The French and their minorities: the legal 'linguicide' arsenal

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Abstract
French Government policies to exclude, silence or outlaw regional minority languages date back as far as the 16th century and are clearly manifest in the nation's legislation. Despite this, marginal languages have continued to survive and in some cases have experienced notable revivals. Perhaps to combat this resistance, a stronger arsenal was developed by the dominant culture in the 1990s—in particular through an amendment of Article 2 of the Constitution and the Toubon Law—in order to ensure the eradication of regional languages.

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French Government policies to exclude, silence or outlaw regional minority languages date back as far as the 16th century and are clearly manifest in the nation’s legislation. Despite this, marginal languages have continued to survive and in some cases have experienced notable revivals. Perhaps to combat this resistance, a stronger arsenal was developed by the dominant culture in the 1990s—in particular through an amendment of Article 2 of the Constitution and the Toubon Law—in order to ensure the eradication of regional languages. These changes can be understood in a wider context of legislation that increasingly and punitively seeks to police minority interests, such as the outlawing of Islamic veils in schools. These modern laws have their origin in the idea of what the citizen should be, first
enunciated during the French Revolution and through the foundational concept of “Republicanism”. This latter view, shared by the major political parties, allows no space for minority differences—either regional or migrant—in the nation state. This paper explores connections between recent extreme responses to centralist policies—bombs in Corsica, riots in the suburbs of French major cities—and what can arguably be viewed as a longstanding and systematic manipulation of the legal system to produce a dangerous uniformity.

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