



Armies as a national melting pot what place for the descendants of immigration?

Elyamine SETTOUL

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The populations living in the French suburbs - portrayed in the media as "lost territories of the republic" - are often presented as resistant to order and the various symbols of the nation-state.

The idea of an irremediable otherness between young people from immigrant backgrounds and uniformed officers, which is partly justified in practice, is nevertheless qualified when it comes to military uniforms.

The whistles sounded against the Marseillaise during the football confrontations between France and its former colonies are one of the most remarkable manifestations of this. Similarly, the riots that episodically shake urban areas often spark clashes between young people from immigrant backgrounds and police officers.

Other categories of civil servants (firefighters, etc.) also deplore the tensions and violence that crystallize in their presence during certain interventions. The combination of these phenomena supports the idea of otherness. Although partly justified, this representation nevertheless needs to be qualified when it comes to military uniforms.

A relatively unknown phenomenon, the armies are indeed a real attraction for young people from working-class neighbourhoods, in France and abroad. In this respect, a look at the American experience allows us to better understand this paradox and what underlies such attraction. Indeed, American military sociology offers some elements to decipher this dynamic. Very early on, it highlighted the over-representation of ethnic minorities in the armed forces.

And the production of ethnic statistics made it possible to objectify the increase in the number of African-American recruits since the professionalization announced in 1973: black Americans, who make up about 12% of the population, now represent nearly 18% of the institution. Today, official reports tend to highlight the growing recruitment of groups of Latin American origin.

Researchers, such as Charles Moskos, have highlighted the fact that these professions are particularly popular avenues of professional integration for minority groups with low qualifications, a lack of social capital or who are victims of discrimination on the traditional labour market.

All things considered, France is experiencing a dynamic, if not similar, at least comparable in form .

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Title :	Elyamine SETTOUL
Author (s) :	Elyamine SETTOUL
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