



# TEENAGE SECESSIONS: THE NEW MUTINEERS OF PANURGE

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If there is one place where everyone can observe the numerous and diverse rebellions that are taking place in France, it is the school. Every teacher is aware of this—school is no longer the civic and cultural mold that used to "make" the French. On the contrary, it is now up to the educational institution and academic knowledge to adapt to the "French archipelago," to use Jérôme Fourquet's expression.

In all classrooms, the new cultural and ethnic cleavages are now evident. Sociologists have long been analyzing the various adolescent tribes that have populated the playgrounds of high schools and colleges since May 1968: "goths," "geeks," "riffraff," "rockers," and so many other possible affiliations for adolescents in search of an identity that is both gregarious and rebellious. These clans once formed a set of counter-cultures opposed to the official culture condemned since Bourdieu as "bourgeois" by a whole section of the teaching profession itself. However, the current situation offers the attentive teacher some new features.

### **School Cultures and Counter-Cultures**

Classical culture no longer exists, at least as a reference culture, either among the students or in the content of teaching. With the exception of a few large inner-city high schools, most students have no idea of its importance. Their own civilization is now essentially foreign to them, since it is assimilated to a simple collection of meaningless old things—what good is Moliere or Descartes when their understanding requires an effort that the tyranny of immediacy has abolished? Everything converges towards a simplification of the language. This phenomenon explains the collapse of the mastery of the French language, the mother of all school secessions. In this respect, one can refer to the precious indictment of Professor René Chiche in *La désinstruction nationale* (2019). He has the courage to speak of "quasi-illiteracy" to designate this implosion of the common language observed during the correction of hundreds of copies of the baccalaureate "written in a gibberish that borrows vaguely from French as from a foreign language."

As for the teachers, either they no longer know this culture of reference, or they are ashamed of it, or are forced to admit defeat by the spirit of the age—self-censorship and the simplification of knowledge triumph, even if it is at the cost of yet another renunciation. Certainly, there are still a few chains of transmission that work, a few students who are attentive to this legacy of the past; but these students only survive in a universe that is now hostile to the idea of a cultural hierarchy. This is the great seesaw: the former reference culture has become a minority counter-culture in the school, one of the many

islands in the school archipelago—and this among students and teachers. This is the first condition of secession, when the norm becomes the exception and the exception the norm.

Among all these counter-cultures that face each other, is there not one that does not tend to dominate the others? It would be naive not to believe this, for nature abhors a vacuum. In most establishments, demographic evolution has made the difference—it is now Islam, even if it is not well known and because it is not well known, as well as rap culture that dominates mentalities. As far as Islam is concerned, most students grant the Muslim religion the prestige that the Catholic religion once held—in biology and philosophy classes, the new norm of the sacred is indeed Islamic. How many teachers have faced widespread disbelief in evolutionism? And because it is authentically sacred in the eyes of most students, Muslim or not, it is a norm that one must necessarily deal with, as a student on the playground and as a teacher in the classroom.

### **On the Koran, Ma!**

The philosophy course on religion often turns into an insurmountable challenge. It is impossible to stay within the Christian theological framework, even though it is perfectly adapted to Greek rationality, since these references seemingly exclude students of the Muslim faith, and all students, including non-Muslims, find fault with these references. It is also impossible to discuss Muslim dogmas and texts, since the teacher would dare to interfere in the sphere of the sacred shared by most students—the new bigotry is of Koranic origin but internalized by all. The "wallah" and "on the Koran" are the backdrop of recesses as well as of interclass periods. More surprisingly, teachers discover to what extent some Christian students in the minority proudly claim the practice of Lent, unconsciously copying that of a Ramadan that has become predominant in many schools. It is therefore deference to Islam that serves as a common reference point.

As for rap culture, which it is now absurd to call a "counter" culture, its hegemony is undeniable, including in the more bourgeois high schools where tracksuits and rap have been crushing the competition for several years. The lyrics and the imagination of this musical genre now grant it a monopoly on subversion, vehemence and virility. Victory has thus gone to the most aggressive tribe. But in the peripheral high schools, exhibiting this obedience is not only a sign of good adolescent taste, it is above all a means of integration, even of social survival. For boys, adopting the social codes of the dominant group gives them hope of immunity from harassment. The girls themselves are not mistaken—adopting the codes of the "street" is a very effective defense mechanism to make

themselves respected.

## **The Colony of our Colonies**

Obviously, this new dominant culture, halfway between Mecca and the United States, has a common ground—the massive immigration of the last decades. "Conquered Greece has conquered her fierce conqueror," said Horace (*Epistles*, II)—by one of those dialectical reversals that history possesses the secret of, the descendants of the formerly colonized populations are now consciously and unconsciously imposing their spirituality and aesthetics on the natives, who are obliged to pay allegiance. Nomadic identity has replaced the sedentary culture of the former majority, since it is now shameful not to have origins—when one is a "little white boy," one comes to dig up Italian or Polish ancestors to cultivate one's extraterritoriality.

Thus, at school, minorities that have become the majority are now capable of tyrannizing the majority that has become the minority. This secessionist matrix, to which everyone seems to be resigned, has many repercussions, including for the rare families who still seem to escape it—bypassing the school map, private schools, private lessons. It is then multilateral tribalism that emerges to compensate for cultural disaffiliation, as Michel Maffesoli already noted in *Le temps des tribus* (1988): "Tribalism reminds us of the importance of the feeling of belonging to a place, to a group, as the essential foundation of all social life." And in the average high school, teenage tribes are about to be overwhelmed by the most proselytizing and most fertile of them. Michel Maffesoli's world is thus answered by Philippe Muray's world of prison-guards and mutineers of Panurge.

The school and the world of tomorrow will not be the paradise of intersectionality but the hell of incommensurability—a conflicting space without true culture; that is to say, without any common measure capable of transcending the particular tribes.

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