance* [profound desire for recognition] (2002)? Are the identity-formative structures of the nation-state and the social psychology of majority-minority relations indeed so strong and unidirectional that they lead to an autonomous process that renders state policies, normative standpoints, and migrants' agency practically irrelevant? If this is not the case, we might, in a second step, critique the suggestion that all forms of pluralism or multiculturalism can only be ideological and can only lead to a discourse concentrated on race and racism. We might then see the relevance of making distinctions between forms that do and those that do not. In a third step, we may finally take a normative perspective and ask how we can design policies and institutions that do not take one specific interpretation of the process of assimilation for granted, but that instead exhibit some trust in our ability to organise incorporation processes in ways as democratic and just as possible. In the following chapters, I will regularly come back to the either/or conception of belonging. This is a feature shared by many critiques of pluralism.

(1) A first critical step concerns Noiriel's presentation of the relation between ethnicity and assimilation as an 'either/or' opposition with regard to the second generation. For first-generation immigrants, Noiriel recognises a certain, albeit always interrupted, continuity between the established habits and ways of perceiving things learned by migrants in their original cultural contexts and those they practice in France. For them, it is impossible to shed the heritage of the country of origin entirely. Once they arrive in France, migrants may have more or less pronounced wishes to remember and continue—or to forget and shed—their cultural background, and hence they do have some agency in deciding the speed and extent of their assimilation.

Yet while this diminishes the republican ideal of 'full assimilation' for the first generation, it returns for the second in Noiriel's explanation, this time in a

naturalised form. Noiriél seems to allocate very little agency to second-generation migrants in relation to the assimilation process. Members of the second generation assimilate in a manner that is partly voluntarily but, under the pressure of the violence of members of the majority and the institutional structure of the nation-state, perhaps even more involuntarily. This seems to imply that they not only assimilate to French culture, but do so at the expense of a deep attachment to the ethnic difference of their parents. Talking about the passively experienced 'perfect assimilation' of second-generation Maghrebi immigrants, Noiriél suggests that any claims they might make in terms of culture, ethnicity or religion can only be interpreted as inscriptions onto the 'available vocabulary' of French multicultural discourse. This precludes any actual experience of the self as a (partial) member of a specific ethnic group that goes beyond the mere result of a discriminated social position or some other political motive; and it perhaps also deprives migrants' children of possibilities for grouping themselves and acting collectively to improve their situation by presenting themselves as members of a disadvantaged minority instead of only as members of a disadvantaged class.

At this point, I do not want to question Noiriél's very well-documented long-term analysis of the thoroughness of the process of immigrant assimilation at a time of strong nation-state formation, particularly in France. Yet it is quite implausible that full assimilation for the second generation, under the influence of the institutional force of the French nation-state and under the pressure of a violently assimilationist majority, is the only possible interpretation of the process, particularly in the context of the last decades of the twentieth century. Noiriél's rejection of ethnicity as a relevant category is based on a very mono-directional and generalising interpretation of what assimilation means, particularly for the second (and even third) generation. The definition of assimilation as a process that occurs in a predominantly random fashion, detached from politics and migrants' agency, results in a disregard for those aspects of cultural transmission that do at least partly fall within the control of migrants (such as the transmission of language or religion). These aspects are regarded as accidental or illusionary, or at best as merely the effects of multicultural politics and therefore insufficiently substantial to counter the structural process on which this politics is based.¹⁷

¹⁷ The heritage of structuralism, for example via Mauss, has influenced Noiriél's interpretation of assimilation too strongly. Noiriél's vision of the structural influence of the assimilation process on migrants is related to Bourdieu's *habitus* concept, which also carries excessive structuralist and determinist traces, even though Bourdieu was critical of structuralism. For a critique on the heritage of structuralism within the *habitus* concept and a simultaneous defence of it versus a constructivism that only acknowledges performance and agency, see Bader (1991).

A less structuralist perspective would permit us to see that both for second-generation immigrants individually and for the process of incorporation in general, there are more possible outcomes, depending on specific contexts. What Noiriel seems to neglect is that incorporation processes, however asymmetrical, are open-ended, involving many actors. Assimilation is not a process that happens to migrants, and particularly to their children, independent of state policies and the agency of the people concerned. What migrants themselves want and do, both individually and collectively, is a relevant factor in determining the shape, tempo and end result of the process, and this is not necessarily the same for everyone or for every group. Whether migrants and minorities assimilate—and the speed with which they do so—depends on many factors: the resources and authority they possess; whether they live in concentrated territories or dispersed among other ethnic groups; the power-balances between minorities, majorities and the state; the wants of the spiritual or actual elites and whether they are politically astute enough to realise their goals. The opportunities that members of minorities see for integrating into the majority also play an important role (see for example Bader 2003b; Zolberg and Woon 1999).

With regard to the members of the second generation, different kinds of reactions are possible, even if we acknowledge the force of nation-state formation and of the 'gaze' of assimilatory majorities. This force does not imply that everyone reacts to these experiences in the way Noiriel seems to assume, namely by aspiring to recognition as 'one of us' by the dominant group. It cannot be said that this is the 'essential' result of the process and that identifications with ethnicity are only attempts to hide the disillusionment of failed recognition. Claims of culture can have other sources than frustration or mere political usefulness. Moreover, people can play with their imposed identities and make them useful to their specific social situation.¹⁸

Let me bring up here what Rushdie's narrator adds to his description of the old 'turbot' cited at the beginning of this chapter. He writes that this 'man had constructed his face and voice with care' and that migrants' 'false descriptions of themselves' are made 'to counter the falsehoods invented about us, concealing for reasons of security our secret selves' (1989: 49). Is nothing left of these secret selves in the second generation? And more importantly, is such 'secrecy' still necessary in today's multicultural societies? Should it be? The immense literature within the humanities (and cultural studies in particular) on,

¹⁸ For example, Sawitri Saharso (1992) discusses the differentiation in discourses and practices by second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands. Though the institutional context differs from the French one, members of the second generation in the Netherlands report the same experiences of rejection and they can relate to the kind of painful experiences Noiriel describes. However, they do not react solely in terms of a wish to be accepted.

for example, *hybridity*, *mimicry*, *translation* and *performance*, and on what it means to be, to behave, or to feel 'the same but not quite'—questions that have been explored by Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler and many others—is more promising for understanding the subtleties of agency within a context of inequality than any assumption of full assimilation.¹⁹

The balance between assimilation and pluralisation may depend on national contexts. Some members of the dominant cultural 'majority' in France may be more offensive than members of some other majorities (under the influence of age-long discourses on the need to assimilate and perhaps also as a reaction to their own experiences with assimilatory pressure). The experience of being rejected is rife among immigrants and minorities in France. Dyane, a black female friend from Benin whom I first met during a long stay in New York and later again in Paris where she was living, told me about the immense difference it made to her whether she was in France or in the United States. Even though she speaks French fluently and English only moderately well, she is frequently treated as an undesired stranger in France, whereas in New York this was much less so.

But let us return to Noiriel's notion that historical evidence teaches us that whatever perspective we may take, long-term analyses of the process lead to the conclusion that immigrants to France have almost all fully assimilated, if not within two than at least within three generations.²⁰ Even if we were to assume that the exceptional assimilatory force of the French nation-state indeed exists to the extent of being able to mould immigrants quite independently of their own wishes and perceptions, and that this has, in the past, usually led to full assimilation in the case of immigrants, this situation appears to have changed over the course of the last decades, because the opportunities for migrants to retain certain cultural practices have increased under three main influences.

The first is the influence of 'top-down' state-organised differentialism itself. Insofar as the French state, like all other liberal nation-states, has wanted to protect 'cultures', this has led to different cultural contexts and different opportunity structures for migrants that have breached, to some extent, the homogenising powers of the nation-state (Bader 2003b). Furthermore, there is a gap between, on the one hand, the either-or ideologies of differentialism and neo-republicanism developed in national politics and, on the other, governmental practices at the regional level. In France, like elsewhere, multicultural policies have simply arisen in order to manage contacts with

¹⁹ I return to these intersubjective aspects of 'assimilation' when reading the *Recherche*.

²⁰ It is not only Noiriel who holds this view with regard to France; it has also been defended by Tribalat (1995). She, however, holds a much more clearly normative republican assimilationist view of the process (Kaltenbach and Tribalat 2002).

migrant elites (Schain 1999). The role of majorities may also have changed under the influence of differentialist and human rights discourses, which have both and also in relation to each other claimed respect for other cultures. An increasing awareness of the violence with which the 'West' has behaved towards colonised peoples and internal long-time minorities like the Jews, the Roma and the Sinti may have influenced majority reactions. Many members of majority groups have developed a greater consciousness that brusque pressures to assimilate may harm people, and the rejection demonstrated by some may be compensated by fascinated, 'normal' or enthusiastic and curious reactions by others.²¹

Secondly, the diminution of the extraordinary power of the nation-state to achieve cultural homogenisation has been accelerated by the international developments in the direction of more transnational forms of cultural belonging. Much sociological and anthropological research done in the 1990s has demonstrated that globalising tendencies, such as the rise of new media and travelling opportunities that connect migrants to their home countries with greater ease, as well as the visibly more diverse and multicultural character of contemporary liberal societies, have led to an increased heterogenisation at the national level and, at the same time, to a homogenisation around 'capitalist' values at supra-national levels. This has led sociologists and anthropologists to argue that multiple identities and all kinds of cultural exchanges have assuaged the rigid homogenisation inherited from nationalism (see for example Soysal 1994; Waldron 1995; Bauboeck 1998a).

Thirdly, the immigrant populations themselves have changed. They come from more diverse backgrounds and bring more diverse religious beliefs and practices with them. Noiriel seems to think that if we suggest that the specificity of the groups of migrants themselves might be a factor in the assimilation process, we encourage the tendency to consider some groups of migrants 'inassimilable', but this is not necessarily so. Instead, we have to recognise that assimilation can be grouped into several social fields. People can assimilate in some fields, while retaining a particularity in others. Here, language and religion are particularly important for distinction. In most liberal nation-states, simultaneous linguistic assimilation processes and religious pluralisation

²¹ Even so, the moral wish to be 'tolerant' and respectful may hide an equally deep, nearly involuntary inclination in members of majorities to pressure 'foreign' people to assimilate, which, after all, they themselves have also done to some extent and at a certain price. A moral rejection of the pressures to assimilate that Noiriel describes can be based on an analysis of the harm done to people who are subjected to disrespect or non-recognition, as some philosophies of respect and recognition have recently done (Taylor 1994; Honneth 1998). This has, as Nancy Fraser argues, given rise to some evident backlashes, in particular with regard to the anticipation of a specific, disabling effect of the harm done to people who experience disrespect. We then 'risk to add insult to injury' (Fraser 2001).

processes occur, both taking place in different tempos depending on several different factors. Zolberg and Woon (1999) also notice that migrants usually completely assimilate linguistically—with the loss of the language of origin—within a few generations.²² Religion, however, is a field that makes matters more complicated. Religion mediates between inherited cultural practices and rituals on the one hand, and ethical views of the good life on the other, and it is something that people who have assimilated linguistically can opt to ‘preserve,’ albeit always in changing shapes.

It is possible to detach religion entirely from ethnic difference, for example when we speak of an *Islam de France* and consider Islamic belief the private concern of otherwise fully assimilated French citizens. We can consider this simultaneous nationalisation and privatisation of Islam either as an ‘is’ or as an ‘ought’, but in both cases, religious particularity would be seen as ultimately irrelevant to the question of assimilation. Religious pluralism would be considered guaranteed by the freedom of conscience and the religious neutrality of the state, a neutrality that could be achieved by a *laïcité* that would have overcome some obvious biases in the ways in which it privileges the heritage of ‘Frenchness’ and Christianity. This is the option proposed by the Stasi committee, to be discussed in chapter six. What I wish to note here preliminarily is that the suggestion of a ‘privatised’ *Islam de France* should not make us overlook the relations between Islam as a religion, the (post-)colonial context, recent and ongoing immigration from the Maghreb and other African countries such as Senegal, the interaction between minorities and majorities, and, lastly, the French tradition of the *gestion de la religion* [the governance of religion].

With regard to the fact that migrants usually assimilate as far as language concerns, another remark needs to be made. The regular occurrence of linguistic assimilation does not imply that the language of origin will always be lost within one or even two generations. While people usually have only one religion, they can easily master at least two languages if these are taught well. If migrants would be presented with real opportunities to learn two languages it is not so certain that full linguistic assimilation would always occur within one or perhaps even two generations.²³

²² This in contrast to national minorities, who usually try and succeed—though sometimes at great cost—to preserve their own language (for this distinction, see Kymlicka 1995). For a more elaborate overview of the many categories ‘in between’ those of migrants and national minorities, see Bauboeck (1996) and Bader (1997b).

²³ There is a specificity with regard to those languages used in the context of religious practice here, such as Arabic, Hebrew, or Sanskrit. Here, the language of preference need not necessarily be the original language of the parents or grandparents. Matters are complicated here. For instance, in the Maghreb, there was a lot of resistance by some of the members of the Berber peoples to the Arabisation of their cultures after decolonisation. This implies that for some

The above-mentioned arguments explain that assimilation at some points, even at structural points, does not necessarily imply the loss of legitimacy for claims of culture or for a politics willing to make allowances for such claims. To see this, we do not, however, need to revert to those sources in international sociology that have argued these points over the last years. Noiriel's own theoretical model leaves space for a more differentiated interpretation of the assimilation process and a milder judgement of the reference to ethnicity. After all, in the footsteps of Durkheim and Elias, Noiriel emphasises that objective collective forms mediate between 'natural' ethnic ties and the 'modern' abstract ties of citizenship. Noiriel himself fully acknowledges and extensively describes the cultural memories that generations of immigrants have brought with them (1996a: chapter 1 and 5; 1996b). Nevertheless, after stressing the importance of the memory of immigration, he seems to ignore the fact that some of these memories may lead to objective forms that would go against the monocultural character of France, also at an institutional level, and that would crucially add to its 'deep' pluralisation. I will try to contribute to an understanding of this 'Durkheimian' aspect of memory in chapter seven by addressing cultural aspects of memory in Marcel Proust's *Recherche*.

Noiriel's failure to question the suggested necessary outcome of the process of assimilation and his suggestion that it occurs in more or less the same way for everyone, precludes two insights. First, it inhibits our perception that some migrants do not assimilate as quickly as Noiriel suggests, and second, it constrains our ability to imagine that migrants and their descendants could have more of a say in the speed with which and the extent to which they assimilate, if they were genuinely given the option to do so. This is possible without denying the 'deep assimilation' process that Noiriel so convincingly uncovers. In large parts, they exist side by side and could be made to co-exist to an even greater extent.

(2) Returning to the second step of my comments on Noiriel's concept of assimilation, we need to question whether all kinds of 'culturalism' lead to an ethnicist or culturalist discourse that stays close to, or at least fuels, racism, and whether they necessarily result in a neglect of the economic causes of socio-

Berber immigrants in France—but also more largely in Europe—it can be irritating to be associated with Arab culture and they may, for example, prefer to learn Tamazigh. On the other hand, the necessity of dealing with what the French context has to offer, and indeed with the fact of being 'othered' in terms of 'Arabness' or of being Muslim, may encourage immigrant identification with religion and the adoption of Arabic as the language of preference. The complexity of the possibilities clarifies how important it is to hear and follow migrants' own wishes instead of predetermining their identities on the basis of theories of either 'originary' group-belonging, general citizenship, religion, or whatever other identities we may imagine.

economic marginalisation or, formulated differently, of the effects of neo-liberal capitalism on positions that 'cannot be reduced to cultural status' (Fraser 2003).

Top-down differentialism, which has been advocated in France as much as elsewhere in Europe (see section 1.1), may indeed have had the effect of enforcing ascriptive categorisations of immigrants. It reminds one of the right-wing *inassimilabilité* thesis by suggesting that immigrants will not want to assimilate or that if people want to retain certain cultural or religious practices this implies that they do not want to assimilate but *only* 'integrate'. The suggestion that we either have 'integrated' societies and social coherence or risk gradual disintegration because immigrants wish to preserve their differences, may not be particularly helpful in preventing xenophobia. In the next chapter, I return to the concept of integration, which has been criticised for precisely these reasons (Bader 1997; Favell 2001; Morawska and Joppke 2003). At this point I just want to note that this encouragement of ascriptive categorisations has not been the only effect of top-down differentialism. As I argued before, top-down differentialism has also led to changed opportunity structures for migrants to resist their forced assimilation and it has brought about possibilities for ethnic and religious particularities in a more positive sense than just as the result of ascriptive categorisations by dominant majorities.

In line with the arguments above, in which I suggest that it would be important to admit to passive and active moments in the interpretation of assimilation, I would like to put forward that Noiriel's socio-historical concept of assimilation as overcoming both assimilationism and anti-assimilationist 'culturalism' or 'differentialism', should be reinterpreted. Noiriel argues that his socio-historical concept of assimilation overcomes the overly political view of assimilation held by the two factions, but at a deeper level his interpretation shares a crucial position with both. This concerns the suggestion that there should be a central and equivocal interpretation of what assimilation means and that policies should be based on this 'true' interpretation. Instead of purifying the political concept into an empirical one, we should modify it into one that takes both structural moments and the perspectives of all different actors into consideration, thereby diversifying it. Most problematic of top-down differentialism is the fact that the state decides whether the preservation of cultures is good or bad based upon a single and too simple theory of assimilation, and of culture. This search for the ultimate meaning of assimilation on which to base our policies is something that Noiriel's concept of assimilation has not overcome.

In response to Noiriel's suggestion that differentialism is the problem and that a solid analysis of the process of assimilation would provide at least a partial answer, we should also challenge the suggestion that arguing that immigrants do eventually assimilate could sufficiently combat xenophobia and

segregationist tendencies. This is based on a superficial understanding of the relation between xenophobia and assimilation itself. Establishing the scholarly certainty that immigrants will assimilate appears to be, at first sight, a realistic way to prevent xenophobia in the majority population. Yet this argument bypasses a critique of the logic of assimilation, which holds that newcomers have to be like 'us' in order to be accepted as full citizens. If we do not try to alleviate the force of this logic by undermining the apparent self-evidence of assimilation, we establish assimilation as a norm and seem to legitimise the notion that full citizenship, but also full recognition, can only be acquired by migrants and their children at the price of declaring their former or 'different' selves as not belonging. The frequently made suggestion that all references to 'difference' lead to racism precludes the insight that if we are not allowed to be different, segregation has already started.

Questioning the logic of assimilation becomes particularly important when groups do not want to assimilate, at least not fully. Assimilatory pressure has always led to problems with national minorities, but longstanding conflicts with immigrants rarely arise, because they generally do wish to assimilate promptly. However, some groups may not want this and in that case the logic of assimilation can lead to a hardening of the conflict on both sides.²⁴

(3) We now have to consider the third, normative step: if we wish to think of assimilation without assimilationism, we need to develop policies that take migrants' wishes into account and that take all options, including (partial) non-assimilation, seriously. For this, we need to develop our 'institutional imagination' and think of procedures that can organise the process in ways more just, democratic and peaceful than Noiriel suggests is possible.²⁵ Top-down differentialism is not the only form of pluralism that we can imagine, nor are all pluralisms tolerant of references to ethnicity by the descendants of immigrants guilty of the sin of reifying culture. The central issue is how a liberal and democratic pluralism could respond to migrants' own considerations about whether or not and in which ways they want to assimilate, while at the same time not falling into the trap of reifying cultural differences. In any case, such a pluralism should neither impose active assimilation nor multiculturalism, but try to create diverse institutional options providing

²⁴ The rigidification of cultural claims on the side of minorities under the influence of assimilatory pressure has been explained by Ayelet Shachar (2001) in terms of 'reactive culturalism'. Levy (2000) and Bader (2001) ascertain that it is possible that some groups simply do not wish to assimilate (completely) and undue pressure exercised by the state could result in prolonged conflicts.

²⁵ The phrase 'institutional imagination' was coined by Bader to denote the failure to consider different institutional options by those theorists returning to the 'creed of the melting pot' when they seek answers to the questions posed by contemporary multi-ethnic societies (Bader 1998: 20).

migrants, both as members of groups but also as individuals that may come into conflict with those groups, with as many choices as possible (see Bauboeck 1998a; Shachar 2001 and Bader 1998 for elaborate views on the options available; I return to this in chapter two).

To conclude, I would like to put forward that Noiriel's concept of assimilation needs further differentiation and needs to be placed in a less systematic opposition to ethnic belonging or, rather, to non-national forms of belonging in general, also transnational ones. What should be kept in mind, however, is his convincing analysis of immigrant assimilation as just one special form of the more general processes of assimilation that go together with nation building, which migrants and others alike all undergo in some way from their early years onwards. A version of this insight is one of the basic premises of pluralism and this analysis of the force of the process of national (or more multilevel) cultural homogenisation processes undermines the thesis of those who suggest that the state can be, or even is, culturally neutral. This thesis, however, forms the basis of the political philosophy underlying the liberal-secular conception of citizenship, to be discussed in the following chapter.