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What role do French society and its education system play in promoting violent radicalization processes?

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Abstract

Radicalization is a complicated phenomenon, which is caused by multiple factors, including poor housing, low education, and unemployment, according to a study by the French Institute of International Relations (Hecker, 2018; Macaluso, 2016). France has a high number of radicalized terrorists, most of whom are homegrown, often with strong cultural ties to former French colonial countries in North Africa (IFRI, 2018). This paper aims to illustrate how social exclusion and marginalization created and perpetuated by the inequalities in the French society and education system (Bourdieu, 1971; Croizet et al, 2019; Goodman 2019; Jetten et al., 2020; Vanten, 2016), may be contributing to the radicalization of many young French citizens. This push factor could be a key precondition for radicalization in many Western societies (Ghosh et al., 2016). While critiquing the French education system, this study insists that schools can and must create a sense of connection with their students and construct resilient and inclusive communities (da Silva, 2017, Ghosh et al., 2017; OECD, 2012). Finally, some pedagogical approaches, especially care in education, are suggested for educational institutions and school agents to effectively build a sense of belonging among young students that would enhance their resilience against radicalization.

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Introduction

With increasing frequency, Western youth have been involved in extremism and radicalization (Harpviken, 2020**;** Neumann, 2017). Young people are particularly active in searching for, or

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constructing their identities, while having little life experience, therefore they are most susceptible to adopting extremist or radical ideologies (Bhui et al. 2012; Manuel 2014). Within the same scope of identity politics, many scholars highlight the possible link between sense of exclusion, or more generally, perceived injustice and radicalization (Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Mandel, 2009; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). That said, the intent of this article is to illustrate the possible relationship between marginalization or perceived injustice and radicalization in the context of the French society and education system. After a short review of push and pull factors that may lead to radicalization, this paper revisits French secularism as well as the education system. As Farhad Khosrokhavar, sociologist and director of the French Institute of Higher Learning in Social Sciences (EHESS) posits, French secularism is situated as an anti-Islam policy and perpetuates radicalism among some marginalized youth (Picard, Xenos & Laurain, 2020). Subsequently, French values, practices and culture produced and reproduced in the French education system may contribute to the feeling of ostracism and feeling of injustice among some minority students. Finally, some pedagogical practices that can enhance a sense of belonging and inclusion of those sidelined in French schools are recommended.

Undeniably, education plays an important role in psycho-social and cognitive development of youths. Therefore, developing students as resilient citizens must be the objective of educational programs. This paper posits that student-centered pedagogy highlighting critical thinking is a valuable tool in countering religious extremism, by building strong communities through analytical, ethical and active citizenship. The development and propagation of information and values through dialogue inculcating the freedom to question, negotiate and relate one's personal experiences to the learned concepts is significant in the education of youth (Theriault et *al*. 2017; Troung, 2018). Education must build strong communities among their youth through analytical, ethical and active citizenship, reiterates Philippe Coen founder of Respect Zone (Picard et al., 2020).

This paper also suggests that care in education (Noddings, 1992; 2001) and inclusive educational practices are essential in countering violent extremism or radicalization (Ghosh et

al., 2016; Sklad & Park, 2017), because education is a tool of empowerment with a moral initiative (Nord & Haynes, 1998). Education can play a proactive and preventive role in countering extremist ideologies and therefore must be considered in the dialogue on terrorism (Ghosh et al., 2016; Sklad & Park 2017). All of these theoretical proposals are made within the backdrop of the French education system.

Some key push and pull factors leading to radicalization

There exist multiple push and pull factors that can trigger the process of radicalization. Some of the very key push factors include perceived threat to personal and collective identity that creates a feeling of ideological necessity to take revenge (Doosje et *al*., 2013; Linden & Klandermans, 2006; Samuel, 2012), exclusion or marginalization from mainstream society (Mucha, 2017), especially when one is not recognized, or misrecognized (Taylor, 1994). The above two factors are intertwined as the feeling of being marginalized or excluded from mainstream society reinforces the perception of an ideological necessity or sacred duty to take revenge against those seen as oppressors or enemy groups (Koomen & van der Pligt, 2016; Lyons-Padilla et *al*., 2015; Stern, 2016). In relation to this, Benavides et *al*., (2011), emphasize the role of deep systemic and enduring inequalities that can deprive people of basic human security, such as "provision of clean drinking water, education, vaccination programs, provision of food and shelter, and protection from violence, military or otherwise" (p. 204). Seeking for meaning in life, or "the quest for significance" can be seen as another push factor in this regard (Kruglansky & Webber 2014, p. 380). Some researchers such as Bhui et *al*., (2012), Bloom (2011) and Saunders (2012) highlight personal tragedies that may cause adoption of radical ideologies. Equally important, many scholars point out that lack of religious literacy as well can lead to radicalization (e.g., Batrawy, Dodds & Hinnant, 2016; Ghosh & Chan, 2017; Kelley & Morgenstern, 2006; Moore, 2006).

Meanwhile, there can be multiple pull factors that can cause radicalization, such as various extremist groups' propaganda rhetoric and narratives that create "us vs them" dichotomies

(Stephane et *al*., 2019; Jetten et al., 2020), similar enticing messages that evoke sympathy and affiliation towards certain extremist groups (Huey, 2015; Koehler, 2014, Musial, 2016; Tucker, 2009*)*, beautiful promises for a better or more meaningful life or afterlife (Bloom, 2011; Juergensmeyer, 2000); powerful teachings of radical leaders (Bergen, 2015; Braniff, 2015; Duffy & Harley 2015), peer group pressure or influences (Andre, Mansouri & Lobo, 2015; Duffy & Harley, 2015; Elgot, 2015), and influences of radical prison inmates, etc (Hamm, 2013, 2019; Rubin, 2018).

While these factors are not exhaustive, they feature the most salient societal elements that would increase vulnerability towards radicalization among various groups. Each society may produce all of these conditions, but in varying degrees; there is no perfect society; there exists a spectrum here. At the same time, it should be noted that some of these conditions may prove to be more powerful and effective than others under various circumstances. Reaffirming such point, Doosje and his colleagues (2016) highlight the particular dynamics of the individual's sense of belonging to a group, especially that of the marginalized, in relation to the radicalization process at all societal levels (micro, meso and macro). Indeed, as political scientist Jacques de Maillard maintains, the problem in France is structural (Picard et al., 2020). In other words, when structural inequalities such as systemic racism, marginalization and discrimination interact with re/imagined group membership, the combination is likely to incite some youth to become radicalized (McAuley, 2020). These factors exclude individuals and groups from mainstream society and illustrate the debacle of French integration (Onishi & Méheut, 2020). Within this theoretical backdrop, the study focuses on the French context, paying special attention to its education system in order to analyse how some specific factors may have been contributing to marginalization of certain sectors of the population in France, rendering them particularly susceptible to radicalization.

Methods

This study is primarily based on reviewing and synthesizing scholarly debates and policy documents about French education and society in relation to exclusion and marginalization of certain sectors of population. Meanwhile, some relevant first-hand interview data obtained by the lead author in 2015 at her sons' middle school in rural Haute Savoie, France, are used to support our analysis of the pertinent issues. The lead author volunteered as a teacher and directed an academic support program she initiated for low-performing students. She interacted with the school community whose feedback was gathered informally and is used here. Data were collected through an ethnographic method, as in journalism. No participant expressed concerns over their privacy to share their opinions on the French education system and some highlighted the urgency to change the status quo. During this period, discussions and interviews with some principals, teachers, students, professors, and local political authorities revealed their perspectives on issues facing French education policies and practices, relevant social problems, and their ideas on strategies to improve academic achievement of marginalized youth. The lead author is also a French citizen with a home in Haute Savoie. She continued to meet and discuss educational issues in France with principals, teachers, parents, and former middle school students, until 2016.

This independent field work resulted in an unpublished manuscript on Equity and Achievement in the French Education System (2016). At the time, the lead author did not intend to write an academic paper, thus no written consent was obtained from the educational actors during their discussions and interviews over the 12-year period. However, all the participants gave oral consent to sharing their concerns along with their occupations and names. Yet, we decided to use tokens for all participants to protect their confidentiality. When interviewed, questions were semi-structured, some of which were audio recorded with permission by the participants. The findings were thematically analysed. Some important interview questions were as follows:

1. What is your view on grade repetition? What impact does withdrawing this policy have on schooling?

2. What issues do teachers, parents, face, if any, in relation to academic support of their students/children?

3. What role do teachers and parents play in building school communities?

4. In your opinion is the French education system elitist or not? Explain.

5. Why, in your opinion, do many students not continue their education after middle school (grade 9)?

6. How would you describe your role/priority as a middle school teacher, student, principal?

Participant tokens	**Citizenship**	**Occupation**	**Date**
Teacher 1a	French	Philosophy teacher middle school	05/2015
Teacher 2 a	French	English teacher middle school	06/2015
Teacher/ Mayor 3a/3b	French	Math teacher/village mayor	06/2015
Local politician 1b	French	M.P.	05/ 2015
Local Senator 2b	French	Senator	05/2015
Principle 1c	French	Principal middle school	05 2015
Principle 2c	French	Principal middle school	06/2015
Principle 3c	French	Principal middle school	06/2015
Professor 1d	French	Researcher/Professor in Education	05/2015
Professor 2d	French	Sociologist/Professor	05/ 2015
Parent 1e	French	Parent middle school	06/ 2015
Parent 2e	French	Parent middle school	05/ 2015
Parent 3e	French	Parent middle school	05/ 2015
Student 1f	French	+18 former middle school student	06/2015
Student 2f	French	+18 former middle school student	06/2015
Student 3f	French	+18 former middle school student	06/2015

Table 1: Overview of Interviewees

The Violent Radicals in France

French terrorists often have poor school records, no family support, and live-in impoverished conditions. A recent report by the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) found that most of the radicalized individuals in their study had low levels of education, which led to their unemployment and exclusion from society. Among 27 radicalized individuals, 13 had been unemployed when they committed their offenses (Hecker, 2021). Education in values is not only important for its own sake but also because lack of education leads to unemployment and that leads to disengagement with society. On January 7, 2015, in the name of the Islamic State, Cherif and Said Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly, French 'jihadist' perpetrated the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, killing twelve people. They were young delinquents, born and raised in a Parisian suburb, opposed to Western intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. Obsessed with the injustice imposed on the innocent by American occupation, they themselves lived in perceived injustice at home in France. Herein, a high level of violence and social decomposition add to children's sense of reality. This environment inculcates a youth culture, which is negative and toxic (Chrisafis, 2015; Packer, 2015). Many feel that the state has forsaken them, and those republican values do not apply to them. This social breakdown, seemingly unaddressed successfully by the French government, illustrates the debacle of French integration (Onishi & Méheut, 2020) and could be conducive to the growth of radical milieus. The phenomenon of homegrown terrorist should be a matter of utmost concern to educators and society (Ghosh et *al*., 2017).

Although criminal law articles were modified in 2016, after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in order to improve and strengthen the effectiveness of national policies in the fight against terrorism (Hecker, 2021), the horror continued in France. Indeed, the beheading of a middle school teacher Samuel Paty, by a radicalized youth Abdoullakh Abouyedovich Anzorov, north of Paris, is the most recent illustration of France's education system which fails to maintain their republican ideals in their students (Onishi & Méheut, 2020). Despite police knowledge of potential radicals such as the Kouachi brothers, or even Anzorov, legal tools are not working to

curtail more terrorist attacks in France. In order to reinforce republican values and maintain a national curriculum, Macron has waged war on radical Islamists he claims are against French values and who push French children into the clenches of radical movements (McAuley, 2020). While the attacks on Charlie Hebdo underlined the struggle facing issues such as freedom of speech and religion in France, the killing of a teacher who used the satirical newspaper's publication of the controversial caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad during a civic education lesson in October 2020, has left France in shock.

Social unrest in France was accentuated by the 2005 riots in Paris, which tarnished the image of France worldwide (Laurence & Vaïsse, 2005). The riots erupted when Ziad Benna and Bouna Traore, two teenagers of Tunisian and Malian origin respectively, died in a power substation where they were hiding from the police. According to sociologist Smain Laacher, these riots were focused on equality not religion (Weitzmann, 2021) and have had an influence on modern French history (Cragin, 2017). Indeed, the disenfranchised on the peripheries of major cities revolting against economic conditions, discrimination, police violence, inadequate housing and national policies, illustrated the weakness of the French equality model of integration (Laurence & Vaïsse, 2005). In Parisian suburbs populated with multiracial, multicultural, impoverished working-class minorities, youth unemployment adds to societal distress (Debenedetti, 2018). For example, the 'yellow vest' movement, which began in November 2018, is a continual series of protests on the streets of France; a crisis driven by social inequality, governmental mismanagement, and unemployment, among other social issues (Jetten et al., 2020; Louati, 2020). Conflicts surrounding these protests have also brought to public attention the problem of police excessive use of force and further increased frustration and anger on the side of the protesters (The Economist, 2020; Rich, 2020). The opposition, which structurally positions victims of inequality against the elites, is fuelled by repression of protests which question the effectiveness of government actions (McAuley, 2020). Those on the fringe of society feel disconnected from the French promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity (Jetten et al., 2020; Louati, 2020; Weitzmann, 2021). All these examples point to the reality that social injustice

perpetuate large scale public unrest and violence in France. Moreover, the Guardian newspaper concludes that the French nation is at war with itself (Hussey, 2019).

After the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks, Prime Minister Valls acknowledged that a territorial, social, and ethnic apartheid exists in France. The Minister of Justice at that time, Christiane Taubira, concurred adding that segregation feeds marginalization and discrimination (AFP, 2015). In French unequal societies, the 'have-nots' live on the circumference, the suburbs or banlieues, while the privileged live in the centre, the cities. France's overly centralized administrative power in Paris is in marked contrast with its outskirts. President Macron promises to halt the *'ghettoization'* of racial and ethnic *banlieues* and *cités* mostly populated, since the 1960s and 1970s, by migrants from France's former colonies in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (Weitzmann, 2021). Most immigrant workers came from rural areas and had little or no education; existing in often dilapidated neighbourhoods where segregation was not seriously addressed (Bourdieu, 1992). France has always been a country of immigrants, accepting more foreigners than their neighbouring countries; however, integration in France is challenging. As historian Hermon-Belot points out, France nationalism leaves no space for cultural pluralism (Politico, 2020).

France's slow economic growth and youth unemployment (UN, 2020), mostly affecting public housing projects, continues to produce significant disparity (IMF, 2017). A lack of occupational opportunities and the potential for school dropouts provides fecund soil for the spread of extreme ideologies (da Silva, 2017). Despite generous government spending to improve conditions in its poor suburbs, little has changed since the 2005 riots (Debenedetti, 2018; d'Appollonia, 2016; Louati, 2020). The problem is structural, insists political scientist Jacques de Maillard (Picard et al., 2020). Unemployment, exclusions, and unfairness in poor suburbs continue to be centred at the heart of France's social *maladie*. For example, the 'yellow vest' crisis on the streets of France, beginning in November 2018, is a series of protests driven by social inequality and governmental mismanagement of unemployment (among other social issues). A report by Institute Montaigne's Hakim El Karoui asserts that more investment is necessary in education and justice in these zones (Lenglet, 2020). Consequently, according to

anthropologist Dounia Bouzar, the incongruity that lies between the ideology of the national motto and the reality Muslim youth face daily can only serve to cultivate the growth of radicalization (Politico, 2020). General discontent continues to be taken to the streets of France, fuelled by a public desire, including that of Muslim youth, for change regarding inequalities (Louati, 2020; Hussey, 2019). Bouzar affirms that it is essential to understand what leads youth into radicalization in order to lead them out, especially because homegrown jihadism "seems to be the norm" in France (Hecker, 2021, p. 45).

A discussion of French society and education system

French secularism or laicité and the Muslims in France

In early 20th century France was Catholic and highly homogenous compared to today. The law on secularism, or *laicité* introduced in 1905 separated state and church in France. It was founded on a neutral stance wherein the state remained impartial, tolerant, and respectful of all religions in public spaces. French *laicité*, which is built upon closed secularism or a rigid secularist[2] paradigm has further marginalized French Muslims. *Laicité*, or the separation of state and church, is a republican idea which has its roots in the French Revolution. It was meant to prevent religious influence on state policies including public schools: it does not prevent religious freedom (Rémond, 1999). Today, however, in France, *laicité* means absence of religion whereby, in 2004, the French government banned all "conspicuous religious symbols" (such as the Muslim *hijab or chador)* from public institutions, including in primary and secondary schools. This rigid form of secularism has contributed to discontent among French Muslims and is considered an instrument of oppression (Politic, 2020). France's particular brand of secularist policies turned a blind eye to alienated Muslim youth and directly affected many Muslims through the banning of the hijab, or the veil, under the guise of upholding the

[2] We use the term "secularist", following Robert Jackson (2012), as a paradigm that deems "religious claims are false or meaningless", versus "secular" which refers to equal treatment of various religious traditions while respecting the principle of freedom of religion (p.60).

Republic's values as the principle of secularism. Ironically, the current COVID-19 pandemic has made the mask, which covers a large part of one's face, imperative.

In 2004 the policies on secularism provoked religious violence in France, according to French political scientist Oliver Roy (2007). The former Minister of Education, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem (2014), claims extreme right-wing views on secularism have manipulated the concept of *laicité*, misusing and deforming it in public debates as an attack on Islam. In her view, this closed interpretation of secularism reinforces the notion that Muslims are different to others thus creating a sense of exclusion. As such, 'Muslim' has become a term used in reference to the 'other' and not necessarily linked to a religious belief in France (Irish & Pineau, 2015). This discourse has demonstrated itself at the systemic level as well. For example, based on an anti-immigrant platform and xenophobia, the right-wing National Front received 25 % of the French vote, more than any other minority party in the 2014 European elections. In 2019, this right-wing extremist party's leader Marine Le Pen aimed to rid France of hijabs in all public areas, not only in schools (Breeden, 2019). Lawyer and activist Caroline Valentine claims, in a France24 interview, that terrorism is expressed by wearing the hijab; that it is political and cultural propaganda (2020). She, like Marine Le Pen defends the freedom of women they claim are pushed into submission to wear the veil by Islam, evoking a policy of rescue.

Systemic racialization and intolerance of Islam feeds the perpetuation of separatism, which paradoxically, the Macron government is fighting against (Washington Post, 2020). Many concur that the French president's stigmatization of Islam as a *religion in crisis* attacks the faith as a whole and as such contributes, as a push factor, to radicalization (Washington Post, 2020). Moreover, both the former Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, in 2015 and the Minister of Interior, Gerald Darmanin, in 2020 exclaimed the Islamist is the *enemy within.* Ironically, such assumptions have made France the *enemy* for others (Gaillard, 2020). Claims that wearing a hijab reflects Muslims' failure to integrate into French society and values, or that wearing one is 'not desirable' as the Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin declared, work counter to a sense of inclusion and is a failure of the French model of freedom (NYTimes, 2020). President Macron views radical Islamic ideology as the enemy of freedom (Gaillard, 2020), and claims that

Islamists want to steal France's future and their right to mock and blaspheme (BBC, 2020). Policies proposed by the nation's leader serve only to divide the country even more (The Financial Times, 2020) leading the NYTimes (2020) to query France's relationship with the Muslim world.

Indeed, many countries including Turkey, a NATO partner, have chosen to boycott French products holding anti-French protests across the world which only serves to heighten tension (BBC, 2020). Ben McDonald of the Associate Press explains that global Islam's anger towards France can be linked to the nation's colonial past, French interpretation of secularism, and French political leaders seemingly imperviousness to this religion (2020). The real problem is the continual alienation of French Muslims as the root cause of radicalization. Instead of France recognizing its settler role in the racialization and subjugation of former Muslim colonies, France upholds the arrogance that it can and must reform Islam (McAuley, 2020). For Farhad Khosrokhavar, the 'radicalization of French secularism' is itself a problem (Politico, 2020).

Consequently, Muslims have been openly excluded and side-lined not only in educational and public institutions but in the larger society, especially in the labour market (El Karoui, 2016; Silberman et al., 2007). For example, a recent study by the French government reported discrimination against minorities in educational spaces as well as in the workplace, notably candidates with North African names who have less than a 25% chance of being considered for employment (Marmouyet, 2020). Negative racial profiling of Muslims, persisting from France's imperial and colonial days, run contrary to Republican egalitarian values (Delahaye, 2019). France is home to Europe's largest Muslim population outside of Turkey possibly as a result of their colonial history in the Maghreb (Giry, 2006).

Global shifts from resettlement of refugees (who happen to be mostly Muslim) around the world have further exacerbated the intolerance of the Muslim 'other.' The 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, compounded with the attacks by Islamic State coming from Syrian-based terrorist-returnees to France, have provided ammunition to the dangerous rise of right-wing extremist ideologies (Berry, Garcia-Blanco & Moore, 2016; Hecker & Tenenbaum, 2017) in

France, only reinforcing the vicious cycle. In the aftershock of the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attacks in January 2015, French Muslims united to publicly express their solidarity with '*la patrie,'* (the homeland) and to clearly dissociate themselves from Islamist terrorists. This expression of solidarity may have been deemed necessary because of the lingering tensions between the state and Islam (as a religion and political ideology) in secular France. However, such solidarity did not have the desired effect but rather led to further social alienation, deepening the Muslim community's sense of despair, anger, outrage, and isolation (Andre et *al*., 2015). Islamophobic incidents reportedly increased in the week after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks (Aziz, 2015). After the terrorist attacks in 2015-2016 in France, the management of state and religion became the central focus rather than questioning why this is still happening (Rim-Sarah Alouane, 2020); why French soil is the playground for violent extremism. These factors may have potentially added to the radicalization of youth. Feeling singled-out wherein an *us versus them* dynamic is cultivated only serves to exclude the already disenfranchised who then can justify the process of radicalization (Sklad & Park, 2017). This example shows that homegrown terrorism is indicative of a perpetual societal problem and amplifies the need to address inequality in France.

Le Ministere de l'Education Nationale

Criticized as centralized, complex, and archaic, the French education system is appropriately nicknamed the 'Mammoth' due to its slow responses to educational needs, despite continuous changes in policies, reforms, and action plans (Institute Montaigne, 2019; OECD, 2018). Compared to high performing international systems, the French system malfunctions despite external global pressure to transform (Brunner & Maurin, 2019; OECD, 2012). According to the 2018 PISA study, France ranked internationally between 20th-26th in reading, 15 th-24th in math and 16th-23rd in science. One of the major factors in its inability to function as a high performing education organization is its resistance to change (Vanten, 2016). It is quite paradoxical that France is a nation based on egalitarian beliefs expressed in their national moto *liberté, égalité et fraternité,* freedom, equality, and brotherhood, yet when it comes to its

education system it does not practice what it preaches; rather, it is unfair and exclusive (Mosavi, 2014; Valadares, 2019).

In 2013, according to the Ministere de l'Education Nationale, only 39% of working-class students received their high school diploma as opposed to 77% of students from wealthy families (MEN, 2015). In 2017, the graduation rate was still largely favourable for elite high school students as compared to working-class students (Piketty, 2017), demonstrating that the French education system excludes sections of the population. Such injustice is reminiscent of French hierarchy wherein the aristocrats, the elite, held the power and the wealth, while the peasants lived in social injustice. The paradox is glaring. According to Paul Krugman, the politics of the Third Republic, with its egalitarian as opposed to aristocratic ideology, reflect a highly unequal reality.[3] As in Napoleonic times, 21st century education and society in France continue to be stratified and elitist based on educational attainment (Delahaye, 2019; Zanten, 2005). Access to higher education is limited for students from the working class as compared to a higher percent of students from wealthy families who obtain their high school diploma (Chapoulie, 2017; Duru-Bellat, 2015).

To add to these inequalities, the quality of schools is based on socio-economic levels in France. Therefore, if one lives in poor government housing projects, the quality of the neighbourhood school reflects its environment because one's future hopes of employment or housing are aligned with regard to where one 'comes' from. This means, equality of opportunity treated as same opportunity cannot improve the status quo in a given society, when learners have highly unequal socio-economic backgrounds (Rawls, 2001). Such a structure is geared for success for those who have the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) while excluding disadvantaged others (Institut Montaigne, 2019).

[3] For more information see: Piketty, T., Krugman, P. & Stiglitz, J. (2015). The Genius of Economics. Panel Discussion at 7 Days of Genius festival. *MSNBC*. Retrieved from https://vimeo.com/129894198

According to the OECD (2012; 2018), high performing education systems combine quality with equity, that is, equity or fairness within an inclusive structure. Uniformity or sameness promoted through policies in the French education structure is publicized as ensuring equality among its diverse population, when in fact, it maintains the status quo while elitism continues to permeate this unfair reality (Krugman, 2015; OECD, 2012; Rawls, 2001; Stiglitz, 2015). Yet, equality as fairness (equity) is very difficult to achieve in France's highly centralized education system. Students are situated in what is called a "banking system" of education wherein knowledge is deposited to all in the same dose irrespective of their abilities or backgrounds (Alam, 2013; Freire, 1970; Ostinelli, 2009); a method that weeds out and excludes the disadvantaged. In France, equality is translated as same treatment to students who are unequal in many ways; justice, as same treatment rather than fair treatment (Stiglitz, 2015). This arrangement enables the propagation of intergenerational inequalities in social structures. Through social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1971; Duru-Bellat, 2008; 2015), the French education organization perpetuates elitism in schools and in society, undoubtedly setting the stage for further marginalization of young citizens such as youth whose alienation from society draws them towards drugs, gangs, extreme violence and /or radicalization. The cultural traditions and political structures in France contribute to its inability to change its education system. Inequity is not just the result of economic forces but of politics and policies. As the economist Joseph Stiglitz (2015) points out, political processes themselves are affected by the level and nature of inequity.

Teacher accountability, recruitment, and hierarchy

Teachers are accountable to school inspectors who are local representatives of the centralized government. A middle school philosophy teacher shared his opinion on the purpose of education in France, elaborating that school inspectors represent the state, upholding national traditional ideologies. The state uses the education structure, he claims, to create or reproduce its vision of a Republican citizen *"… like in a factory, producing uniformed products"* (interview 1a, 2015). In his opinion, teachers are afraid to be a failure in their superiors' eyes,

that is, the school inspectors who evaluate them, but they are not afraid to fail their students (2015)[4]. Philippe Meirieu (2012), professor of pedagogy concurs, highlighting a proletarianization of teachers with respect to their social status and their wage. From this Marxist perspective, 'the workers,' i.e., teachers, are placed at the service of 'the machine,' *l'Education National*, and not vice versa (Meirieu, 2012). Moreover, the government does not provide teachers with effective teacher training which would boost their inventiveness, educational innovation, and teamwork (interview 1d, 2015). At the same time, teachers face frequent changes in education policies and reforms, while they receive little support from the management which is obsessed with systemic control (Meirieu, 2018). French teachers are not given the proper means and yet so much is expected of them asserts Philippe Coen (Picard et al., 2020).

In this selective education system, teachers are expected to have academic knowledge of the subject to be admitted into the profession (Lapostolle & Chevaillier, 2011). Teaching skills are not considered enough. Therefore, teachers are not sufficiently prepared, lacking in pedagogical practice even though they have the academic knowledge (Meirieu, 2018; Saque et al., 2020). Teachers are recruited through competitive academic exams. The best teachers are selected for the advanced academic examination, the *Aggregation*. Considered intellectually superior, the *Aggregation* exam tests advanced content knowledge of teaching subjects. Teachers who succeed in this difficult assessment earn significant public respect, elevated social status, fewer teaching hours and higher salary than other teachers, according to the *Institue National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques* (Insee, 2015).

Consequently, the ranking prevalent in French culture is reflected among the teaching staff and does not serve to unite teachers (Dubet, 2015). Hierarchy has historically existed between teachers of different academic levels in French society and continues to affect their practices (Dubet, 2015). Although encouraged to cooperate for the betterment of students

[4] No research exists about student experiences and teacher behaviour. That is why the lead author includes her interview notes carried out with parents, teachers, professors and other school agents, including political figures in 2015 and in 2017 in Haute Savoie, France.

(MEN, 2010; OECD, 2016), many teachers are disinclined to collaborate with colleagues (Dubet, 2015). As a French professor of sociology explained to the first author, it is generally accepted that teachers in France have '*le savoir'* or the knowledge; their role is to impart this 'savoir' on the students, not to 'mother' or 'nurture' them (interview 2d, 2015). In other words, France maintains a banking model, a teacher-centred approach to instruction wherein order is clearly defined between the student who is quietly seated and listening while the teacher, stands in front (Alam, 2013; Freire, 2000; Ostinelli, 2009). This cultural perspective positions teachers hierarchically with respect to their students, in a relationship of distance (Freire, 2000), which runs counter to the sense of belonging and care essential for academic achievement (Noddings, 2002; UNESCO, 2015). This approach clearly creates a push factor towards radicalization.

While French schoolteachers are among the youngest in the OECD countries, they continue to maintain a traditional relationship with students (2012). It is perplexing that young new teachers prepared by the French education system in the 21st century still adopt a traditional classical teaching position which is authoritarian vis a vis their students and contrary to global trend. To remedy the need to support underachieving students, the French Ministry of Education proposed a national policy, *Accompagnement Personsliase* (AP), adding two hours of classroom academic help weekly for grade six students (MEN, 2010). Via this policy, teachers have since been required to provide academic support to their students. To date, such policies do not seem to be working. As an example, many middle school principals complain that this program has never really functioned because of teacher unwillingness (interviews 1c; 2c; 3c, 2015). Dubet (2015) agrees that teacher reticence is an obstacle to developing a high performing education system.

Middle school – a decisive point

Najat Vallaud Belkacem warned of 'apartheid of the mind' referring to middle school children uninterested in continuing school because they do not feel a sense of belonging (Pilgrim, 2015). An Ifri study on radicalized individuals confirms that 40% of the participants had 'left the education system at the end of middle school or the beginning of high school'

(Hecker, 2021, p.45). Furthermore, 71% of middle school students are bored (Vallaud-Belkacem, 2015a). Some students see no relevance of their 'book-studies' with their life outside school (OECD, 2014; interviews 1f; 2f; 3f, 2015). The obligatory study of philosophy introduces Montesquieu and Voltaire to 12-year-old children, in an attempt to cultivate analytical thinking from primary years. The six-year study of philosophy culminates in a 4-hour final exam in the last year of high school. Meanwhile, classical studies of Greek and Latin, starting in middle school, continue to be valued by parents and teachers (interviews 1e; 2e; 3e, 2015).

According to an OECD study (2014), indication of a high performing education system is based on how the funds are spent versus the budget allotment. For example, France invests less money than the OECD average in primary school and more than the average in high school, whereas research shows that student attrition in France is linked to academic difficultly already evident in grade one (OECD, 2014; interviews 2b; 1c; 3c, 2015). For the learner, the transition from primary (grades one to five) to middle school (grades six to nine) is often lived with difficulty (Dubet, 2015). Middle school is important because grade nine is the last year of compulsory education, and often by then the decision to drop out of school has been determined (Valadares, 2019). The separation of general academic and vocational tracks through early selection in middle school in France encourage youth to drop out of school and go through good vocational training enabling them to enter the labour force early (OECD, 2014). Najat Vallaud Belkacem (2016), suggests that the transition from middle school to high school is often avoided by students who feel segregated and disconnected from the ranks of high school.

Indeed, as Vallaud Belkacem indicates, middle school is where the problems in the education system are 'crystalized' (MEN, 2016). Some middle school students, having already failed their grade once or twice, leave school to find work in local service sectors (interviews 1b; 2b, 2015; OECD, 2012). This limited life choice is reinforced by France's socialist structure because it provides low-income families with substantial social assistance such as government housing which is often of a good quality and very affordable (Insee, 2015). However, in obtaining adequate housing, the white working class is favoured over the marginalized racial

groups (Beaman, 2017). Hence, such socio-political structure functions to preserve the status quo - a stratified France (Levi-Strauss, 2014; Bourdieu, 1971).

Moreover, as Bourdieu (1992) argues, France's education system guarantees to sort through its learners and reproduce its intelligentsia. Only the elite who have the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992) can succeed in an academic system with early selection, standardized exams, and ambitious curriculum with minimal academic support (Delahaye, 2019; Institut Montaigne, 2019; interview 1d, 2015; Stiglitz, 2015). While dropping out of school continues to be an unresolved social tragedy in France (Institut Montaigne, 2019), most of those dropouts are marginalized youth (Education International, 2019). These young people may become easily involved in radical extremism, unless school makes them feel they are included, and they truly matter (Harris-Hogan, 2017). Such a system can create a fertile ground for youth radicalization.

Grade repetition

The infamous policy of grade repetition that was cancelled in 2014, was inherently unfair as it was used in France. Indeed, the long tradition of failing students in France reveals that teachers assume that some learners are not equipped with the necessary knowledge to succeed to the next grade (interviews 2a; 3a, 2015). For example, some middle school teachers blame primary school colleagues for passing children despite their low academic performance (Dubet, 2015). Moreover, many school agents, as well as parents of students, often hold the conviction that failing a student offers him/her a second chance to better prepare for the revered *'baccalaureat'* the national high school exam (interviews 2c; 3c; 3e, 2015). The French high school diploma is valued as an end in itself, so subsequently grade repetition serves as a pedagogical and disciplinary tool for teachers (interview 1d; 1a, 2015; also see Peretti, 2003). Allowing a student to repeat an academic year is 'generously offered' by taxpayers and the government, insist several school principals (interviews 1c; 2c; 3c, 2015). On principal added: "*repeating the school year is a gift, a second chance to improve your grades and hopefully obtain le baccalaureat* (the high school diploma)" (interview 1c, 2015).

Unfortunately, many educators therefore see value in grade repetition because it enables greater uniformity in the level of student preparedness. To teachers and parents, it is the only solution to the problem of school failure even if the decision to fail can be biased and indiscriminate (Cosnefroy & Rocher, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Some parents even encourage their children to repeat an academic year as a strategic move, for example, to avoid being sectioned off into a vocational track after middle school or repeating grade 10 in order to be better prepared for the baccalaureate exams (Jarraud, 2017). According to a French professor of teacher education interviewed by the lead author, France's elitist education system cannot function without grade repetition because many teachers consider it a 'solution' to poor academic performance (interviews 1d; 2a, 2015). Repeating the entire school year is common practice and is used as a pedagogical tool to eliminate poor students and maintain high performing and homogenized class levels (interview 1d, 2015; Peretti, 2003). It appears that grade repetition is anchored in the teaching philosophy in France.

School failure adds to France's social woes because it penalizes students, lowering their life chances, increasing their risks of unemployment (CCL, 2010) and their rates of attrition (Gouvernement.fr, 2017). International studies carried out by PISA confirm that in 2006 and 2012, 38% and 30% of all French youths, respectively, had already failed their school year, some twice, by the age of 15 (OECD, 2006; 2012). Such a mentality can be considered culturally based (interview 1d, 2015; Peretti, 2003) and does not take into consideration the possible negative impact of grade repetition on a student's socialization and self-esteem (UNESCO, 2015). Failing students negatively impacts their school performance, causing lack of confidence and low self-worth in them, which may lead to a feeling of marginalization (Riele, 2006). The long-term use and educational purpose of grade repetition and relevant pedagogical philosophies and classroom practices are closely tied to French culture and values which are difficult to change (Cnecso, 2015). Although, since 2014 grade repetition is no longer permitted except in rare cases in France, in an attempt to align with high-ranking international education systems (MEN, 2015), the failing mentality may still reveal itself in other ways, such as ranking discussed below.

Ranking

French society's elitism is further strengthened through its National Examination system, in which grades are listed from best to worst and posted as public information. Calling out marks from good to bad in front of the entire class is culturally accepted in France. Very few teachers or parents see how public ranking could be invasive and humiliating to children (Chiu & Khoo, 2005). Rating publicly suggests a shaming of those who struggle academically compared to the rest. Public identification of children as successful or unsuccessful, good or bad, are classifications based on academic subject scores ignoring multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). The impact of such a competitive environment on an underachiever's self-esteem can be devastating (UNESCO, 2015). But it is even more debilitating if students feel judged as failures by their teachers (Chiu & Khoo, 2005).

For example, PISA testing of 15-year-old students revealed that French pupils are often reluctant to answer questions for fear of being wrong (interview 1d, 2015; OECD, 2012). According to a study by France's National Assessment Council of Schools, French students hardly dare to ask the teacher for clarity when they do not understand (Cnesco, 2018). Paris-based French Education expert and critic of the French school system, Peter Gumbel (2010) adds that the risk of being penalized for an incorrect answer, whether mocked or humiliated in front of the class, is imbedded in the classroom tradition. 'Fear of failure' is inculcated in the classroom from a young age (OECD, 2012), which can evoke feelings of exclusion. Such negative school experiences created by strict and discouraging teachers are shared by many French students (interview 1d, 2015; Ostinelli, 2009; Peretti, 2003).

In this context, low self-esteem is easily internalized from classroom experiences, which affects learning outcomes as well as inhibits student development, and consequently limits students' life chances (Layard & Dunn, 2009; Riele, 2006). A survey by OpinionWay (2014) found that 73% of school parents believe that such form of classroom evaluation is very discouraging because of the stress and fear it instils in children. Of these parents, 90 % are worried and 75 % of them are specifically concerned about their child's self-esteem in an environment lacking nurturing. Such an assessment method undermines student progress

because it emphasizes what is not learnt, while prioritizing grades, rather than learning (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). However, many teachers still maintain the position that fewer evaluations and a lack of ranking would imply lower quality education (interviews 2a; 3a, 2015), although there is an urgent need to implement assessment reform within French education system.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is a culturally accepted practice as well in France and still used by some teachers. At the same time, according to BBC (2018), approximately 85% of French parents use corporal punishment to discipline their children. Backed by a vague law, hitting a child is condoned if it is warranted for educational reasons (ODAS, 2013). The *European Social Charter*, which focuses on human rights, encourages all members to ban corporal punishment (Breeden, 2015). However, many French are against eliminating this outdated practice and continue to see the value in this traditional disciplinary method (interviews 3c; 2a; 3e, 2015). Corporal punishment is therefore not seen as a problem when it is used at school or at home to curb undesirable behaviour (ODAS, 2013).

Personal interviews by the first author of this article, including her sons' experiences in the French education system, have further validated these points. Some examples of punishment involved taping talkative children's mouths, hitting disruptive ones on their heads or on their hands, or pulling their hair. Such reprimand is still deemed acceptable by some teachers and parents if the student 'deserves' it (interviews 3e; 2a; 3a; 2e, 2015). *"She pulled me by my hair to drag me into class asking me if I was going to tell my 'mommy' on her"* (2f, 2015). Disciplinary methods such as humiliation and sarcasm in the classroom are often used to shame students (interviews 1f; 2f; 3f, 2015) and can be used as pedagogical tools positioning teachers as bullies (Sylvester, 2011). Children may feel unworthy when told by a 'significant other,' whether directly or by implication, that they are 'losers and will never amount to anything' (interviews 1f; 2f; 3f, 2015), because teacher expectations have a great impact on students and influence student performance and self-esteem (Chiu & Khoo, 2005; Harkness et *al*., 2007).

Student support

OECD reported in 2012, 2014 and again in 2018 that academic failure of low performing students can be prevented through extra educational support during school (Gomes, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). However, when the French Ministry of Education tried to implement a policy to support underachieving students and encourage collegiate collaboration in 2007, teacher unions rejected such an initiative. In 2008, *Accompagnement personalize* (individualized academic support) was proposed instead, but it has proven to be unsuccessful due to teacher reticence (Dubet, 2015; interview 2c, 2016). Teachers are unwilling and/or unprepared to give students' academic support beyond their 18-hour weekly duty (Dubet, 2015). One middle school teacher echoed a shared sentiment *"What? Are we to babysit them by staying at school longer?"* (Interview 2a, 2015). Although the French Ministry of Education proposes policies to make learning relevant, keep students from facing failure and dropping out, many reforms often face resistance from parents and teachers alike (Chhor, 2016).

In contrast, in the Finnish model, one of the highest ranked education systems in the world (OECD, 2018), one in three students receive some sort of special academic support in school (Hancock, 2011). Teachers and students in Finland promote a collaborative relationship, wherein the students solve problems together in small groups rather than sitting obediently in front of the teacher, as they do in France (Dubet, 2015; Ostinelli, 2009; Sahlberg, 2013). French students do not feel supported by their teachers who rarely encourage them, and only point out their weaknesses, causing students to live in fear of their grades (Picard, Xenos & Laurain, 2020). As such, it is little surprising that France ranks low when it comes to teacher-student support. According to French students, 57 % of their teachers seem to care about their progress compared to 70 % on average in all OECD countries (OECD, 2018). These findings are disturbing, as many scholars argue that lack of teacher support makes young people feel marginalized, therefore more vulnerable to radicalization, (de Silva, 2017; Harris-Hogan, 2017; Sklad, 2017). Student perspectives should be part of the educational process, as de Silva (2017)

contends. Moreover, parents must also be part of the dialogue insists Guillaume Denoix De Saint Marc, president of the French Association for Victims of Terrorism (Picard et al., 2020).

Although, some teachers in the French education system, according to the personal experience of the lead author, respect their students, even the most positive of them can tire in an organization that is maladjusted; drowned in a structure that is antithetical to democratic principles and student rights.

What can education do?

As Gagné (2015) emphasizes, education should be at the heart of anti-radicalization strategies. The development of life-long values, skills and behaviors conducive to economic, social and personal security requires a long-term approach shaped by both curriculum content and teaching methodology. Questioning the world around them, starting in primary school, is vital in education as it invites students to share and listen to different perspectives and ideas (Macaluso, 2016; Sklad & Park, 2017). Students need to feel safe, and not afraid to voice their opinion in class. Allowing children to think freely and critically empowers them so they will not accept any given ideology without questioning it (Theriault et *al*., 2017). Students as resilient citizens must be the objective of education programs, insists Philippe Coen (Picard et al., 2020). Additionally, parents must be part of the dialogue because what is outside the classroom affects the students as well as what goes on inside, asserts Fabien Troung (Picard et al., 2020). All stakeholders must be on board.

Most importantly, students must see the relevance of what they learn, (OECD, 2014) and be able to develop an analytical understanding of the world, insists Fabien Troung (Picard et al., 2020). Critical thinking is a necessary pedagogical approach to eliminating the process of radicalization, allowing students to challenge ideas and participate in class discussions (de Silva, 2017; Macaluso, 2016; Sklad & Park, 2017; Theriault et *al*., 2017). The French classical method of teacher-centred learning, where teachers talk, and students listen is not conducive to

critical pedagogy and disregards the importance of teachers respecting their students. Teachers' own beliefs and how they express them in classroom discussions, as well as their professional ethos and conflictual interpretations of norms and values, impact their practices and their understanding of diversity (Laborde & Sihol, 2018; The Conversation, 2020). Critical thinking is a necessary pedagogical approach to eliminating the process of radicalization, allowing students to challenge ideas and participate in class discussions (de Silva, 2017; Macaluso, 2016; Sklad & Park, 2017; Theriault et *al*., 2017). Paradoxically, critical pedagogy is essentially what Samuel Paty believed he was doing, discussing free speech with his middle school students. However, both Farhad Khosrokhavar and Francoise Lorcerie, education expert at the National center for scientific research (CNRS), question the educational purpose of Paty's choice to use Charlie Hebdo cartoons with middle school children (NYTimes, 2020).

Teachers must teach the laws of the republic to follow any creed, says Francois Holland, the former president; however, there is a misunderstanding about secularism that must be made clear both to the youth and teachers (Saque et al., 2020). Indeed, teachers lack the training and support necessary to take on all the responsibilities that society places on them, maintains Fabien Troung (Picard et al., 2020). For example, as historian Patrick Weil posits, France's colonial past has to be taught authentically including secular values of which religion is just a part (Saque et al., 2020). Teachers often lack in-depth knowledge of the issues such as cultural diversity, but they are nonetheless increasingly expected to address it in class. France is more ethnically and racially diverse today but according to El Karoui, some youth of immigrant background neither identify as French nor from their families' homeland so they fall between the cracks and feel 'othered' (Onishi & Mheut, 2020).

Many teachers fear reprisal if they talk about controversial subjects especially about religion and freedom of expression since school has become a socio-political arena which is no longer a protected and safe space subsequent to Paty's murder (Onishi & Meheut, 2020). Teachers are expected to teach ethical issues as well as mediate the public debate around these issues when they are not provided the proper means to connect with their students, the school, parents and community (Saque et al., 2020). Nonetheless, Macron is using Paty as a martyr, a

symbol of the nation's value of freedom. 'This teacher embodied *la Republique',* proclaimed Macron (Washington post, 2020), yet Paty was not supported by the system and died a tragic death.

Schools are a microcosm of society. Teachers and schools can create a space where students can feel safe rather than rejected; heard rather than silenced. If a student doesn't feel part of a group and doesn't have a sense of belonging, they may withdraw, turning to anti-social activities such as drugs, gangs, or radical extremist groups. To this end, we need educational organizations geared towards cultivating individuals who are resilient against extremist recruitment attempts. In Bandura's words, we need to build "social systems that uphold compassionate behaviour and renounce cruelty" (2002, p.116). That would imply, to prevent radicalization it is crucial to create a highly inclusive and caring environment for the most excluded and marginalized groups. Education can shape the values and behaviours of children and play a very important role in countering the process of radicalization. Therefore, starting from an early age, focusing on humanistic education aimed at social cohesion and developing resilience in students is essential (da Silva, 2017; Ghosh et *al*., 2016; Sklad & Park, 2017). Furthermore, schools need to work with communities and parents to help students construct strong identities and positive self-concepts (da Silva, 2017; Ghosh et *al*., 2017; Harris-Hogan, 2017). Overall, schools can and must contribute to safety and harmony in society by creating a sense of inclusion among all learners, especially those living on the edge (Ghosh, 2020).

However, as Noddings (1992; 2002) argues, schools (such as in the French education system) tend to emphasize the secular academic achievements or merits, neglecting 'care' which is one of the key human capacities essential to building a better world. In most industrialized and secular nations as well as in many developing countries, the education structures have been focusing on developing cognitive skills, while largely neglecting the affective and ethical dimensions of their students (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2010; Noddings, 2002). Cognitive, affective, and ethical domains are not mutually exclusive and can be developed by reinforcing each other. Unfortunately, this aspect is increasingly dismissed by

neo-liberal ideology in many Western countries, (hooks, 2014; Noddings, 2001) including France.

Care in education prioritizes the human factor in teaching and learning processes which thrive in inclusive and egalitarian spaces. According to Noddings (1992; 2001), caring pedagogy or compassionate education is indispensable to effectively address the affective and ethical domains of human development. Care in education is not solely an action or behaviour, rather, it is more about an attitude, a positive reciprocal relationship between teacher and student who both give and receive. Such a process would prevent marginalization of minority students, therefore ensuring these students have voice and agency. As Noddings (1984) further argues, care in education is a quality that "provides the motivation for us to be moral" (p.5) and more humane. This means, as an affective domain of human life, caring can form a dynamic social force that embodies our collective sense of justice (Noddings, 2002).

Education that prioritizes care and inclusion, rather than one based on strict bureaucracy, exclusion, and stigmatization of minority groups, as illustrated in the case of France, can cultivate among young and diverse students a sense of belonging, which ultimately prevents these youth from radicalization. In the French education system, there seems to be much to be addressed in order to remedy the existing reality, which is necessary for enhancing youth resilience against radicalization. Therefore, *La Republique* must address the malfunctioning of its nation, which is conducive to the radicalization of those who feel rejected by society and school. Through ostracism, disintegration, fueling grievances and anger against the state and its underlying values, *La Republique* is producing a social environment conducive to extremist recruiting. These factors may have potentially added to the radicalization of youth. Feeling singled-out and positioned as the 'other' (Jetten et al, 2020) only serves to exclude the already disenfranchised youth who then can find in such rejection a reason to morally justify the process of radicalization (Sklad & Park, 2017). Education has an essential role to play to halt homegrown terrorism which is indicative of a perpetual societal problem in France, and which amplifies the need to address continuous inequality.

Conclusion

France's strong cultural tradition and political structure influence its educational organizations, teacher mentality, in-class practices, and consequently impact student academic achievement. This paper reveals prevailing factors, which play a key role in perpetuating the failure of this education system. These factors are rooted in French philosophical perspectives, traditions, values, and organizational structures. France's traditional approach to schooling, which values grade repetition, ranking, and corporal punishment, is closely tied to the country's culture which influences pedagogical philosophies (Gumbel, 2010). Since 2000, OECD comparative studies have exposed the stagnation that the French education structure preserves till today. French students are still facing high levels of academic failure and dropping out of school (OECD, 2012; 2018). Societal troubles are further exacerbated by continual youth unemployment and a struggling French economy (Downie, 2019; Lagarde, 2017; Piketty, 2013). The French education system does very little to solve inequalities in society at large (OECD, 2018; Onishi & Meleut, 2020).

Education is one of the ways that disparity is created and perpetuated in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Stiglitz, 2015). It is also through education that injustice can be eradicated (UNESCO, 2015). The French government, through a ministerial circular, proclaimed the need to 'work toward disengagement from violent radicalization and prevent the risk of progressing to violence while encouraging social reintegration and instilling civic values' (Hecker, 2021, p. 39). Although radicalization prevention and disengagement programs for jihadists are designed to teach community values and help the individual assimilate into society (Hecker, 2021, p. 31), we suggest that these goals should be the responsibility of schools. Indeed, education has a role to play by creating a sense of inclusion for all learners and especially for youth who are on the periphery of society (hooks, 2014; OECD, 2012; Noddings, 2002). As the former Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem (2015b) points out, the French education system lacks a sense of inclusion and care. In theory, the role of educators is to socialize students and prepare them to invest in, and contribute to, the

development of their country and the global community. School is only one agent in this battle; it cannot work alone. Together, united with all its stakeholders, education has great potential in shaping minds. *L'Educational Nationale*'s systemic malfunction does not serve *les enfants de la patrie* well. Indeed, the 'Mammoth' must reflect on the purpose of its mission and on its reluctance to change (Education International, 2019; OECD, 2018). France must reinstate its crucial role to abolish social injustices through quality education. Schools and teachers must partner with parents, and students and teachers must cooperate with each other, in order to cultivate a community space where students are encouraged to develop a positive self-concept, feel safe, and remain in school because they feel they belong there (OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2015)

That said, before France can defeat terrorism, it must reflect on its complicity with the enemy. Social injustice is a breeding ground for the lost children of the Republic, which inspires homegrown pawns of radicalization. The war on terror will be long but must start with educating the nation's future citizens in a fair and inclusive environment. To this end, a total renovation of the French education system is required to address and remedy societal injustice which marginalizes those who are non-white and not Catholic (despite secularism). As suggested earlier, exclusion is a push factor in promoting the radicalization of youth in society, and particularly, in French society. Therefore, the onus is on schools to build resilient communities where students feel a connection to what is being taught, and where a sense of belonging is cultivated (de Silva, 2017, Ghosh et al., 2017; OECD, 2012). It is the responsibility of school agents to create a community where teachers and students collaborate, in order to prevent oppositional activities such as radicalization. As such, it is incumbent on governments to steer the education structure on a committed and invested path. The consequences of a maladjusted education system can be grave both nationally and globally. Change will never take place if hierarchy and elitism remain part of the French mindset. A systemic transformation of education in France, against a backdrop of ingrained cultural and political ideologies, will take time. But how long can France wait?

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