3 Re-imagined communities? Education policies and national belonging in Britain and France

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Almost all highly industrialized Western European countries began seeking foreign labour following the Second World War, increasingly from non-European countries. Yet, in spite of the fact that ethnic minorities now constitute a significant proportion of the populations of several European states, relatively little is known about how these demographic changes have affected the national identities of West European nations. This paper focuses on the effects of ethnic pluralism on education policies in Britain and France, two countries with particularly elevated percentages of ethnic minority residents. Education is a critical domain for understanding national identity, since schools are the key institutional location for the state to disseminate ideas about legitimate membership in the nation.

Viewed through the prism of education policy, Britain has ‘re-imagined’ its community while France has not. British education policy was re-imagined as schools began to support cultural pluralism and articulate an understanding of Britain as a multicultural country. In so doing, British education policies have sought to widen the boundaries of national membership to include minority cultures as acceptable elements of Britishness. France, on the other hand, has consistently pursued an educational policy which tends toward the assimilation of minority immigrants into the already established French culture. France has thus reaffirmed its cultural boundaries through its schools, leaving little place for ethnic minority cultures in education institutions. While there are exceptions to these trends, Britain and France have undertaken substantially different policies with respect to ethnic minority immigrants in the arena of education.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. Part one argues that national membership can be fruitfully conceptualized by employing a ‘boundary’ framework. It argues that belonging is contingent not only on formal legal boundaries which regulate immigration and citizenship, but also on less concrete sociological boundaries between ostensibly equal citizens. A re-imagined community is defined as one which has undergone a shift in a sociological boundary of membership. Part two examines Britain and France, demonstrating that the two countries have taken very different education policy paths. It shows that, despite certain countercurrents and exceptions, Britain has undergone a re-imagination of community through education policy whereas France has not. Finally, part three argues that conceptualizing the nation involves not only examining the flexibility of national boundaries - and thus the willingness to re-imagine community - but also the nation’s content - the level of equality of belonging between individuals within the boundaries. Insights from categorization theories in cognitive science can clarify issues of stratification within boundaries. This, in turn, raises questions about the advantages and disadvantages of re-imagining community, and therefore of the different British and French education policies.

Nations, boundaries and re-imagined community

All nations draw boundaries to define membership in the national community. Examining and analyzing identities through their boundaries has proven a useful approach for anthropologists in addressing issues of belonging in social groups (Barth, 1969; Wallman, 1978; Wallman, 1986). With respect to the nation, there are both formal legal criteria of citizenship and symbolic and sociological dimensions of belonging such as class, religion, ethnicity and race. The multiplicity and overlap of lines drawn between members and non-members within a national community raise complex questions about the location, salience, permeability and flexibility of different boundaries. The concept of re-imagined community focuses on the last of these issues, asking...
whether nations actively seek to widen their boundaries to include new members.

In Anderson's now-classic terms, a nation can be conceived of as an imagined community. 'It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson, 1991, p.6, emphasis in original). If an imagined community encompasses all members within a given set of boundaries, then a re-imagined community is a shift in the sociological boundaries of belonging to include a new group of members. In terms of boundary flexibility, re-imagined community is thus the inverse of assimilation. Assimilation enjoins perceived immutable identity of the nation. Conversely, imagined community is a shift in imagined community. 'It is imagined in the members minds. However, because national identity is rarely agreed upon and is a fragmented structure, this is an unlikely event. It is nevertheless possible to investigate how some spheres (or segments of the population) re-imagine community and to understand when and how the boundaries of nation come to be negotiated and re-negotiated. Each public policy area and different segment of society can be examined for change. When dominant boundaries within a policy area or segment of society shift, we can say that the community is partially 're-imagined' to include different individuals.

Although it is possible to discuss re-imagined community as it applies to the nation as a whole, it is more prudent to break down the analysis by focusing on three factors: the boundaries that are called into question; the actors that are shifting the boundaries; and, if applicable, the policy spheres in which boundaries are changing. If full belonging hinges on sociological boundaries as well as on legal citizenship status, then to understand how a community is re-imagined it is necessary to specify which of these types of boundaries are being challenged. Re-imagined community, by definition, focuses on the change in sociological rather than in legal boundaries. Yet it is necessary to specify which types of sociological boundaries - such as cultural, racial or class - are at stake in the process of re-imagination.

Furthermore, it is critical to specify the actors involved in the re-imagining. Mass survey data, opinion polls, in-depth anthropological or historical studies of particular societal groups and biographical works of important opinion makers or average citizens are all tools which can clarify the extent and the locus of the re-imagined community. Although the boundaries of the imagined community are unlikely to shift simultaneously across all segments of society, there may be key groups or individuals - such as political or mass media elites - which, through their strategic positions, have a multiplier effect on general social attitudes. Examining the changes in boundary perceptions of these groups is particularly central to understanding the imagined and re-imagined community.

The ultimate measure of a re-imagined community is the individual and social perceptions of the nation's members. Nevertheless, a state's policies and legislation also serve to encode and reproduce national boundaries and national identity, and can therefore be understood as an additional location of the imagined community. Citizenship, documentation and rights policies perform this function in obvious ways, dealing explicitly with national status and participation (see Brubaker, 1992; Brubaker, 1989; Freeman, 1979; Hollifield, 1992; Soysal, 1994). Yet, these policy domains focus principally on the formal boundaries of belonging; other policies - notably education policies - must also be investigated for their role in reflecting and promoting the social boundaries of the imagined community.

Because different individuals or groups can hold different ideas about the boundaries of the imagined community, and because there are many policy areas which relate to expressions of the nation, different political or social spheres may send mixed messages about belonging. Thus, as is commonly argued in Britain, positive signals vis-à-vis ethnic minorities sent by the Government's inclusive 'integration' efforts may be offset by restrictive immigration policies which imply that immigrants (closely associated in the public mind with minorities) are undesirable. It is therefore critical to define the sphere through which the community is re-imagined. Defining the boundaries, the actors and the spheres relative to re-imagined community renders tractable and concrete the task of understanding the way in which the nation conceives of membership and belonging.

**Education policy in Britain and France**

This chapter examines cultural boundaries as negotiated by policymakers in the sphere of education. Education policy is a key domain for understanding the social boundaries of the nation. Unlike immigration or citizenship policies, education does not define national membership in a formal or legal sense. Yet more than other policy areas, it promotes and transfers understandings of the national community to future generations. As Rex (1987, p. 218) argues, the education system is concerned with three tasks: social selection (of leaders), transmission of skills, and 'the civic morality.' Authors on nationalism also assert that transmission of civic values and the knowledge of the nation are central functions of the education system (see Gellner, 1983, pp.29-36; Anderson, 1991, passim; Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 96; Smith, 1991, p. 16).
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Although few educational documents explicitly state the government’s vision of the social boundaries of the nation, this vision can be interpreted by examining written policies and curriculum materials and by understanding their application in the nation’s schools. This study thus seeks to understand how educational policymakers and practitioners have viewed the cultural boundaries of the British and French nations, and how they have devised policies to pass this vision on to future generations. Since the end of the Second World War, educational application in the nation’s schools. This study thus

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Although the contrast between Britain and France is sharp, it is not total. There have been exceptions to the rule in both countries. At different time periods and in different societal segments, the dominant trend has been bucked in each nation. In order to avoid an overly simplistic and reified account of each country’s policies, the countercurrents and exceptions within each country will also be explored below. Nevertheless, it is clear on balance that Britain has re-imagined its cultural boundaries through education policy to a substantial degree, whereas France has not.

**British re-imagination through educational multiculturalism**

In adopting various aspects of the internationally popular paradigm of multiculturalism, British educational policy has sought to widen the boundaries of the nation to include ethnic minority cultures. Although the process and the policies have had their limits, Britain has accepted a substantial amount of multiculturalism in its education policy since the 1960s, and has thus promoted a vision of Britain as a multicultural nation among a large proportion of its school-aged youth (see also Bleich, forthcoming).

1966 marked one of the earliest announcements of a re-imagination of community, when Home Secretary Roy Jenkins proclaimed that the integration of immigrants was defined ‘not as a flattening process of assimilation but equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance’ (cited in Freeman, 1979, p. 57). This statement effectively announced a different view of society, a view of a multicultural British nation which rejects assimilation. Although Jenkins’ statement reflected more openness to minority cultures than did concurrent policies, between the mid 1960s and the late 1980s, changes to education policies introduced increasing levels of multiculturalism in Britain.

The 1966 syllabus of the West Riding of Yorkshire, for example, was the first to include a reference to other religions (Nielsen, 1988, p.69). Beginning in the 1970s, issues of Muslim dress and food were raised and overcome through compromises such as ensuring that religious clothing conformed to the colors of the school uniform and provision of vegetarian or halal lunches (see Joly, 1995, p.16; Nielsen, 1992, p.54). And in 1971 the Schools Council published its Working Paper 36, ‘Religious Education in Secondary Schools,’ which announced a shift to an ‘undogmatic’ approach which ‘does not seek to promote any one religious viewpoint’ (Cole, 1988, p.126). Policies designed to favour linguistic pluralism were also developed in this period. The Bullock Committee stated in 1975 that schools ‘should help maintain and deepen knowledge of [the] mother-tongue,’ two years before the EEC mandated mother-tongue instruction in 1977 (Bullivant, 1981; on the EEC directive see Churchill, 1986; Verma, 1984, p.66).

Beginning in the mid-1970s, research organizations (both government affiliated and not) increasingly described Britain as a multicultural or multiracial society (see Bullivant, 1981; Troy and Williams, 1986, p.25). The multiculturalism of this stage was meant to bring about changes in the education of the ‘native’ British children as well as in that of the ‘immigrants.’ In 1977, the Department of Education and Science published a Green Paper entitled Education in Schools. Although the recommendations were aimed primarily at solving problems faced by ethnic minority pupils, this document also supported the establishment of a large-scale inquiry into ethnic minority issues, and suggested that it ‘might embrace the wider concept of the education of all children for life in a multiracial society’ (Great Britain: Department of Education and Science, 1977, p.22).

The years 1975 to 1988 saw increasing numbers of local and national level multicultural policy initiatives. Anti-racism also gathered momentum during this period as a frank and open challenge to ‘native’ or ‘white’ Britons and their views on race (see Arnot, 1985; Troy and Williams, 1986). And by 1981, approximately twenty-five Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in Britain had appointed an advisor for multicultural education, and several had produced policy documents on multiculturalism; by 1989, at least fifty-four of the 108 LEAs had multicultural, anti-racist or equal opportunities policies, and a further twenty had policies under review or in preparation (Taylor, 1992).
The major announcement of multiculturalism in this era was the 1985 publication of the Swann Report, *Education for All*. The government committee used this platform to state that "it is essential to change fundamentally the terms of the debate about the educational response to today's multi-racial society and to look ahead to educating *all* children, from whatever ethnic group, to an understanding of the shared values of our society as a whole as well as to an appreciation of the diversity of lifestyles and cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds which make up this society and the wider world" (Great Britain: Parliament: House of Commons, 1985, p.316, emphasis in original). In the conclusions and recommendations (p.769), the report talks about combating racism and inherited stereotypes and ensuring that multiculturalism permeates all aspects of a school's work.

Furthermore, the government released monetary support for the findings of the Swann Report. Approximately £3 million were funneled through the 'Educational Needs in a Multi-Ethnic Society' program between 1985 and 1989 to support 119 projects. They covered a wide variety of regions, including many 'all-white' districts, and from 1988 on, 'projects were to be more firmly and openly directed towards changing the attitudes and behavior of white pupils' (Tomlinson, 1990, p.106). Though the funding was not enormous and the duration of the programme was limited, the Department of Education and Science took a concrete step towards re-imagining British society as multicultural.

In spite of periodic setbacks and inherent limitations, multiculturalism has left an imprint in Britain, especially in areas with diverse ethnic and racial populations. The majority of education policymakers and practitioners are convinced that assimilation is not an appropriate method for dealing with cultural diversity. Rather, they accept the principle of developing a culturally pluralist curriculum, which moves the boundaries of nation outwards to include cultural minorities. And therefore British students - at least a significant proportion of them - continue to learn about Britain as a multi-ethnic and multicultural society.

*Education policy in France: a preference for assimilation*

In contrast to developments in Britain, France has - within the educational sphere - spurned the push toward notions of cultural inclusiveness within the nation. From 1945 until the early 1970s French schools did not differentiate immigrants or ethnic minorities from other pupils. As Noiriel (in CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation), 1987, p.25) notes, 'the school was a powerful factor in the abandonment by the children of immigrants of their culture of origin; for their generation this stigmatisation was a fundamental psychological incentive which filled them with a fierce determination to integrate within the French society by ridding themselves of the slightest trace of any difference.' Educational institutions have had pride of place in turning immigrants into Frenchmen.6

Between the early 1970s and the mid 1980s there were brief and tentative moves away from the dominant assimilationist paradigm. Yet even during this era there was no true parallel to the education policy movement towards a re-imagined community that was taking place in Britain. And since 1985 there has been a marked trend in rhetoric and policy towards a renewed assimilationist model of dealing with ethnic pluralism in educational institutions (see Lorcerie, 1995, esp. pp.46-7). French public discourse, government documents and state policies have trumpeted the value of the French system of integrating foreigners into the established fabric of society (see, e.g., *Haut Conseil à l'intégration*, 1991). Although the French concept of integration appears to permit cultural maintenance as long as cultural differences remain in the private sphere, within the public sphere, assimilation is often a more fitting policy description. And of all of the policy domains, education policy has taken the most assimilationist line. Schnapper (1991, p.351) notes that the Commission on Nationality stresses the role of education and socialization in determining Frenchness, a position much more in line with traditional notions of a 'le creuset français' (the French melting pot) than with a reconceptualized pluricultural community. Also, though the *Haut Conseil à l'intégration* accepts that cultural diversity can enrich the nation, it does not appear to advocate any major changes to French institutions - particularly educational institutions - as a result of it. Rather, it states that 'integration policy increases (valorise) solidarity, stresses similarities and convergences' (*Haut Conseil à l'intégration*, 1995, p.13).

In France, concepts of multiculturalism cut strongly against the grain of the nation's republican and *laïque* values, inherited from the Revolution and from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century struggles over religion in school (Baubérot, 1994; Berstein and Rudelle, 1992). Culture is 'out of play' in French educational policy; and though many foreign critics claim that France's assimilationist model is monocultural (Rex 1987), the French see it as acultural. There is indeed a sense in which the culture is very French (since the school imparts a knowledge of the French language and French history), but French education policy is also *laïque* - not favouring any one religion over another - and therefore argued to be neutral and universal. In the 'foulard affair' of 1989, to take the most prominent example, three girls were sent home from school for wearing Muslim headscarves, widely interpreted by the public as contrary to the principle of *laïque* education (Beriss, 1990). The notion of impartiality extends to racial or ethnic differences, making French actors resist the multiculturalism which has made inroads in British education policy.

The rejection of multiculturalism reflects a reaffirmation of the cultural boundaries of the nation - whether interpreted as monocultural or acultural - within which immigrants and minorities must operate on the same terms as the
rest of the nation's children. Education policy in France is thus an unabashed state tool for encouraging common French cultural boundaries in the public sphere.

Policy countercurrents in Britain and France

The principal policy direction has been towards a re-imagined community in Britain and towards assimilation in France; yet it is important to attend to the contradictions and the countercurrents present in each nation in order to nuance the stereotypes about each country. For example, school policies towards ethnic and racial minorities in Britain have not always been multicultural. In the early post-war period, schools dealt with immigrants and their children much as they did with the native British. Government documents from the early 1960s, such as the Second Report of the Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Committee, were concerned with 'the role of the education system in bringing about the cultural assimilation of immigrant children into "British life"' (Tomlinson, 1983, p.16). This initial period of assimilationism only began to give way to multiculturalism beginning in the mid 1960s.

Additionally, in the 1990s, the forward progress of multiculturalism in British education policy has waned. Even as multiculturalism was on the rise in the 1970s and 1980s, there were countercurrents of mono-culturalism which eventually halted the momentum of the movement. In the early 1980s, Prime Minister Thatcher and Education Secretary Joseph made statements to the effect that Britain's schools were meant to express a certain culture, and that there were elements of sense in mono-culturalism (on Thatcher, see Tomlinson, 1985, p.74; on Joseph, see Troyna, 1990, p.403). There were vocal and vehement attacks on multiculturalism from right wing groups such as the Monday Club and academic think tanks like the Salisbury group which played up several prominent cases of parent or teacher discontent with multiculturalism (Bangs, 1995, pp.171-8; Halstead, 1988; Tomlinson, 1990, pp.35-41). The influential Education Reform Act of 1988 contained virtually no reference to ethnicity or race, and there have been few references to multiculturalism in other government documents since then. In addition, the late 1980s moves to centralize the education system by instituting a National Curriculum may give rise to further restrictions on multiculturalism, as some individuals with power over these policy levers believe that 'children should be taught to be British' (Richardson, 1995).

If there were pressures toward assimilation in Britain, there were also moves toward accepting cultural diversity in schools in France. Beginning in the early and mid-1970s, politicians and educational policymakers began to institute new initiatives focusing specifically on the needs of immigrants. Special classes to ease foreign students' transition to French schools were introduced first at the primary and then at the secondary level. These were followed by bilateral mother tongue teaching agreements negotiated with eight foreign states between 1975 and 1987. There were also a number of concessions announced in the mid-1970s which aimed to support Muslim culture in France, though perhaps intentionally, none in the field of education policy (see Kepel, 1991, p.142).

From the beginning of the 1980s to approximately 1985, there were limited but noticeable moves away from pure assimilation and integration in education policy towards a more pluralistic view of French society (see Safran, 1989). Writing in 1983, Henry-Lorcerie (pp.267-73) noted the strong increase in the use of the term 'intercultural' (similar to Britain's multiculturalism) in varied contexts in French society. Paralleling developments in Britain, France produced a document in 1985 on education and the demographic fact of cultural pluralism. The Rapport Berque can be seen as advocating a halfway house between a France with an 'historic French cultural identity,' and one where there is a 'new concept of unity, respecting and taking into account heterogeneity, which the problem of immigrants' children raises' (Berque, 1985, p.57). Although by this time it was clear that the extent of the re-imagmination of France as a multicultural nation would be limited, there continued to be marginal aspects of French education policy which emphasize cultural pluralism, such as a 1989 Ministry of Education project to encourage schools to stress the 'foreign contributions to French heritage' (Boyzon-Frader, 1992, p.159).

Moreover, although the French education policy sphere is particularly immune to processes of expanding cultural boundaries of national belonging, other aspects of French society and policies are more open to this type of re-imagination of community. For example, France does not deny the right of individuals to maintain their culture outside of educational institutions. The quasi-governmental organization responsible for integrating immigrants into French society (the Fonds d'Action Sociale) even provides funds to immigrant organizations to sponsor cultural events.

Yet noting these exceptions does not detract from the rule. Although in the first few years of the 1980s, there was a brief and weak push in education policy to re-imagine France as a culturally pluralist country, this quickly gave way to the more assimilationist rhetoric and policies of earlier eras. On balance, the French elite - and especially the education policy elite - is very reluctant to embrace educational multiculturalism. Few education policies or public statements have aimed to re-imagine France as a multicultural society, and this is even more true today than it was ten to fifteen years ago. Similarly, although the momentum of British multiculturalism was largely lost in the late 1980s and 1990s, no attempt has been made to roll back the tangible changes of the earlier decades. There have been no major policy changes affecting the presence of ethnic minority clothing and food in local schools. Moreover, in 1991 ninety-five per cent of surveyed LEAs had multicultural/anti-racist or
equal opportunities policies in existence, under review or in preparation, up from eighty per cent in 1989 (Taylor, 1992, p.11). Finally, there is evidence that localities with high percentages of ethnic minorities continue to support multiculturalism within their districts.  

Nations, categories and belonging

How does the re-imagination of community through British education policy and the corresponding reaffirmation of assimilation in France affect belonging in the nation? Although Britain has shifted its boundaries of membership through its education policies, this may not be sufficient to guarantee equal belonging to ethnic minorities. The boundary approach implicitly assumes that once an individual is inside the boundaries erected to determine membership, he or she is on an equal footing with all other members since boundaries perpetuate a 'continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders' (Barth, 1969, p.14). Categorization theories in cognitive science demonstrate - and we know from common experience - that this is not necessarily the case. After briefly outlining two types of categories, this section explores their implications for the different politics of belonging as developed through British and French education policies.

Thinking about membership in the nation ultimately entails defining a category of individuals. Generally speaking, categories are 'assumed to be abstract containers, with things either inside or outside the category' (Lakoff, 1987, p.6). Within these 'classical' categories, 'no members should be better examples of the category than any other members' (Rosch, cited in Lakoff, 1987, p.7). And some theorists seem to conceive of the nation as essentially this type of category. Anderson, for example, argues that the nation is imagined as limited, because it has 'finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations,' and it is imagined as a community, because 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1991, p.7). In other words, although there may be inequalities along other dimensions (such as class or status), once within the category of citizen, all members are equal citizens.

Yet this is patently not the case. Within the formal category of citizenship there are two types of internal differentiation relevant to belonging in the nation. First, as argued above, although the formal category of citizenship is defined by legal rules, the less formal concepts of membership and belonging are subject to a variety of informal boundaries which may render some individuals questionable members. Within the legal boundaries, there may therefore be identifiable sociological boundaries which act as exclusion mechanisms.
the French would emphasize, a more assimilationist model also has its advantages. A narrowing of the cultural gap between minorities and the ‘natives’ reduces the ability of the majority to use cultural boundaries as a means of distancing the minorities; in France, this tends to bring ‘Frenchness’ more in line with the classical categories of cognitive science theory, where no members are ‘better examples’ of the category than others. That each nation is attempting to foster equality and belonging is beyond dispute. Which method is ultimately better suited to the task remains to be seen.

Notes

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2 Since British education policy is highly decentralized, the data presented below refer principally to educational developments in England and Wales, for which the shorthand ‘British education policy’ is used.

3 Theoretically, a boundary shift could also exclude members. This restrictive form might be labeled a ‘de-imagined’ community.

4 It may also be necessary to account not only for the broad domain of the boundary (cultural, racial, socio-economic), but also for specific sub-divisions within these domains, such as boundaries between sub-cultures. For example, although Britain and France are primarily Christian countries, Jews are commonly held to be ‘less problematic’ members of the nation than Muslims.

5 Laiq can be translated as ‘lay,’ although in France it is a term loaded by the history of turn of the century political battles over religion in schools. Unlike in the United States, where separation of church and state is compatible with multiculturalism, in France, laïcité and the Revolutionary tradition have combined to render multiculturalism politically unpalatable.

6 To paraphrase the title of Eugen Weber’s 1976 classic Peasants into Frenchmen.

7 This judgment is based on interviews with senior educational policy officers in inner London boroughs.

References
