National Debates on Race Statistics: Towards an International Comparison

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The Collège d'études mondiales/FMSH and SIPA/ Columbia University have opened up a process of reflection on the global issues and conflicts stemming from "diversity statistics" or "ethnic statistics." A first workshop, organized in September 2011 in New York, brought together experts from the US and France. This working paper offers three of the conference papers, by Michel Wieviorka, Hervé Le Bras and Jean-Luc Racine.

Working Papers Series

National Debates on Race Statistics: towards an International Comparison

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Abstract

The Collège d'études mondiales/FMSH and SIPA/Columbia University have opened up a process of reflection on the global issues and conflicts stemming from "diversity statistics" or "ethnic statistics." A first workshop, organized in September 2011 in New York, brought together academics and experts from the US and France. This working paper offers three of the conference papers. Michel Wieviorka, asks: "Should France collect race statistics?" Hervé Le Bras explores the contradiction between "Ethnic and racial statistics and the structure of the French nation-state: a contradiction". Jean-Luc Racine writes about "The next step: a note on the issue of caste census in India".

Keywords

Les débats nationaux sur les statistiques ethniques : vers une comparaison internationale

Résumé

Le Collège d'études mondiales/FMSH et SIPA/Université Columbia se sont engagés dans une réflexion commune visant à comparer le débat scientifique et public sur les enjeux des statistiques ethniques/ statistiques de la diversité. Dans ce cadre, une première conférence, organisée à New York en septembre 2011, a rassemblé douze chercheurs et praticiens français et américains. Ce Working Paper offre à la lecture trois des interventions proposées. Michel Wieviorka demande si la France devrait collecter des statistiques ethniques. Hervé Le Bras explore la contradiction entre les statistiques ethniques et raciales, d'une part, et l'État-nation français d'autre part. Jean-Luc Racine développe « La prochaine étape : une note sur la question des recensements de caste en Inde ».

Mots-clés

Reference to this document

A brief general introduction

The Collège d'études mondiales/FMSH and SIPA/Columbia University have opened up a process of reflection on the global issues and conflicts stemming from what the French call "diversity statistics" or "ethnic statistics", and more specifically on how race/ethnic/ancestry statistics available to governments constrain policy responses in the domains of social justice and immigrant integration.

A first conference, organized in September 2011 in New York (SIPA/Columbia University) brought together twelve specialists from the US and France for a period of two days. Conference participants have engaged, on both sides of the Atlantic, in these debates, and the conference didn't rehash them. It did, however, recast them in light of US and French concerns over immigrant integration in the 21st century and, more generally, in ways in which demographic statistics shape how nations govern heterogeneous populations. This working paper offers three of the conference papers.

Under the responsibility of Hervé Le Bras, one the College's chair, a series of additional conferences, featuring a comparative approach, is planned in the near future, progressively introducing the BRIC countries: India, Brazil, Russia, and China.

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Michel Wieviorka

Should France collect race statistics?

Before presenting my paper, let me say a few words about…words. Jean-Luc Racine, Hervé Le Bras and myself are here, not only for this lecture, but also as participants in a joint program with American colleagues, including Ken Prewitt, which will endeavour to compare the debates on this issue – race and ethnic statistics- in different societies, first of all in the USA and France, but also, and this will be the next step, in India and Brazil. But in order to compare, we need to share concepts, categories and terminology which is always a problem. If you mention 'ethnic' or 'racial' statistics to a French person, he or she will consider you to be racist. The French do not consider 'race' as a social construction, they consider it to be a physical definition of human groups, and will not accept it. So, even the passing –from *statistiques ethniques* in French to race statistics (in American) -is misleading. Let me add that in France, 'ethnic' means a combination of nature and culture; it can be used as a euphemism by people who do not want to use the word '*race*' and try to find a substitute. Another word is: *Noir*. If I speak to an American audience, what word should I use - 'African-American'? As I am referring to the French situation it looks strange. If I say 'Black', it may be politically incorrect, and nobody in France would say '*Africains*'. In reality in France we have two main categories, people from Sub-Saharan Africa, and people from the French Caribbean. Sometimes, in France, people who want to appear as definitely non-racist will use the American term 'Black' when speaking with 'black' people, rather than *Noir*, in an attempt to create a good relationship.

The French debate on what are referred to as '*statistiques ethniques*' is not only, nor fundamentally, a technical question, and is part of a much wider issue. This issue can be presented as related to the French version of universalism, which began to be questioned anew in the mid-1980s. At the time, France was discovering the importance of Islam on its own national territory, and the fear of a crisis in its Republican model of integration was becoming widespread. In France, it is true that the very idea of universalism is directly linked to the Nation and the Republic. The Nation is the cultural and historical framework of our country,

and for many French citizens France is a 'universal nation', perhaps, as Dominique Schnapper used to say, "the universal Nation *par excellence*". And the '*République, une et indivisible*' – one and indivisible- is a set of principles that apply to all citizens, '*libres et égaux en droit*' – free and equal in rights. When you visit France, you can read above the entrance to most public buildings the words: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*.

But this idea of strong universal values connected with the Nation and the Republic, which clearly correspond to one another, has been contested for the last quarter of a century, mainly in relation to issues such as religion (i.e. Islam), and cultural differences or identities; sometimes the social and territorial difficulties that are symbolised by the word '*banlieues*' – suburbs are also a factor.

I have no time to describe all these issues; let me just say that it became clear that there was a political and intellectual opposition in this context; in the United States what are known as 'liberals' opposed 'communitarians' and in France, to use the French categories that were proposed by Regis Debray in the mi-1980s, '*Républicains*' opposed '*Démocrates*'. This opposition became more concrete on several occasions, with sometimes a real confusion: with the numerous '*affaires du foulard*' –'scarf (or veil) affairs', the first one in 1989, with the so-called "*discrimination positive*" (the French expression for Affirmative Action which in fact denigrates it), more recently the debate about the '*burka*', etc. One should consider that the debate about "*statistiques ethniques*" is one aspect of this general issue.

This debate about ethnic statistics was launched in the mid 2000's, with a series of events. On the one hand, a new movement, the CRAN (Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires), published the results of a survey in a popular daily newspaper, in January 2007. A sample of the French population was asked about their belonging to a visible minority and, more precisely, to the Black world. Those who replied in the affirmative were asked about the discrimination they had experienced in the recent past. The results were clear: there were a lot of people who defined themselves as black, and a large percentage of them (61%) considered that they had suffered from discrimination during the previous twelve months. On the other hand, in 2007, the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, along with part of the political right, appeared to be in favour of the collection of

'*statistiques ethniques*', which are referred as '*statistiques de la diversité*' by their supporters. He said he would like the word "*diversité*" to be included in the introduction to the French Constitution. In this context, I was asked by the Minister for Research, Mme Pécresse, to right a report on 'diversity', and I was assisted, in this mission, by five or six colleagues, including Hervé Le Bras, I must admit that our report and its recommendations were not very effective. At the same time, a law was passed, approving, among various other elements, the project to produce '*statistiques ethniques*', and a Commission, chaired by Mme Simone Veil, a key political actor, former minister, and well known for her action in favour of legalising abortion, was asked to make concrete proposals in order to introduce the word *diversité* into the Constitution. But the Commission rejected the idea, and the *Cour Constitutionelle*, a body whose role is not so different from the American Supreme Court, considered the part of the law of 2007 dealing with '*statistiques ethniques*' to be non-constitutional.

Nevertheless, the French President appointed Yazid Sabeg, a businessman, well-known to be in favour of '*statistiques ethniques*', as '*Commissaire*', a position not far from that of minister, and Sabeg decided to create a *Comité pour l'évaluation des discriminations et de la diversité* (COMEDD), chaired by a demographer, François Héran. I was one of the members of this huge *Comité*. This was in March 2009; the final report of this *Comité* was published in February 2010. The content was so prudent, so far from any radical statement, so cautious not to promote '*statistiques ethniques*' too obviously that Yazid Sabeg did not appear at the official presentation.

As soon as the COMEDD was launched, a group of social scientists led by Hervé le Bras decided to constitute a counter-committee, called CARSED, in order to oppose the idea of *statistiques ethniques*, which they considered as meaning the return of race, that is to say of racism.

So, in recent years, the idea of establishing ethnic or race statistics appeared to be more a right-wing idea than a left-wing one, even if people like me, Patrick Simon or Eric Fassin are known for their political orientations on the left. Not only were two reports, one by the COMEDD and the

other by the CARSED published dealing directly with this issue, but also a lot of articles in newspapers and magazines. Many social scientists participated in the debate. But let us now consider the most interesting aspects of the content of the debate.

First of all, all the participants agreed on a key point: whatever their position; they share a common will to fight racial discriminations.

The question of the relationship between discrimination and social inequality was examined. Two positions existed here in the debate: for some thinkers or politicians, there should only be one campaign which should target social inequality; if this were successful, discrimination should more or less disappear. Some writers go farther, and consider that those who promote diversity and race statistics are in fact indifferent to social inequalities – a position that was promoted by Walter Ben Michaels[1], an author who has been translated into French by followers of Bourdieu. The more you defend race statistics, the more you separate inequality and discrimination.

The participants in the debate also agreed, if asked, to distinguish three possibilities:

- direct discrimination, when for instance an employer refuses explicitly to give a job to an African American as such,

- indirect discrimination, when the criteria of discrimination is apparently not discriminatory: for instance, when the type of job demands that it be given to a person whose physical qualities are obviously those of men,

- institutional or systemic discrimination, when apparently nobody is racist, but the result of the functioning of a system is that, for instance, no African American will be given a job in a company located in an area where lots of African American people live.

Those who are in favour of race statistics consider that the only way to fight systemic discrimination is to prove it, and in order to prove it, to produce this kind of data.

The participants in the debate agree that it was not acceptable to have interviewers decide on the ethnicity or the race of the people they interview.

Two other major possibilities then remain, and are discussed (in fact, the COMEDD report distinguished five separate methods). One considers that the people themselves should decide what their identity is, or to which ethnic or coloured group they belong. The other possibility is to ask people how they think they are considered or perceived by other people.

But let us go to the core of the debate: are what are known as *statistiques ethniques*, or *de la diversité*, a problem, or a solution? Do they help to fight discrimination, or do they introduce considerable perversion?

In the first instance, it should be pointed out that the word 'ethnic' is not appropriate if what is at stake is to measure religion or national origin. This is not ethnic. If it is to record colour, it is not ethnicity, for the word 'ethnicity' means a mixture of nature and culture which is not very clear.

A strong argument against these data is that by collecting statistics about 'ethnicity', one creates the racialisation of the whole society, and contributes to its ethnicisation. This has not been really proven. If there are increasing tendencies towards racialisation and ethnicisation, this has to do to with many other factors, which are much more influential. Another argument consists in the assertion that for those who are surveyed, questions relating to ethnicity could mean a process of ethnic labelling, a kind of stigmatisation, the imposition of an ethnic or racial identity. I have never read real demonstrations on this point.

Another argument against collecting these data is that they could be used for unscrupulous purposes. For instance, if we collect statistics about the number of Muslims in French jails, or of African Americans in American jails, the results will be impressive, and some extreme right or racist people will say: these figures prove that Muslims, or African-Americans, are more criminal than any other group in the country. But this is not a very strong argument: any statistics can be used for dishonest purposes, or for the good.

But it is also true that we do not have in France reliable studies demonstrating the positive uses of this kind of data.

Could we reduce this French debate to the image of a face-to-face opposition, a kind of clash between '*républicains*' and '*démocrates*'? In fact, no. If we try to distinguish between these various

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1. *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality.* New York: Metropolitan, 2006.

types of statistics, we can consider three main cases, and this is where the surprise arises.

First of all, nobody would accept any kind of data that does not preserve the anonymity of the people concerned. In France there is a strong consensus that any kind of what we call '*fichage*' or recording of the population should be avoided. As the census is not anonymous, it has been agreed that no question on racial or ethnic origin should be included.

We have in France – or we had, the truth is more complex - a national census. And here, we must state that information that could be considered dangerous by the opponents of "*statistiques ethniques*" is collected without creating any problem. For instance, everybody is asked to give some details about his or her national identity (is one French at birth, or a foreigner, or naturalised?).

At the other extreme of the spectrum, there are in France, as in other countries, surveys which are private and restricted, for instance in order to know how many people belong to a religious, or a cultural group, or any kind of visible minority. French Jews, for instance, have been the object of several surveys by Sergio Della Pergola and Doris Bensimon, or by Erik Cohen, without anybody claiming these surveys to be a scandal. In fact, there is not a real opposition, even among most convinced '*républicains*' to these non-official and limited surveys.

The real and serious debate is in fact when the *grandes enquêtes* or major surveys by INSEE or INED, two official bodies, are at stake, like the survey entitled TetO (Trajectoires et Origines)[2]. These surveys are not as big as a census, but they are much more general than the limited studies, like the one about the Black population (by the CRAN) or the Jews. They provide a general image of France, and not knowledge restricted to some aspects or some groups. Furthermore, they are sponsored by the State, they have an official value. Here, the intellectual and political opposition is strong.

This leads me to my last point. If limited surveys are accepted, but the census and even *grandes enquêtes* are not, if there is no common reference, how can we pass from limited knowledge to general perspectives? From the perspective of scientific research, it is difficult to accept a fragmentation of the arena for research and studies. How can researchers make comparisons, in time and space, if there is not this tool? But where could such a tool be provided?

So, as you can see, I consider that there is a real problem, but there is not such a big gap between the two main positions in this debate.

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2. Trajectoires et Origines : Enquête sur la diversité des populations en France (TeO)

Hervé Le Bras

Ethnic and racial statistics and the structure of the French nation-state: a contradiction

Those who call for implementing ethnic and racial statistics in France put forward two main arguments

1/The advance of learning and science

2/ The decrease of social inequalities

They link the second argument to the first using the Baconian aphorism: knowledge is power.

Those who oppose the use of ethnic and racial statistics refute such a link. They are not empirically convinced by the Baconian aphorism. For example, there is considerable statistical data concerning economic and social inequalities, but these inequalities show no sign of decline; on the contrary, in many countries where the statistical apparatus is reliable, they are on the increase. Similar remarks apply to the data on the educational system. The French Ministry of Education has done excellent work on this topic over the last twenty years, but, despite this, inequality has considerably increased. Everybody knows the reasons for this failure but nobody does anything to correct it. The failure lies, not in statistical and sociological knowledge but in political will.

But the main reason for disagreement about ethnic and racial statistics which we will address here lies elsewhere, in a different view *a priori* of the working of societies. Briefly, those who are in favor of ethnic and racial statistics speak the technical and technocratic language of social engineers. They think that by taking account of ethnic and racial categories they can improve society by intervening with appropriate measures.

On the contrary, those who are opposed to ethnic and racial statistics, think the question is related to the internal structure of the state and its symbolic perception by the citizens of the country in question. Each state has its own specific history and the question cannot be solved without respecting it. The opponents think it is the image of the state and the nation, its understanding which is at stake. But what do we mean by history and symbolism and image of the nation and how do they affect the whole question? We cannot propose a general view but we will take the French case as an example. We will address three main points:

1/The initial ethnic diversity in France and its interpretation in political terms

2/ The fear of invasion and its ideological consequences

3/ The political framework resulting from these two factors

In conclusion we will comment on the recent upsurge of the question in France and the factors underlying this.

1/ The origins of the diversity of the French population

A/ As stated by Fernand Braudel and other historians, France has a special place in Europe: it is the only place where northern and Mediterranean influences merge. All European states are the product of the aggregation of various peoples, but the variety is greater in France where one finds Mediterranean peoples (Catalans, Ligurians, Corsicans), Saxons (Flemish, Alsatian, Burgundians, Normans), Celtic (Britons), proto-Europeans (Basques) against a Gallo-Roman background. Take Germany, Spain or Great Britain - you will not find such extensive diversity.

As a result of this diversity, the mores or the customs vary greatly on the national territory. There are differences in religion (Catholic and secular regions), in land tenure and traditional types of farming, in the dispersion of the population (sparse orclustered), in the type of family (complex in the south, nuclear in the large Paris Basin).

B/ Over time, this diversity has been reduced and harmonized by virtue of a strong state which grew ever stronger between the 16th and the 19th century. The customs and local languages were kept but the state power infiltrated via the tax system. In reality the main difference was not between people but between orders (aristocracy, clergy and the common people). The French revolution suppressed the orders as is well known and introduced an administration that treated the different peoples equally. This equality was stressed by the territorial grid with 40 000 *communes* at the outset and 85 *départements*. Throughout the nineteenth century, the SGF, (the French statistical office) published a vast array of data by *départements* and by *communes*. Most of this was devoid of any practical interest but it did illustrate the equality of

the different territories and the manner in which *communes* were embedded into *arrondissments* which in turn were embedded into *départements* and these in their turn into the whole nation.

C/ The ethnic argument was taken up by strong opponents of equality. The first was the Comte de Boulainvilliers who wrote a short essay arguing that the aristocracy was of Germanic descent (the Frank-ish invaders in the 5th century) and the common people were of Gallo-Roman descent. In *What is the Third Estate? (Qu'est le Tiers-état?)*, the revolutionary deputy Sieyès advised the aristocracy 'to get back to …their Franconian forests'. During the 19th century, those who advocated ethnicity met with no success at all in France, (unlike in Germany); Gobineau in 1854 and Vacher de Lapouge in 1898 attracted no interest at all. Ethnic statistics were not unknown, but they applied to the main body of the French population rather than to minorities. A good example is a large study by Moreau de Jonnès the founder of the French statistical office. He researched the historical origins of each part of the French population and published the number of persons in each group at his time. A former officer of Napoleon and a free thinker, he wanted to stress the equality of treatment of these peoples, not their inequality. The same can be said for the *History of France* by Michelet. The majority of the population was constituted by the common people in the political meaning of the term, as opposed to the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie or upper classes who were minorities. A well-documented illustration of this point is the myth of descent from the Gauls.

In short, in France, ethnic diversity is seen in terms of equality and not of inequality. (equality of treatment is seen as the response to ethnic diversity). One interesting result of this attitude is the weakness of regionalist, autonomist and independence movements in France. Compare the Basques on either sides of the Pyrenees or the British with Northern Ireland, or Savoy with the Italian Tyrol. In France there are more important lines of division than ethnic ones.

2/ The fear of invasion

Invasion has long been a French obsession.

A/It has actually occurred on several occasions: in 1815 when the allied troops occupied Paris; in 1870 when the Germans won the war and took Alsace-Lorraine and, once again in 1940, when the third Reich invaded and occupied French territory for four years. Before these historical instances and after them, the historiography of France has stressed invasion by the Barbarians at the fall of the Roman Empire, by the Vikings with the myth of Sainte Geneviève, by the Arabs who were defeated by Charles Martel at Poitiers (which, according to Bernard Lewis, is not documented outside France) and by the English with the myth of Jeanne d'Arc. Most, if not all, of these facts are questionable but they are deeply ingrained in the memory and imagination of the French people who have learned them since primary school. Such an obsession is not the case for England or the United States (the Spanish Armada failed to reach Great Britain, Japan only destroyed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, a place some distance from the mainland).

B/ Invasion is felt as a threat by French people. They must therefore be united in the fight against the invaders. One good example of this effort is the victory at Valmy, in fact an unimportant battle from a military point of view but a decisive one from a broader point of view where the common people united to defeat mercenaries and the aristocracy. Goethe, who witnessed the battle, wrote the well known lines "from this place and from this time forth commences a new era in world history". The unity of the French people was the response to invasion as was conscription, and unfortunately, a war of massive casualties rather than technical warfare. One of the effects of the First World War was to unify the different people of France.[3].

C/ Special circumstances led to dramatization. Since the middle of the 19th century, France has suffered from a low fertility rate. The populations in neighboring countries grew much faster than the French population. At the turn of the century, groups who wished to promote a high birth rate, led by Jacques Bertillon, promoted the idea of high and low demographic pressure: in short, rapidly growing populations, particularly Germans and Italians, would invade the slow growing France. At the time, foreigners were quite numerous in France (1.2 million). In his books Bertillon warned against their concentration (he referred to them as colonies) saying they would constitute

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3. See Eugen WEBER. *Peasants into Frenchmen. The modernization of rural France, 1870-1914.* Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1976

a fifth column in the event of war and, if France was defeated, might take other provinces as the Germans had done with Alsace Lorraine. Foreigners were necessary to develop French industry, but their concentration in any one place should be avoided. This is the origin of the French idea of the importance of a socially mixed population. No single group of immigrants should be allowed to occupy a given territory alone; people of different origins should be mixed together. Now the idea has been extended to social groups.

3/ Political context of French diversity

A/ From the preceding considerations, it follows that the major group in France is the « *peuple* », a term which cannot be easily translated[4]. as «the common people». The « *peuple* », is not a dominant group from a hierarchical standpoint but is the democratic basis of the nation-state. On the contrary the « *peuple* »,feel threatened by minority groups who may be stronger than them, for example, hereditary elites as shown in the first part of the discussion. The « *peuple* also fear an invasion of rulers who will dominate them as shown in the second part. Their strength lies in their numbers, their diversity and their ability to overcome diversity in case of danger and to unite.

B/ The contradiction between unity and diversity is resolved on a territorial basis. The « *peuple* », is made up of different regional groups, each one having a well-defined territory. When travelling in France, one may be astonished by the fact that the names of the cities, villages and streets are indicated in two languages in a number of regions. The central government and its administration speak only French to any person living on French soil, but at the same time, it admits that a region be associated with a particular group. The only exceptions are Nomadic peoples who are treated roughly and subject to special laws.

C/ To consolidate the power of the « *peuple* », and its diversity, equality is required. This principle of equality, often depicted as abstract by those who favor ethnic and racial statistics is in no way abstract. It is essential to social cohesion. It is the only means of preventing one regional group from dominating another as is frequent in

many countries fragmented by ethnicity. The only dominant actor is the State, assimilated to Paris. In his portrait of French ethnic groups, Moreau de Jonnès put Paris apart with the description: no possible distinction. A large part of the political history of France revolves around Jacobinism and its challenger, «*décentralisation*». The popularity of Jean François Graviers' book[5] provides another illustration of this fact.

D/ In this respect, newcomers are in a difficult situation. They have no ancestral territory inside France. They therefore have no access to the principle which underlies the French treatment of diversity. For more than a century, the only way to deal with them was assimilation or integration. They had to be integrated into the local community. In time, a Maghrebian or his children would be « Meridional », « Gascon » or « Alsatian ». It is frustrating, but the French structure does not provide any other way for people who have decided to settle in France. For example, the equality problem arises when comparisons are made between the poor of French descent and the poor of foreign descent. Do foreigners receive more aid from the State than the French? Clearly a vast majority of French will answer no. This is why the support provided, for example to young people at secondary school, is designed on a local basis (the « *cités* », the « ZUP » (*Zone à urbaniser en priorité*) and not on an ethnic and racial basis.

E/ Let us suppose affirmative action is implemented in France, giving extra rights to people of specific origins. It would be necessary to classify each person in a group and only one group. What would be done with those who are not of migrant origin? The question was clearly an issue in the MGIS[6] study, one of the French surveys attempting to measure ethnicity. The answer was immediate: those who are not of immigrant origin will be termed « français de souche ». In this case, diversity is lost to the benefit of an ethnic group - « l'ethnie française » to recall the title of a journal published under the German occupation during the World War Two. The philosopher Etienne Balibar in a book written with Immanuel Wallerstein clearly stated the French attitude, namely that a nation-state has never coincided with an ethnic group[7]

4. CASSIN Barbara (sous la direction de), 2004, *Vocabulaire Européen des Philosophies. Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles,* Paris, Le Robert, Seuil. See the article entitled 'Peuple, Race, Nation'.

5. GRAVIER Jean-François, 1947, *Paris et le désert français,*Paris, Le Portulan

6. *Mobilité Géographique et Insertion Sociale* (MGIS), (1992-1992), Tribalat, Riandey, Simon, INED

7. Balibar & Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: ambiguous iden-*

F/ A final point has to be evoked but cannot be treated here because of its enormous implications: ethnicity and the welfare state. We consider the three forms of welfare state described by Gosta Esping-Andersen[8]. They are strongly related to the question of equality. The universal form (the social democratic form) requires strong equality and cohesion of the group. It is difficult to maintain cohesion when migration flows increase. This is now the problem for Scandinavian states. The second form, corporatist-statist, is well fitted to describe France. It requires equality, but not implicit cohesion which is provided by the state and the professional groups. In this case, the migration problem is solved, or is said to be solved, by assimilation and integration. In the third case, the American or liberal one, welfare is limited to helping the poor. Social cohesion is no longer required and can be replaced by community cohesion. I cannot elaborate further on these topics but I think it is essential to the understanding of our subject.

In conclusion why does the question of measuring ethnic and racial diversity arise in France today?

A/ Does the American approach to ethnic and racial diversity fascinate the French ? I do not think so. As is well documented in Philippe Roger's book[9] the opposite is true; this is also well illustrated by the success of Emmanuel Todd's book.[10]

B/ Immigration is on the increase and is becoming a major problem. This is not true. Migration has been stable for the past ten years. The attitude toward it is also constant as illustrated by Ralph Schor's book.[11]

C/ More seriously, the topic has recently been taken up by Claude Bébéar, one of the most liberal (in the French meaning of the term) of French businessmen association (Claude Bébéar and his diversity chart or *Charte pour la diversité*, 2004) The motive is easy to understand: it costs nothing to give a position held by a 'français de souche' to a person from a different ethnic group or race. It would be much more difficult to eliminate inequalities inside firms.

D/ The French president, Nicholas Sarkozy believes strongly in biological differences. This has been illustrated on many occasions (his speech in Dakar, detection of future criminals at the age of two, and so on). Also, it is a way of taking votes from the extreme right party the Front National. He has taken numerous initiatives in the direction of ethnic and racial statistics either by establishing commissions or by initiating a broadly based debate on French identity.

E/ In my opinion, the reason lies deeper and is to be found in changes in the social structure. Over the past ten or twenty years the value of personal assets and goods has risen considerably: houses, extent of social relations, money. The gap has increased between the haves and have-nots. Belonging to a dominant group has also become a value in itself, a value for those who have not benefited from the rise in value of personal assets. We are rich, you are poor, but our wealth is that we are French, of French descent.

It is also possible that diversity inside France has decreased, thus increasing the gap with the newcomers (but diversity has also been reduced at world level with globalization).

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8. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Published in 1990

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Jean-Luc Racine

The next step: a note on the issue of caste census in India

Based upon an initial dialogue on the U.S. and the French debates on what are referred to as « diversity statistics », the programme will expand to key countries including India, which will be the next step. The present note is a preliminary attempt to identify some of the issues illustrated by the India case.

For those interested in the debate on statistics collected for implementing positive discrimination or affirmative action, India deserves attention, for the simple fact that this is the country where the scope of voluntary action by the State apparatus is the widest in this field. The policy of "reservations", as it is called in India, is in fact the largest quota-based strategy of social engineering implemented the world over: it affects hundreds of millions of people and is a source of unending debates, beyond the trans-partisan consensus by which no established political party would ever suggest that reservations should be either abolished, or diminished. These debates have been intensified recently for three reasons: the question of extending reservations to a section of Muslims and Christians; the hypothesis/possibility of expanding reservations to segments of the private sector and, most recently, the decision of the Government of India to widely compile caste statistics for the first time since the country gained Independence in 1947.

I. The multiple rationales for reservation

The historical background of social classification and its impact

In the land of *Homo hierarchicus*, the thousands of recognized castes are grouped into four broad orders, the *varnas*, while the so-called "untouchables" were, according to the scriptures, outside the pale of the *varnas'* (but structured in castes as well). After a long history over several millennia and marked by a number of socio-ideological movements contesting the Brahmin ideological domination and the established caste-based hierarchy, British rule in India, firmly established in the XIXth century, contributed greatly to the detailed classification of social categories, through the Census of India, the impressive reports on "Castes and Tribes", and the local information collected in the 'district gazetteers'. In this regard, the British have pushed further what has for long been, in the best governed Indian kingdoms and Empires, the practice of collecting data, mostly for taxation, as prescribed by the *Arthashastra* written in the 3rd century BC or, with a wider scope, as done by the *Ain-e-Akbari* compiled under Moghol Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605). The first modern Census was conducted between 1865 and 1872 by the British colonial administration. From 1881 onward, censuses were conducted every ten years at the same time.

In the first half of the XIXth century, under British rule, two major debates set out the issues at stake concerning social discrimination (the tone of social competition). Their legacy is still active today.

The first issue was the definition of who was backward. In 1918, the Maharajah of Mysore — one of the most important princely states—considered establishing a job quota. A report introduced the concept of "backward classes", but was too broad: apart from the Brahmins, almost everyone was included. Two years earlier, the Indian Legislative Council has introduced the concept of "depressed classes", encompassing aboriginal tribes, untouchables (the word "*dalit*" was popularized only after the 1970s) and the so-called "criminal tribes" from the British typology. How to extend or not to extend the concepts of "depressed" or "backward" was a matter of debate across India, till the 1931 Census —the last under British rule, as there was no Census in 1941— made a clear distinction between "Untouchables" and "Tribals" on the one hand, and "backward communities" on the other hand. "Hindu backward communities" were estimated at 43.7% of the population, "non-Hindu backward communities", including backward Muslims were estimated at 8.4%. (Ramaseshan 2010). Communities is a concept vague enough to incorporate social groups supposed to be outside the caste system, but in fact, backward communities defines, basically, castes who, in the traditional Hindu hierarchy, are above the Untouchables, and below the Brahmins and other upper castes.

The second debate was launched in the 1930s when the British approved the proposal of B.D. Ambedkar (a Columbia alumni from the very low Mahar caste) who was one of the most prominent leaders of the movement for the emancipation of

the "untouchables" and later on the chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, and Law Minister under Nehru. Ambedkar wanted a separate electorate for the "untouchables", as was already the case for minorities (Muslims, Anglo-Indians…). Gandhi resorted to a hunger strike against such a project, which was abandoned.

Independent India: expanding quotas

After Independence, the Constitution of India set new parameters. Seats were reserved for "Scheduled castes " (SC = the Dalits), and "Scheduled tribes" (ST = the Aborigines, also known as Adi-Dravida) both in the lower House of Parliament, at the alI-India level, and in the Legislative Assembly of the States of the Union of India on the basis of a proportion "as need as may be" similar to their share of the total population. (Part XVI of the Constitution). Originally, this provision was supposed to cease after sixty years. It would be impossible today to demur (abolish?) it. In the present Lower House of Parliament, out of a total of 545 seats, two are reserved for nominated Anglo-Indians, 79 for the scheduled castes, 41 for scheduled tribes, who are elected from "reserved constituencies" where political parties can field only SC or ST candidates. By comparison, the Census of India 2001 registered 16,2 % of the total population of one billion Indians as notified scheduled castes and 8,2% as notified scheduled tribes, theses castes and tribes being duly identified and listed by the Census (the total population of India as per the 2011 Census is now 1.2 billion).

Besides these reservations of seats in elected assemblies, SC and ST benefited as well from a policy of reservations in educational institutions, and in public administration jobs. This was supposed to run for ten years. Some States, particularly in contexts where a strong anti-Brahmin movement had developed, expanded these quotas in their own government administrative services. The quotas for SC and ST remained, while "Backward Classes" were agitating for quotas for themselves as well. Some States did oblige, particularly in South India, and in some States reservations for SC, ST and the so-called OBC (Other Backward Classes= in fact castes in the lower rungs of the hierarchy above SC) accounted for more than 50% of Government jobs.

In the early 1990s, the debate on the Backward Classes was taken up once again, when the Government of India decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report, published a decade earlier, in order to raise the number of jobs under quotas in the Central Government services and in the Universities. A section of the upper caste youths strongly protested (some of them choosing self-immolation) against a decision changing the rules of the competition for access to secure jobs.

The Mandal controversy developed not only on matters of principle, but also because the criteria selected by the Commission for identifying castes and sub-castes amongst the Backward Classes deserving reservations were criticized. Critics argued that the methodology for identifying the Backward Classes (through a sample survey in two villages and one urban block in each district, and extrapolation from the 1931 Census data) was flawed.

More substantially, another issue was raised after decades of reservations: was the quota system efficient enough to be kept alive, or even expanded? Should it be maintained according to the established principles, or should SC, ST and OBC families who have clearly benefited from it — the so-called "creamy layer"—be excluded at the next generation, as the Sattanathan Commission set up in the State of Tamil Nadu suggested as early as 1971 ?

While many of the Dalits, tribes or backward castes have not benefited from reservations, it has certainly generated a new social dynamics, which is clearly visible in the political landscape, with a number of political parties emanating from lower castes groupings, and gaining power, as illustrated by the Bahujan Samaj Party presently ruling the most populated Indian State, Uttar Pradesh (200 million inhabitants in 2011).

In any case, the impact of reservation was seen as significant enough to push for the expansion of reservations beyond their established scope:

- to the Muslim and Christian Dalits and OBC. Some States have started to implement quotas for backward Muslims, such as Andhra Pradesh —at 4%— far below the recommendations of the Ranganath Mishra Commission on Religious & Linguistic Minorities, which suggested in 2007 15%

reservations,

- to the private sector, which opposes such a move in the name of merit, freedom and efficiency,

- to higher learning education, beyond the traditional undergraduate level. The debate was particularly acute in 2006, when quotas were discussed for the most prestigious institutions: the Indian Institutes of Management and Indian Institutes of Technology, as well as Medical Institutes of repute. Despite protests from members of higher castes, the Supreme Court of India upheld in 2008 27% reservations for OBC (creamy layer excluded) in these institutions.

II. The current debate on the caste census

Under social and political pressure from the backward groups, the Government of India decided finally in September 2010, despite divisions inside the Cabinet, to collect caste data for the first time since Independence, beyond the well-established practice to enumerate Dalits and Tribals during the regular Censuses. In fact, for reasons of feasibility, the two exercises have been separated. The regular Census of 2011 was conducted in February and March: a gigantic exercise, covering almost 8000 towns and 640 000 villages, conducted by more than two million enumerators. The separate enumeration of caste, commonly labelled as the "Caste Census", has been disconnected from the regular Census for technical reasons (and lack of preparation) and the States will be in charge of the exercise, which will start late and which is supposed to be completed in March 2012. It is not quite clear if everyone will be enumerated, or only backward castes. Simultaneously, enquiries about the level of poverty, defined by the official "Below Poverty Line", will also be conducted. As late as May 2011 Leftist intellectuals and human rights activists published a press release asking for clarification from the Government about the scope and the methodology of the exercise, and requesting a comprehensive caste enumeration, conducted under the authority of the Census Organization (Collective, 2011).

For long, social scientists have underlined how difficult caste enumeration will be, for at least three reasons: the intricacies of the caste and sub-caste typology, which vary from region to region; the possibility of getting deliberate wrong answers from people hoping to benefit unduly from reservations; the mere technicality of conducting this kind of enquiry, on the scale of India. Some have suggested that it should instead be the task of specific Commissions set up long ago (National Commission for Scheduled Castes, National Commission for Backward Classes, National Commission for Minorities…) to conduct the exercise, as they have already established all-India lists of castes and sub-castes for Dalits and backward castes.

Beyond technical questions, which can always be solved, the core of the debate has been focused on the legitimacy of this first caste enumeration conducted since Independence. The debate, here, is a classic one in matter of positive discrimination. Nandini Sundar, Professor of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, stated that: (Sundar, 2010):

> «Supporters of caste enumeration argue that census categories merely reflect existing classifications, and that only the census can provide the figures necessary to map inequality by caste. Opponents argue that the census does not mirror but actively produces social classifications and ways of thinking. They point to the history of mobilisation around caste in the census and the consequent dangers of both distorted data and increased social tensions. In neither case has much thought been given to how the data might be used, the different kinds of figures needed for different purposes, or alternative ways of collecting the required data.»

The opponents' arguments

In fact, the arguments used from both sides go beyond this basic assessment. Opponents to caste enumeration might invoke the unfairness of reservations, depriving non-backwards from deserved access to higher education. Pratap Bhanu Mehta, the distinguished President of the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi resigned from the National Knowledge Commission when it was decided that quotas would be applied to the elitist and competitive Institutes of Management and Technology. In a piece published in 2010, he launched a scathing attack on the proposed caste census:

> « The decision to, in principle, enumerate caste

in the Census is a monumental travesty. At one stroke, it trivialises all that modern India has stood for, and condemns it to the tyranny of an insidious kind of identity politics. The call to enumerate caste in the Census is nothing but a raw assertion of power wearing the garb of social justice, an ideological projection of Indian society masquerading under the colour of social science, and a politics of bad faith being projected as a concern for the poor… First, a caste census condemns us to the tyranny of compulsory identities… The state has legitimised the principle that we will always be our caste. This is a way of diminishing our freedom, agency and dignity in a way that even votaries of tradition could not dream of… Second, a caste census condemns us to misidentify the remedies of injustice… Discrimination needs to be addressed. But it does not follow from that fact that you need a census to attack injustice. Make a list of all the things that are necessary to empower the disempowered: education, resources, food security, economic resources, political participation, etc. Not a single one of the major things that need to be done to make an impact on people's empowerment requires a caste census… Third, giving in to a caste census is giving in to a discourse of raw political power… Fourth, a caste census is the basis for a self-destructive politics… Fifth, a caste census invites misrecognition… Caste pre-existed the classifications of the modern state; but the classifications we use fundamentally transform the institution. In that sense, the Census will bring into being a new social reality; it will not simply describe an objective one. Caste facts are shadows created by our politics… Sixth, the politics of caste has diminished our sense of self. Imagine what society has become: a vast web of enumeration and suspicion… Seventh, the politics of caste has also largely become the politics of cowardice and hypocrisy. It has not produced much justice... Indeed, the subtle corrosion of reason and character alike that the tyranny of caste categories is producing by displacing reason with identity, reciprocity with group narcissism, is a price we are already paying… (Mehta, 2010).

The pro-census rationales

Against Mehta's arguments, Satish Deshpande, Professor of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, advances that "the single-most important lesson offered by the history of independent India is that caste awareness is the only viable route to the true abolition of caste". He unravels an apparent paradox: the upper castes, so proud of their status in the past, argue today that caste should be forgotten—in order to preserve their privileges—, while the lower castes insist that caste is decisive, positively or negatively, in defining the range of opportunities for social mobility. Deshpande argues:

« Nehruvian India squandered a historic window of opportunity. By limiting itself to 'abolishing' caste formally, it turned a blind eye to the perpetuation and deepening of substantive caste inequalities. Designed to fail, this 60-year experiment has done so in a spectacular fashion. Its crowning achievement is that the country is split into two warring camps. On one side is the upper caste elite, the minority group that has leveraged its caste privileges to maximum effect under the cover of caste blindness, and thanks to the same policy, now believes itself to be caste-less. On the other side is the vast majority of the so-called 'lower' castes, which, having been massively short-changed by six decades of supposedly caste-blind development, now insists that caste is all-important and all talk of abolishing caste is mere humbug… »

« In order to forestall further rifts in our social fabric, we must create a climate more conducive to debate and discussion across the two camps. To do this, we need a decisive break with the naive caste blindness that insists on equating victim and beneficiary, urging them both to be silent about caste. Such naivete fosters the false and incendiary upper caste belief that caste awareness is steeped in the sin of self-seeking 'politics' while caste blindness is an elevated 'ethics' without sin… »

« Census 2011 offers us yet another historic opportunity to make a fresh beginning in tackling the caste question. It can help us break out of the sterile deadlock in which 'caste' is reduced to 'lower caste', and the latter to quota quarrels. To collectively acknowledge that all of us are marked by caste in different ways is the most important reason for a caste census, going far beyond the need to rationalise reservation policies. We must count those who need no quotas and feel caste-less. Let

them say they have no caste, or like Mr Amitabh Bachhan {*the Bollywood superstar*} claim to be of the "Indian" caste. The number and class composition of those who can afford this luxury will itself be educative».

Another leading social scientist, much involved in the debate, is Yogendra Yadav, a Senior Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Developing Society, New Delhi. Yadav suggests that for the time being, the enumeration of backward castes (and not of all castes as Deshpande proposes) would be "the most reasonable interpretation of the demand for a "caste-based census" in the present context". First, backward castes are today the crux of the matter, as Dalits and Tribals are already enumerated. Second, this will debase "the impression that the government has decided to resume the colonial practice of enumeration, and often ranking, of all castes and sub-castes among Hindus". Addressing the objections to caste census on grounds of principles, he adds:

« There is an understandable unease about giving caste primacy in public life. But it is unclear how counting of the OBCs is in this respect qualitatively different from counting the SCs and the STs. We have done this for more than half a century. It is true that official enumeration of any category tends to solidify its boundaries a little more than would be the case otherwise. But this subtle and long-term cost has to be weighed against the most evident and short and long term cost of official non-recognition of categories that everyone operates with. If the enumeration of religious communities has not led to the breakdown of secular order in India, and if enumeration of race in the U.S. has not made U.S. politics racist, it is unlikely that the enumeration of one more caste group would push the country into the prison of caste ». (Yadav, 2010).

More pragmatically, it should be noted that the Planning Commission itself, in its report on the Eleventh Five Year Plan (vol.1, 2008) "stressed the need for such a census", as Professor Hari Narke, a member of the Maharashtra State Commission for Backward Classes, recalls before quoting the Commission report : "State-wise, OBC-wise data on populations as well as vital and demographic variables are not available, which is the main hurdle in the formulation of policies and programmes for the development of the Other Backward Classes." (Narke, 2010).

On a much more militant tone, dalit writer-activist Banwar Meghwanshi, in a piece entitled « Why are we afraid of the caste census?» made three points. First, « in simple words, there is no escaping the fact that castes exist in our society today, and if they exist, what is wrong in counting them and bringing to light the true figures in front of the whole country? … ». Second, a caste census, duly analysed, will expose « the hypocrisy of India's upper castes and their disproportionate claim over the country's resources ». Third, coming back to Ambedkar who wrote in 1936 an essay calling for *The Annihilation of Caste*, Meghwanshi calls for going much further than a caste census:

« The whole debate is on whether or not there should be a caste census when we should actually be debating about whether or not we need castes in this country. The day caste is obliterated, untouchability, discrimination, inequality, casteist hatred, caste genocides and the fight for reservations will automatically get wiped out and nor will politicians be able to play politics on the basis of caste ». Meghwanshi, 2010)

To consider that the debate of the caste census is partly obliterating the major stake of social justice is also a point made by Nalini Sundar, who doubts very much that counting castes will help to reduce significantly inequality :

« For social justice, we are made to believe there is no alternative to reservation, and for reservation, no alternative to counting caste. With over 90 per cent of people in the informal sector, reservation can hardly be the primary solution to greater equality. There is no doubt that stringent affirmative action policies are required to make formal institutions more socially inclusive, but to shackle the census to this agenda betrays a failure to learn from the past or to think imaginatively about the future.

Referring to the loss of popular knowledge versus academic learning, she adds:

« 'Social Justice' becomes simply whether certain castes get admission into agricultural universities, not whether those institutions enhance existing knowledge or contribute to people's well being. And in the meantime, the holders of such knowledge are being decimated through land acquisition, displacement and inhuman forms of counterinsurgency. The counting of SCs and STs in the census

has not led to any greater justice for them… » (Sundar 2010).

III. Elements for a comparative perspective

Basically, the debate running in India on the caste statistics is quite similar in essence to the debate on race or ethnic identities observed in western countries. The set of arguments are familiar, be they pro or con the collect of statistics for affirmative action.

It is always difficult, in a comparative perspective, to escape from the century old debate about the relationship between caste and class —in other words, the specificity of the Indian society. Unavoidably, this debate has resurfaced, albeit not prominently, in the controversies raised by the caste census project. Professor Narke, already quoted above, is clear on the point. For him, the census is needed for a better identification of the OBC, but the real issue is not caste, it is class :

> « A major issue that needs to be clarified here is that the OBC census is a class census and not a caste census. It has to be pointed out that OBCs are not a caste but a socially and educationally backward class. Just as there is a special provision in the budget of the states and the Centre for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), the OBCs also need a separate budget for their upliftment. They have a constitutional right to basic amenities, employment, and shelter and unless we know their exact population, it will be difficult to make plans for them. » (Narke 2010)

A second element to take into account in comparative perspective is the correlation between Indian reservation policy and American affirmative action. A noted Indian political blogger, Yossarin by pen name, assures that the two are different, not just because, according to him, in the US "there is no statutory obligation on Employers or Educational Institutions to adopt Affirmative Action and the laws were framed in such a way that in effect one was permitted to take such actions as Voluntary Measures" . From a more theoretical perspective, he argued that:

> "Unlike the case of Indian reservations which are primarily premised on "entitlement" the philosophy in the case of Affirmative Action in the USA is not one of entitlement but one where it recognizes these actions as a devia-

tion from the norm. While the debate in India has primarily been about providing quotas proportional to share of population the debate in the USA has been about justifying that Affirmative Action was indeed required in cases where it was being applied »

Attacking Yogindra Yadav's pro-reservation position, the self-defined « right of the Center » blogger adds :

> « In Affirmative Action the entire philosophy is anti-entitlement, where you have to go out of your way to make the case that the proposed actions do not adversely affect non-minority groups. Contrary to the spirit of Affirmative Action, in Dr. Yadav's scheme of things nobody from the minority upper castes dare question the actions in favor of the majority backward castes. »

The strong attack against the proponents of reservations, and the suggestion that mixing reservations and affirmation is « intellectually misleading » is not shared by all those who have compared India and the US on this ground. For instance, Ashwini Deshpande, in a paper written for the World Bank, does not dissociate affirmative action from the Indian reservation policy, and concludes that this policy is much needed :

> « The assumption that without Affirmative Action, merit is the sole criterion for hiring/admissions is false. International evidence on inter-group disparity suggests that neither growth nor a strong market orientation can guarantee a reduction in inter-group disparity and discrimination (Deshpande and Darity, 2003). Thus, pro-active policy measures, such as affirmative action, are essential to reduce inter-group disparities in earnings. To the extent that these programs have redistributive effects, hitherto dominant social groups will be strongly opposed to AA. Thus, effective implementation of AA requires a strong political will. While this cannot be generated overnight and will be bitterly challenged, the Indian experience suggests that political reservations are essential to build a core group of legislators committed to strengthening affirmative action ». (Deshpande, 2006).

The centrality of the reservation issue is not weakened by the dynamics of emerging India. On the contrary, the dynamics of Indian economy enhances this centrality, as inequality widens and

aspiration for emancipation and social mobility rises, in a context where Dalits and backward castes are more politically empowered than before. The stakes attached to reservation explain why the debates on caste census are so sharp. They explain also why Indian society is regularly agitated as competition for jobs becomes a matter of public controversy. This was the case in August 2011, when a film depicting the dilemma of the principal of a successful school having to apply new quotas imposed on his institution, fuelled strong protests across India, a number of State Governments deciding to ban the film for a time, at the demand of Dalit organisations. The name of film was "Aarakshan": "Reservation"…

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