

When Discrimination is Positive: Breaking Habit(us) and
Diversifying the French Elite at Sciences Po

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“The most talented and deserving students, whatever their family, social, and cultural backgrounds, must find their places at Sciences Po.”

-Richard Descoings, President of Sciences Po¹

I. Introduction and Research Question

In 2001, the Institut d'études politiques de Paris, commonly referred to as Sciences Po, under the leadership of the university's President Richard Descoings, began the initiative Conventions Education Prioritaire (CEP) program.² This program currently reaches out to high school students from ZEP (*zone d'éducation prioritaire*) areas,³ which are areas identified by the government as needing additional educational resources.⁴ The program initially began with 7 schools but has now expanded, recruiting from 85 different schools.⁵

Though the program has met much opposition, today it is held as a model by the current government administration of a step in the right direction towards expanding educational opportunity and diversifying the French Elite. To support this claim one need look no further than the recent news that French President Nicolas Sarkozy's

¹ Sciences Po, "The Equal Opportunity and Diversity Programme: Breaking Down Social and Geographical Barriers to Higher Education," <http://www.sciencespo.fr/en/content/16/equal-opportunity-and-diversity-programme>.

² This program is also known as the Equal Opportunity and Diversity program.

³ Throughout this thesis I will use the acronyms CEP and ZEP, not to be confused with one another. CEP refers to the program in place at Sciences Po. Therefore mentions of "CEP students" refer to participants in the program. In contrast, a mention of ZEP refers to the impoverished areas that these students come from. In this sense "ZEP students" does not necessarily mean students in the CEP program at Sciences Po but more specifically refers to high school students from ZEP or impoverished areas. The word banlieue, which refers to impoverished areas in the outskirts of large cities, can be used interchangeably with ZEP but not with CEP.

⁴ These areas are located right outside of Paris as well as impoverished areas in Lille, Lyon, Montpellier, Nancy, Poitiers, Reims, and the overseas departments and territories of Nouvelle-Calédonie, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane. Sciences Po, "Conventions Education Prioritaire Lycées partenaires de Sciences Po par Académie," <http://admissions.sciences-po.fr/sites/default/files/Liste%20des%20lyc%C3%A9es%20mars10.pdf>.

⁵ ———, "Procédure Conventions Education Prioritaire," <http://admissions.sciences-po.fr/en/premiercycle-cep>.

administration prodded the Conference of Grandes Ecoles, a network of some 200 grandes écoles or Elite universities, to sign the Charter of Equal Opportunity.⁶ This commits them to increasing the number of scholarship students in their school populations to at least 30 percent within the next two years or risk losing some public funding.⁷

It is clear that the confidence in the feasibility of this Charter relates directly to the reported success of the CEP program, despite there being a serious lack of research and data supporting its actual success from outside of Sciences Po. In light of this new push to diversify the grandes écoles and with the Sciences Po program entering its tenth year, the time is ripe to evaluate whether this program has actually been effective in diversifying the Elite, to move from theoretical analyses of the program to its practical effects. This thesis will explore the efficacy of the program and seek to answer the question: has the CEP program in place at Sciences Po been effective in diversifying the French Elite?

Before one can begin to tackle this issue it is important to establish why this program matters. That is to say, why is it that the French public and scholars from around the world have paid attention to this relatively small program at one French university? Simply stated, this program matters because Sciences Po matters. It is a

⁶Valérie Pecresse, Chatel, Luc, Sabeg, Yazid, Tapie, Pierre, Jacquet, Paul, Borloo, Jean-Louis, Lagarde, Christine, Morin, Hervé, Le Maire, Bruno, Estrosi, Christian, "Charte pour l'égalité des chances dans l'accès aux formations d'excellence," ed. le Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale le Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, le Ministère de l'Écologie, de l'Énergie, du Développement durable et de la Mer, le Ministère de l'Économie, de l'Industrie et de l'Emploi, le Ministère de la Défense, le Ministère de l'Alimentation, de l'Agriculture et de la Pêche, le Ministère Chargé de l'Industrie, le Secrétariat d'État chargé de la Politique de la Ville, le Commissariat à la Diversité et à l'Égalité des Chances, la Conférence des Grandes Écoles et la Conférence des Directeurs des Écoles Françaises d'Ingénieurs (Paris2010).

⁷ Steven Erlanger, "Top French Schools, Asked to Diversify, Fear for Standards," *New York Times*, June 30 2010.

member of the grandes écoles, a system of highly selective French universities that include a variety of specialty schools focusing on subject matters ranging from engineering to political science to public administration to business. Graduates from these universities go on to occupy high profile positions in France, essentially forming the French Elite. Sciences Po in particular, a university specializing primarily in political science, has produced two Presidents of the Fifth Republic, Jacques Chirac and Francois Mitterrand, fashion designer Christian Dior, writer Marcel Proust, Prince Rainer III of Monaco, and the philosopher Albert Camus, to name a few famous graduates. Typically, 80% of Sciences Po graduates work in the private sector, 15% in public administration, and 5% in research and academia.⁸ As the President of Sciences Po, Richard Descoings, has said of the grandes écoles, “In France, families celebrate acceptance at a grande école more than graduation itself. Once you pass the exam at 18 or 19, for the rest of your life, you belong.”⁹ Gaining admission to a grande école is the ultimate educational goal for French students because it provides access to high profile positions in business, politics, academia, and other top professional areas. This explains why each year thousands of students work hard to either gain admission into a *class preparatoire* [preparatory class],¹⁰ or to directly enter a grande école (at least, the students who can afford such intense preparation). Admission into any grande école is highly competitive. It has been

⁸ Daniel Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 20, no. 3 (2002): 53.

⁹ Erlanger, "Top French Schools, Asked to Diversify, Fear for Standards."

¹⁰ *Class preparatoire* refers to prestigious two year preparatory schools designed to prepare students for the *concours* [a competitive entrance exam] at very specialized grandes écoles, usually in the sciences. The concours for a school outside of the sciences, Sciences Po for example, does not require a formal two year preparation period.

reported that out of 2.3 million French students enrolled in institutions of higher education only 15 percent are enrolled in a grande école or class préparatoire.¹¹

The overarching system of these universities can be compared to the American Ivy League.¹² Yet even this comparison is insufficient. While calling a group of individuals in the American context “the Elite” would be considered highly problematic and may shift greatly depending on the context, in France the idea of an Elite is clearly defined and widely accepted as meaning the alumni of grandes écoles. Graduates of the grandes écoles system are recognized by the majority of French society to be the deserving Elite due to merit alone. That is to say, if one is not a member of the Elite it is simply because one does not deserve to be since, at least in theory, everyone has an equal opportunity to attend a grande école. In order to ensure that deserving students from across economic classes can in theory attend a grande école, tuition, at least at Sciences Po, is based on a sliding scale from €0 to €9,300/year.¹³

Although this idea of meritocracy should lead to a diverse population at the grandes écoles, in reality it does not. Prior to the CEP program Sciences Po itself was not exactly known either for its socioeconomic or racial diversity. Admissions data from 1998 show that less than 1% of students were from the working class whereas 81.5% of students were from upper middle class families.¹⁴ Moreover, in considering non-CEP students who entered Sciences Po during the 2001-2002 school year

¹¹Erlanger, "Top French Schools, Asked to Diversify, Fear for Standards."

¹² Comparisons to the United States and American institutions are not a primary focus of this thesis; however, casual comparisons such as this one will sometimes be used in order to help the reader to better understand France and the French.

¹³Sciences Po, "Admissions: Tuition Fees at Sciences Po," <http://admissions.sciences-po.fr/en/financial-tuition>.

¹⁴ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 53.

through the traditional admission track, only 0.5% of these students were the children of manual laborers and only 2.5% were the children of salaried employees.¹⁵ The alternate admission program aims to correct this inequality. For example, if we look again at students admitted for the 2001-2002 school year, this time focusing only on students in the CEP program, we see that there is a difference in the socioeconomic makeup of these students versus non-CEP students. We see that 16.5% were the children of manual laborers and 34% were the children of salaried employees.¹⁶ The school reports that in each subsequent cohort of CEP students between 50 and 70% of students have been the children of those unemployed or laborers.¹⁷ Furthermore, between 2002 and 2005, 70% of students admitted through the program have been of African descent, specifically Algerians with a rate of 32.9%.¹⁸ Other statistics from Sciences Po report that about 2/3 of the students admitted through CEP have at least one parent born outside of France.¹⁹ These statistics suggest that Sciences Po has been effective in increasing socioeconomic and racial diversity in its student population through CEP.

Though socioeconomic and racial diversity at Sciences Po is the goal of the program, officially the program is restricted due to France's long-standing Republican tradition of a color-blind framework which makes it illegal to put in place any sort of race-based admission program (American-style affirmative action, for example). This Republican tradition that all are French, thus all are equal and should

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Po, "Procédure Conventions Education Prioritaire".

¹⁸ Saran Donahoo, "Reflections on Race: Affirmative Action Policies Influencing Higher Education in France and the United States," *Teachers College Record* 110, no. 2 (2008).

¹⁹ Po, "Procédure Conventions Education Prioritaire".

be treated as such, is captured in the Fifth Republic's current Constitution written in 1958. Article 1 dictates that, "The Republic guarantees the equality of all citizens in the eyes of the law, regardless of origin, race or religion,"²⁰ which has been interpreted to mean that race should not play a role in the selection or aid of groups of people. This unwavering commitment to Republicanism has notoriously deepened social inequalities born of racial discrimination and limited policies aiming to correct them. As a result, positive discrimination programs like Conventions Education Prioritaire are regionally based and targeted at economically troubled regions rather than aimed at any ethnic group in particular. However, because ZEP areas are largely inhabited by ethnic minorities, these programs can be viewed as a form of indirect affirmative action.

Still, the majority of those in opposition to the program point to the fine line between democratization of the admission process and the idea of meritocracy.²¹ Sciences Po, as a result of extending admission to students from ZEP areas through a separate admission process that does not include the traditional exam, has been seen as challenging and interfering with the French ideal of meritocracy. And yet, although improved diversity in admission statistics to Sciences Po is progress, it is not sufficient evidence to answer the research question of whether this program has actually been effective in diversifying the French Elite. Admission is important but there are other contributing factors that must be simultaneously overcome. The next section will explore these obstacles.

²⁰Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 55.

²¹Ibid., 52-64.

II. Core Concepts: Habitus and the Diversification of the Elite

Before the research question can be addressed, however, one other question must be addressed. How did the Elite class in France come to be and how is it perpetuated? Though a common belief in France is that one's membership in the Elite depends solely on merit (one's ability to pass the necessary competitive exams) and equality (everyone has an equal chance to enter the Elite), Pierre Bourdieu's The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power presents a challenge to the perspective that there is no other force working in the selection of the Elite. He offers a non-conventional explanation to the existence of these inequalities in French society, the gulf between the French Elite and everyone else, and the phenomena that perpetuate this system. For the purposes of this paper, Bourdieu's work lends an important theoretical framework as to why the French Elite exists and how this group and social structure has been reproduced and perpetuated, that is, how educational institutions work as an agent of *habitus* within French society. Only after considering these factors can we understand what obstacle(s) must be overcome to begin the process of diversifying the Elite.

Bourdieu's chief theoretical explanation is a concept he refers to as *habitus*,

generative schemata of classifications and classifiable practices that function in practice without acceding to explicit representation and that are the product of the embodiment, in the form of dispositions, of a differential position in social space defined precisely by the reciprocal externality of positions.²²

In essence, *habitus* is the idea that people are continuously sorted and generalized into certain categories by processes and practices, which Bourdieu recognizes as being unconscious.

²² Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Laureyya C. Clough (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 2.

With regards to my research topic an example of a structure of habitus is the classifications within the context of French higher education. If seen as a structure with the Elite at the top and everyone else at the bottom or sprinkled throughout, habitus is the unconscious sorting of certain individuals into the grandes écoles, while others are left outside of this group to attend public universities open to all who have completed the baccalaureate, the mandatory exit exam for French secondary schools. Furthermore, what Bourdieu refers to as “differential spaces” is the legitimacy of the Elite maintained both by the insiders as well as the outsiders, who believe that they deserve to be outside, in a “reciprocal externality of positions.”

Yet even as Bourdieu sees these processes as unconscious there are certain elements of habitus that are in fact conscious. For example, with regards to the Sciences Po program there are those students, usually possessing quite a bit of symbolic capital via prestigious family names, etc., who are expected to attend a grande école, and who consciously chase admission to these universities, often tailoring their entire educational careers to reaching this goal. While, on the other hand, there are students who, through a process of self-selection, decide to not attempt to gain admission to a grande école. They dare not dream. Bourdieu also highlights the importance of the role of the student in perpetuating habitus saying, “The chosen also play a role in successful cooptation in choosing their choosers by offering themselves up for the choosing, while others spontaneously exclude themselves from a competition that would exclude most of them anyway.”²³ So pervasive is this issue of self-selection that Sciences Po included it as one of the chief

²³ Ibid., 141.

goals of its program: to inspire students to allow themselves to reach for a grande école education.

Yet even for those brave students from non-traditional backgrounds who attempt the admission process, Bourdieu warns that the process itself is discriminatory in that it is designed in such a way as to recognize itself in the applicant pool. This creates an uphill battle for any outlier students. Bourdieu criticizes this process of selection among grandes écoles stating that,

when the process of social rupture and segregation that takes a set of carefully selected chosen people and forms them into a separate group is known and recognized as a legitimate form of election, it gives rise in and of itself to symbolic capital that increases with the degree of restriction and exclusivity of the group so established. The monopoly, when recognized, is converted into a nobility.²⁴

Here Bourdieu presents an open challenge to the idea of meritocracy, which leads many French to accept this blatantly discriminatory selection process, as Bourdieu sees it, as legitimate and even necessary. This monopoly is being kept alive not only through the belief of the insiders in their right to be included but also through the belief of the outsiders in the superior abilities and talents of the Elite and their deserving nature.

According to Bourdieu the concept of *habitus* is furthermore at the root of the continuation of social structures. He states,

its tendency to perpetuate itself according to its internal determination, its conatus, by asserting its autonomy in relation to the situation (rather than submitting itself to the external determination of the environment, as matter does) is a tendency to perpetuate an identity that is difference. *Habitus* is thus at the basis of strategies of reproduction that tend to maintain separations, distances, and relations of order(ing), hence concurring, in practice (although not consciously or

²⁴Ibid., 79.

deliberately) in reproducing the entire system of differences constitutive of the social order.²⁵

In other words, habitus is the determination to maintain difference and superiority and, whether conscious or unconscious, it is a powerful factor in the organization of social spaces and exists alongside the need to maintain a sense of order.

Bourdieu argues that it is the educational institutions (specifically the grandes écoles and class préparatoires, two to three year training schools for an entrance exam at higher level grandes écoles in the sciences) which perpetuate a certain kind of social structure in France, the Elite. These institutions, particularly preparatory schools, are breeding grounds for high positions within French society and other forms of what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital, or achievements, honors, awards, recognition, prestige, or titles that graduates of these schools share.²⁶

Bourdieu asserts that,

the structure of social space as observed in advanced societies is the product of two fundamental principles of differentiation –economic capital and cultural capital- the educational institution, which plays a critical role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and thus in the reproduction of the structure of social space, has become a central stake in the struggle for the monopoly on dominant positions.²⁷

That is, the existence of cultural capital and economic capital that tends to set people apart and creates differences, such as inferiority and superiority, is continued by universities. This is most clearly seen in France through the grandes écoles. These institutions become the gatekeepers to the ‘right’ kind of cultural capital, deciding who may benefit, or who is deserving. As a result, the selection processes for these

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 81.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

institutions are crafted in such a way as to mirror the current Elite in order to ensure its continuation.

Bourdieu argues that the titles bestowed in these institutions also have a practical purpose within the job market to continue social reproduction. He says, “Through the academic title, the educational institution is ever-present in the conflicts, negotiations, individual contracts, and collective conventions that arise between employers and employees regarding all the stakes that separate them...”²⁸ In this way the academic title becomes an indicator making it easier for employers to make the ‘right’ decision during the hiring process. This back and forth has also been, in many ways, predetermined by generations of employee and employer relations on what is expected behavior according to the nature of the grandes écoles diploma.

But beyond the title, students in these environments gain a *culture générale*, or general knowledge, which help them to stand out in the applicant pool. Bourdieu describes culture generale as,

the art of being able to mobilize instantly all available resources and to get the most out of them, taken to its highest form by certain prestigious concours, such as the ENA exam, and the statutory confidence that goes hand in hand with this mastery are undoubtedly among the primary leadership qualities that are sanctioned and consecrated by all grandes écoles and which indeed predispose students more to the pragmatic, disciplined calculations of decision-making than to the daring originality of scientific or artistic research.²⁹

In this way the admission process itself, most clearly seen in the preparation of class preparatoire students for the concours exam but also seen in the admission process for Sciences Po, teaches students certain skills which are then further developed during time spent at the grandes écoles and are easily transferrable to the

²⁸ Ibid., 121.

²⁹ Ibid., 88.

job market. As a result, students entering the job market from these prestigious schools not only have a title (an indication of superior symbolic capital) but they also have (or are assumed to have) a monopoly on culture générale or certain skills that generally are well suited to higher positions within French society. Students without this type of culture générale appear to be inferior in comparison when competing for high level jobs. Bourdieu suggests that in this way an academic title has become a “universal standard,”³⁰ symbolizing legitimacy and allowing holders of certain diplomas to get certain jobs.

In theory, the CEP program at Sciences Po is meant to capitalize on this immediate acceptance of the legitimacy and prestige associated with a Sciences Po diploma. The idea is that the program will elevate students of immigrant, racial minority, and low socioeconomic background and extend them a means to enter the realm of the Elite, with all the perks that traditionally come with membership. However, Daniel Sabbagh, a scholar who has studied the CEP program, has expressed a fear held by others that,

the existence of this separate admission track will actually prove detrimental to its intended beneficiaries and cast a cloud of suspicion over their academic achievements, leading employers to draw new distinctions among the population of Sciences Po graduates and to dismiss the degrees earned by the ZEP students as a less certain certificate of quality.³¹

Because there will be no clear indication as to whether a student was admitted through the CEP program or not, taken too far, this dynamic could lead to profiling students in the job market where employers may make snap decisions on who they think is a typical Sciences Po student. Profiling in this way may have stronger

³⁰ Ibid., 123.

³¹ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 54.

implications for students of color, a group that has traditionally not been well represented in the French Elite. This fear, referred to hereafter as Sabbagh's fear, will be explored throughout this thesis.

Bourdieu's work shows that the inequalities which exist in French society are not just between those who are French and those who are not or who are considered to be non-French, but there is also a huge gulf between the so-called Elite and the rest of the French which presents itself as an issue of class. This gulf is not only symbolic but also practical, affecting everything from the type of job or position one may hold right down to one's lifestyle and the future of one's children.

It is of course not a simple matter to upset habitus, especially at an institution such as Sciences Po. In fact, Bourdieu himself specifically mentions Sciences Po as an example of a *grande école* that selects its students in a specific way so as to ensure perpetuation of the status quo. He writes,

But the most troubling case... involves institutions like English public schools or Sciences-Po and the ENA, whose recruitment procedures are so obviously designed to guarantee them students already endowed through their background, with the dispositions they require that we have to wonder whether, as the Romans used to say, they aren't merely "teaching fish to swim."³²

With this he suggests that Sciences Po is one of the schools that needs the most improvement in crafting a selection process that doesn't simply perpetuate the status quo and choosing students who do not already exude the "I'm a Sciences Po student" attitude. Since habitus is the reproduction of differences, interference in one of the main agents of habitus, educational institutions, has the power to upset this process.

³² Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*: 73.

How can we fix what has always been broken?

Given that State Nobility was written in 1996, five years before the start of the CEP program, and there is no scholarship from Bourdieu specifically on the program, one cannot know for certain what he would have thought of the program. However, as Bourdieu argues that educational institutions perpetuate the structure of social spaces, it is obvious that he would probably have been in favor of increasing educational opportunities to underrepresented groups (both racially and economically). Perhaps he would go even further and suggest that the integration of these underrepresented groups into selective institutions of higher education is the key to integrating these groups into French society in general.

Although we do not know Bourdieu's thoughts on the CEP program, we do know that today he is not alone in his belief that the current hierarchical system that structures French society is highly problematic. As it is, the system keeps individuals of low socioeconomic status, immigrant background, and even French of ethnic backgrounds from overseas departments and former colonies largely confined to the lower rungs of French society with little chance to rise in the ranks. This hierarchy is evident in terms of employment opportunities, housing, and the future of one's children, all of which we have seen are inextricably linked to one's educational background. Sentiments of unrest, frustration, and anger resulting from exclusion all came to a violent head in 2005 with riots in the outskirts of Paris and other major French cities. Though many in France were shocked to learn of these events, other segments of the society had seen such an explosion coming for quite some time.

How can France ensure that events such as these do not occur in the future? In other words, a question that has been on many people's minds since these riots occurred has been that of: how can we fix what has always been broken?

These riots as well as instances across Europe of home-grown terrorism have pushed French politicians (both on the political Right and the Left), activists and scholars to rethink how they can better integrate traditionally excluded populations. The French minister of equal opportunities at the time of the riots has since suggested that the government offer better opportunities to help integrate in particular second and third generation Maghrebian youth.³³

On the other hand, Nicolas Sarkozy played a more problematic than positive role with relation to his treatment of immigrants as Minister of the Interior during the riots, while as President he has enacted policies focusing on fighting discrimination and on integrating immigrants into French society. Activists have also weighed in. One in particular, Patrick Lozès, who represents the interests of blacks in France, has called on the government to institute measures to address both current and past injustices. Using Republican language he demands American-style affirmative action arguing that this targeted increase in diversity will benefit all of French society and eventually lead to a color-blind society.³⁴ As leaders focus on ways to better integrate the excluded into French society, the CEP program has, along these lines, been seen as a potential solution as well, albeit on a small scale. Although the program had been

³³ Azouz Begag, *Ethnicity and Equality: France in the Balance*, trans. Alec Hargreaves (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). In the French context, Maghreb refers to a collection of three countries in Northern Africa, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, which were once either protectorates or an integral part of France. The term Maghrebian then refers to immigrants from these areas.

³⁴ Patrick Lozès, "Nous Les Noirs de France," ed. Editions Danger Public (Paris: La Martinière Groupe, 2007).

in place a few years before the riots, afterward the program received renewed attention. As mentioned in the introduction, Sarkozy himself has been supportive of the CEP program as a model, even pushing for the Charter mandating that all grandes écoles commit to increasing diversity.

III. Literature Review, CEP program: Silver Bullet or Band-Aid?

Scholars, too, have seen the program as a silver bullet of sorts, a way to address several issues pervasive in French society: integrating immigrants and other underrepresented populations³⁵, diversifying the Elite,³⁶ democratizing education and educational opportunity,³⁷ correcting social inequalities,³⁸ and compensating for poverty.³⁹

Those scholars who hail the program as a success praise the program's audacity, uniqueness,⁴⁰ and potential. The program at Sciences Po as well as a high school mentoring program operated by a grande école for business, ESSEC ("Why Not Me?"), have been praised for single-handedly reviving the discussion on the need to diversify the Elite.⁴¹ The Sciences Po program in particular has been seen as a good starting point towards diversifying the Elite to reflect modern France by correcting racial and socio-economic inequalities. Other scholars such as Polakow-Suransky,⁴²

³⁵ Christian Joppke, "Transformation of Immigration Integration: Civic Integration and Antidiscrimination in the Netherlands, France, and Germany," *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007).

³⁶ Agnès Van Zanten, "L'ouverture sociale des grandes écoles: diversification des élites ou renouveau des politiques publiques d'éducation ?," *Sociétés Contemporaines* 79, no. 3 (2010).

³⁷ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po."

³⁸ Lozès, "Nous Les Noirs de France."

³⁹ Donahoo, "Reflections on Race: Affirmative Action Policies Influencing Higher Education in France and the United States."

⁴⁰ Bernard Toulemonde, "La discrimination positive dans l'éducation: des ZEP à Sciences Po," *Pouvoirs* 111, no. 4 (2004).

⁴¹ Zanten, "L'ouverture sociale des grandes écoles: diversification des élites ou renouveau des politiques publiques d'éducation ?."

⁴² Sasha Polakow-Suransky, "Crème de la Crème," *Legal Affairs* 2004.

Toulemonde,⁴³ and Sabbagh⁴⁴ have all regarded the program as a successful educational policy, a step in the right direction towards democratizing the educational process in France.

However, other scholars have been more skeptical regarding the quality and future of the CEP program and wonder out loud if it is more band-aid than solution. Despite the huge potential of such a program to help reverse the effects of so many inequalities, some scholars have been critical of the fact that the program is not doing more to specifically name the groups that should be targeted. One such scholar is critical of the program because it is a positive discrimination program and, when compared to similar programs in other countries, is insufficient because it fails to specifically identify the groups meant to benefit from the program.⁴⁵ However, this is more of a criticism of the pervasive French color-blind framework,⁴⁶ which limits corrective measures, than of the Sciences Po program itself. Moreover, there are scholars who tend to criticize the program in terms of whether its additional admission process is needed and whether it is an improvement of the selection process. Donahoo for example makes the argument that, while successful, the program is doing nothing towards correcting the social inequalities which made such a program necessary in the first place and is merely compensating for poverty.⁴⁷ The problems with the traditional admission process have been well-documented and even proponents of the program question what Sciences Po is doing to revamp their

⁴³Toulemonde, "La discrimination positive dans l'éducation: des ZEP à Sciences Po."

⁴⁴Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po."

⁴⁵Gwénaële Calvès, "Les politiques françaises de discrimination positive: trois spécificités," *Pouvoirs* 111, no. 4 (2004).

⁴⁶This concept will be further expanded upon in the next chapter.

⁴⁷Donahoo, "Reflections on Race: Affirmative Action Policies Influencing Higher Education in France and the United States."

entrance exam, which contributes to and perpetuates these inequalities.⁴⁸ There are still others who, while admitting that the program is not perfect, acknowledge that it is helping to both elevate selected students into the Elite and to motivate other ZEP students outside of the program to reach higher levels of academic achievement.⁴⁹

Although the debate rages on the quality and potential of the program, little research deals with the actual success of the program. In fact, the available research was mainly produced at two critical points in the program: at the very beginning, reporting on the initial opposition and the hope of the program, and at the five year anniversary of the program, reflecting on the program in light of the riots. Neither of these sets of research was produced at a point where the program's success could be critically evaluated. Thus the contribution of this thesis will be a nuanced approach to assessing success by evaluating the program's effectiveness in one particular category of concern for scholars: the diversification of the Elite. Despite the idea that the program is too small to change the face of the entire French Elite, given the prestigious reputation of Sciences Po as progressive and innovative, any inroads that this program has made towards diversifying the Elite are significant and worthy of our attention.

IV. Working Hypotheses

Given the obstacles produced by habitus, an effective positive discrimination program in education must not only launch students into this group in an effort to break its exclusivity, but must also find a means to break many of the smaller ways in which habitus presents itself; for example, the spread of symbolic capital. Bourdieu

⁴⁸Toulemonde, "La discrimination positive dans l'education: des ZEP a Sciences Po."

⁴⁹Polakow-Suransky, "Crème de la Crème."

would argue that no program can do that. Perhaps the symbolism of a diploma (ex. a Sciences Po diploma) is helpful, but other forms of symbolic capital that are concentrated in this group (ex. certain family names) will largely remain elusive. In general this thesis concerns itself with the joint question: is it possible to break habitus and has Sciences Po made progress towards doing so?

For its part, Sciences Po has argued that the purpose of their program is to help open selective universities in France to deserving students from all backgrounds. Based on the personal belief of Richard Descoings (the President of Sciences Po), that the university has a “political, social, and moral responsibility,”⁵⁰ the program was created to overcome what the university sees as the four main obstacles facing students from ZEP areas: the lack of financial means, the lack of cultural capital or certain knowledge, the social bias which underlies the traditional entrance process, and the self-defeating prophecies of the students.⁵¹ The school has published some statistics indicating the success of the program. According to these statistics, five promotions or groups of CEP students have already graduated from the school. Among the current students, Sciences Po reports that academic performance has been on par with students who entered the school through the traditional admission track.⁵² Yet despite the more inclusive admission process (as seen earlier) and despite the reported success of these students within the school, these are only two parts in the process towards breaking habitus and truly diversifying the Elite.

⁵⁰ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 54.

⁵¹ Po, "Procédure Conventions Education Prioritaire".

⁵² Ibid.

Using Bourdieu's theory as a point of departure, we can clearly see several other agents of habitus within the system of French higher education which work against the goal of diversifying the Elite. The question then remains, has Sciences Po fully overcome these obstacles to then diversify the Elite? The outcome of interest for this thesis is to determine if this program is working to dismantle the effects of habitus that have for so long ensured the perpetuation of a homogenous Elite. One must look at how habitus impacts the diversity of the Elite, which, as outlined by the program itself, boils down to much more than student achievement at the school but also encompasses the effect of the program on the attitudes of the students coming into the school, their experiences at the school, and their experiences after graduation in the job market.

Possible hypotheses fall into three main categories: complete success of the program in dismantling habitus on all three levels, complete failure to break habitus, and a nuanced combination of the two. The first hypothesis, that of complete success, would be indicated primarily through proof that, in the period before entering Sciences Po, students from ZEP areas are learning about the CEP program early and that the admission process is effective in identifying and challenging talented students. Then, once at Sciences Po CEP students are doing well academically, meaning on par with other non-CEP students, and well socially, meaning making social ties with non-CEP students and feeling generally welcomed. Success would also mean that in their third, fourth, and fifth years, graduates are preparing to enter major fields that the Elite occupy (at least the fields taught at Sciences Po) and are not experiencing any backlash in the job market. According to Bourdieu's habitus,

complete success should also include the spread of culture générale (set of skills valued in the job market), extensive efforts to combat the tendency of self-selection among students, spread of social, symbolic, and economic capital.

The null hypothesis would be that of complete failure; that the program is not making any progress in breaking forms of habitus which appear before and at Sciences Po and also that CEP students are clustering in certain areas of the Elite rather than preparing to enter all major fields.

Yet a nuanced explanation that I propose is that the program has done all that it can do within the confines of the school to begin the process of the diversification of the Elite. This has been accomplished through removing as many student obstacles as possible with tutoring, mentoring, financial aid, and employment support. However, these efforts have not sufficiently neutralized habitus, creating difficulties for some students and making changes to the program necessary. Also, given early reports from some Sciences Po students, there appears to be a pattern emerging in the areas that CEP students tend to gravitate towards both in their choice of Master's degree program as well as their choice of employment area. This suggests that though these students are being launched into some areas of the French Elite, other areas are being neglected entirely, indicating that habitus may still have an impact on the diversification of the Elite. Yet even if this is so, the program will be found to be an overall good program since, as Bourdieu has indicated, there are some elements of habitus that no one program can change. Therefore, a complete restructuring of the system would be required, starting with a change in the admission process for all students.

V. Research Methods

Given that the primary outcome of interest in this thesis is whether the program is upsetting the process of habitus with regards to diversifying the Elite, an apparent way to measure this was to focus on the experiences of actual participants in CEP. A survey comprised of twenty open-ended questions was administered online via Kwik surveys, an online survey tool. The link to this survey was e-mailed to current CEP students with the help of four contacts at Sciences Po. The survey was in the field for a total of six weeks. Survey results trickled in slowly and several approaches were employed to increase participation. Six surveys were returned and one qualitative interview was collected bringing the total number of participants to seven.

In this thesis these survey results will be analyzed in order to detect for evidence and impact of habitus and whether the program has been effective in neutralizing it on three levels. The first level will seek to determine how habitus plays out before a student arrives at Sciences Po. What are students' thoughts on the admission process? How and when did they learn of CEP? Also, is there evidence of self-selection? This last question is particularly significant given that the diversification of the Elite also means that students must be conditioned to believe that they can enter the Elite. The second level will seek to understand the student's experience in the program, specifically their academic and social experiences. The third level will seek to determine what third year experiences and which Master's programs students are gravitating towards as these are key indications of what areas of employment they hope to enter. Students were also asked general questions on the program.

An initial approach to measuring this concept was to attempt to obtain the job placement data specifically of CEP grads directly from Sciences Po so as to compare them to their non-CEP peers. However, due to the commitment of the program to not make any formal distinctions between CEP students and non-CEP students, this information, while suspected to exist, has not been officially collected. Thus the bulk of measurements will depend on survey results that I have collected.

VI. Thesis Chapters Outline

Chapter two will be devoted to explaining key background concepts. The question driving this section is: Why does CEP exist? Chapter three will use survey responses from CEP students and will focus on detecting habitus and its impact on three levels: student experiences before Sciences Po, academic and social experiences during, and career trajectory after the program. Chapter four will analyze the program from the perspective of CEP administrators using official program information. Chapter five will conclude the thesis with a synthesis and implications for future policies aimed at the diversification of the grandes écoles.

CHAPTER TWO: WHY DOES CONVENTIONS EDUCATION PRIORITAIRE EXIST?

“You can't escape the past in Paris, and yet what's so wonderful about it is that the past and present intermingle so intangibly that it doesn't seem to burden.”

-Allen Ginsberg⁵³

I. Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, the effects of habitus in French higher education is pervasive, quite literally coming from all sides and excluding all but those who are already made in its image from receiving a grande école education. This phenomenon ensures that, without intervention, the French Elite will continue to be neither racially nor socio-economically diverse. In order to help the reader to begin the process of understanding France and the French, which admittedly is never complete, this section will serve to introduce the reader to some of the key concepts and forces that exist in French culture and society that, alongside habitus, have worked to create an Elite largely void of diversity. This chapter will be organized around the key question: Why does the Conventions Education Prioritaire exist?

II. The Problem: Who is being excluded?/ France's Immigrant Population

A simple answer to this complicated question is that the CEP program was created under the leadership of Sciences Po's President Richard Descoings⁵⁴ with the intention of ensuring the French ideal of *égalité des chances*, that is, making sure that all qualified students have the chance to attend a grande école. But who exactly is being excluded? As briefly mentioned in chapter one, students of immigrant background and students from lower socioeconomic status have been the classic

⁵³Kelby Carr, "France Quotes: France in Quotations," About.com, <http://gofrance.about.com/cs/funquizes/a/quotes.htm>

⁵⁴ President of Sciences Po since 1997 and alumni of Sciences Po

victims of habitus as it plays out in the admissions processes for the grandes écoles. In addition, more often than not, students of immigrant background are also from lower socioeconomic status.

Before moving forward, it is important to clarify the origins of this population in France. Just where did France's immigrant population come from and why has this group been socio-economically disadvantaged? France's ethnic population today is largely composed not only of its most recent immigrants, but also descendants of those who immigrated to France from various parts of the French empire following World War II, some already French citizens. The fact that the bulk of this immigration occurred in the postwar period cannot be ignored.

Why indeed was World War II a catalyst for such massive movement? Simply stated, postwar France was a disaster and there was much work to be done in order to rebuild the country. Demographically, however, there were simply not enough people to do this work or the willingness among the métropole (term used to describe the European portion of France) French to do the menial jobs that were in surplus. Thus, the French government turned to its former colonies in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), Indochina, and the Caribbean (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guinea, which by this time had become overseas departments), to recruit cheap labor both informally as well as formally through programs. One such program was the BUMIDOM (Bureau Pour le Développement des Migrations Interessant les Départements d'Outré-Mer) that specifically recruited Antillean women for housework in métropole France and Antillean men for hard labor jobs.⁵⁵ These

⁵⁵Felix Germain, "Jezebels and Victims: Antillean Women in Postwar France, 1946–1974," *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 3 (2010): 480.

workers were meant to provide much needed labor to help in the grueling rebuilding of the métropole with the expectation that they would return to their home elsewhere once they were no longer needed. Unsurprisingly, many stayed. The flow of immigration intensified during this period and in fact continues to this day.

Thus France has become a multicultural nation due to its own actions during the postwar period. This is a part of French history which, in the rants on immigration coming from the National Front (France's extreme right wing party), is often ignored. Along with other Western European countries such as Britain, Germany, and Italy, the French métropole, especially symbolized by Paris, struggles to incorporate new immigrants as well as French citizens from its overseas departments and former colonies.

Today 5%, roughly 3 million, of France's population is non-European and non-white.⁵⁶ The majority of this population lives in the outskirts of large cities in sections known as *banlieues* or suburbs. These areas are nothing like the American suburbs that are typically home to middle and upper-class Americans. Rather, these areas are more similar to American housing projects in that the inhabitants are crammed into dilapidated housing structures, many of which were only meant to be short-term housing for post-war workers. One report describes one of these areas, Château Rouge, as "filled with the hundreds of thousands of nonwhite immigrants, some Arabs but mainly blacks, whom France has absorbed over the years from former

⁵⁶ Erik Bleich, "Race Policy in France," *Brookings*(2001), http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2001/05france_bleich.aspx.

colonies in Africa and the Caribbean.”⁵⁷ Although it is well known in France that these areas contain a large number of ethnic migrants and descendants of ethnic migrants, there are no governmental records on the ethnic composition of these areas due to a 1978 law prohibiting the collection of census data based on race and ethnicity.⁵⁸ Scholars have remarked that this severe lack of information has consistently created barriers towards helping this community and has made it more difficult to detect discrimination against this segment of the population.⁵⁹

Indeed, research has shown that in general, immigrant communities are more likely to experience deplorable living conditions than their citizen counterparts, despite both groups receiving welfare benefits, with ethnic immigrants being the worst off.⁶⁰ In fact, ethnic minority migrants are more likely to fall below the poverty line than citizens and white immigrants. In France specifically, data on the number of households below the poverty line shows that 23.9% of migrant households were in poverty while 36.2% of ethnic minority migrant households were in poverty. Unsurprisingly, the number of French citizen households in poverty was a mere 6.7%.⁶¹

Unemployment is also a major issue for the banlieue population. In 2005, the average unemployment rate in immigrant banlieues was 40%, and even higher for

⁵⁷ John Tagliabue, "French Lesson: Taunts on Race Can Boomerang," *New York Times*(2005), http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/21/international/europe/21letter.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=September%2021,%202005%20France&st=cse.

⁵⁸ Erik Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policy-Making Since the 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶⁰ Ann Morissens and Diane Sainsbury, "Migrants' Social Rights, Ethnicity and Welfare Regimes," *Journal of Social Policy* 34, no. 4 (2005).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

younger individuals.⁶² The unemployment rate for people of French origin was only 9.2% in 2005 while in the same year the unemployment rate reached 14% for foreign-born people.⁶³ Many link high unemployment rates for France's ethnic population to race-based job discrimination and lack of employment opportunities.

For immigrants who do obtain employment, the jobs they receive are generally thought of as menial positions (as during the post-war period) or they find themselves in other positions where the glass ceiling is quite low. French Muslims and Arabs in particular are often limited to jobs that involve little contact with the public and often work under assumed names that sound more traditionally French.⁶⁴

Access racism, or discrimination in employment, housing, and provision of goods and services, has been singled out as a major dynamic working to create these realities. This dynamic in particular makes the life of an ethnic minority immigrant or other persons of color in France largely associated with poverty, fewer employment opportunities, poor housing, and, of particular interest to this thesis, educational inequality.⁶⁵

Lack of equal education opportunities has proven to be a major setback as the schools located in the banlieues are often characterized by teachers more preoccupied with behavioral issues and working with a severe lack of resources than preparing students for entry into a *grande école*. The 2008 film *Entre les Murs (The Class)*, a semi-autobiographical account that follows a French language teacher for one year at

⁶² Joel Kotkin, "Why Immigrants Don't Riot Here," *Wall Street Journal*(2005), <http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110007519>.

⁶³ Henri Astier, "French Muslims Face Job Discrimination," *BBC News*(2005), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4399748.stm>.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵ Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policy-Making Since the 1960s*.

a banlieue high school, is a vivid representation of the difficulties and unique issues which arise and work against students from the banlieue and those who seek to educate them. This film has been credited with raising awareness about the difficult educational climates in banlieue high schools that are quite similar to the educational climates in inner-city public schools in America.⁶⁶

III. Educational Inequality

These educational inequalities have not been lost on the government and some policies have in fact been put in place to correct them. The most noteworthy of the State's solutions has been the Z.E.P initiative. Z.E.P or educational priority zones is an initiative put in place under the administration of Francois Mitterrand⁶⁷ as a measure meant to identify certain areas as needing extra educational resources. It has been said that the larger purpose of ZEP was to, "contribute to correcting social inequality by selective reinforcement of educational activity in the zones and social environments in which the level of failure at school is the highest."⁶⁸ Though it was meant to be only a temporary measure involving 362 zones, today the program still exists and has now expanded to include over 700 zones.⁶⁹ In order to qualify as a ZEP school at least 30% of students must be of immigrant background.⁷⁰ Areas identified as ZEP have undergone complete overhauls of not only the school (emphasizing smaller classes and focusing on increasing teacher retention rates) but also of the entire community including increased neighborhood ties to the school and

⁶⁶ For more information on *The Class* visit this website: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1068646/>

⁶⁷ President of France from 1981 to 1995

⁶⁸ Elise S. Langan, "Assimilation and Affirmative Action in French Education Systems," *European Education* 40, no. 3 (2008): 53.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

increased parental involvement through offering more fiscal resources, teachers, and special tutoring (specifically in French but also other important subject areas). In reality the program has been criticized for not giving enough financial resources (ZEP schools only receive a 10 percent increase in financial resources, still less than “the allocation for per-student funding in a high school in central Paris.”⁷¹) and also for stigmatizing schools, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy for students.⁷²

Despite these efforts on the part of the government to ameliorate educational inequality in the banlieues, it is still a hallmark of these areas. This phenomenon places students at a disadvantage in comparison to their inner-city peers and prevents these students from attending the nation’s best universities, the grandes écoles.

IV. Conventions Education Prioritaire Program

One of the biggest challenges for the founders of the program was how to expand opportunity to a more diverse group of students. The answer was to create a separate admission track: the Conventions Education Prioritaire program. In 2001, Sciences Po began making partnerships to recruit directly from high schools in ZEP areas located right outside of Paris as well as areas of low socio-economic status in Lille, Lyon, Montpellier, Nancy, Poitier, Reims, and the overseas departments and territories of Nouvelle-Calédonie, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Guyane.⁷³ Sciences Po has three guidelines that high schools must meet in order to become a partner school. In a presentation on the program it states,

any high school located in French territory, whether public or private (with or without a contract of association with the State), is eligible to become a partner if

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Po, "Conventions Education Prioritaire Lycées partenaires de Sciences Po par Académie".

they meet at least one of the following objective criteria of the Government's priority education policy: are classified in a priority education area (ZEP), a priority education network (REP), a problem neighborhood or a neighborhood with a prevention of violence program, in the framework of special arrangements implemented by the State OR have a student body in which the proportion of students belonging to socio-economic categories characterized as underprivileged is at least 70% higher than the national average OR have a student body in which the proportion of students coming from junior high schools located in a ZEP or REP area, a problem neighborhood or a neighborhood with a prevention of violence program is higher than 60%.⁷⁴

Prior to the creation of CEP, entry into a grande école was mainly achieved through taking the concours, a rigorous entrance exam which is widely held as the gatekeeper to membership in the French Elite. While for some grandes écoles it is mandatory to attend a two year preparatory school to prepare for this exam, the concours for Sciences Po can be completed directly after a student has taken their baccalaureate exam. The traditional Sciences Po concours is composed of five parts which include: an essay on a subject relating to 20th century history, an analysis of text, a foreign language component, an essay based on a surprise topic, and an oral examination.

Though this exam is largely held to be fair for all prospective students, there are some elements of this admission process which exclude certain groups of students. Specifically, the majority of students who take this exam enroll in expensive preparation courses, which cost about \$8,000 for a nine month course.⁷⁵ The actual content of the exam has also been called into question, notably the foreign language and history components, on the grounds that these sections are particularly difficult

⁷⁴ The Equal Opportunity and Diversity Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," ed. Sciences Po (Paris2011), 3.

⁷⁵ Langan, "Assimilation and Affirmative Action in French Education Systems," 54.

for students of immigrant background. As a result, the entrance exam has come under fire by Bourdieu and others as reproducing an homogenous Elite.

The Conventions Education Prioritaire was thus created as an in-house solution to the discriminating nature of Sciences Po's own traditional entrance exam. During this separate admission process, students are first asked to write two papers. The first of these papers is a synthesis of press on a subject of their choice and the second is a critical essay in which the student is asked to take a stance. The student must then defend these papers in front of a jury of teachers and administrators at their school. Students who pass this round then undergo a 30 to 40 minute oral interview in front of five judges at Sciences Po.

Students are evaluated on the basis of their level of maturity, motivation, originality, and potential to excel at Sciences Po.⁷⁶ Admitted students receive financial aid which is on average about 6,200€ per year (about \$8,489).⁷⁷ In addition to being partly financed by the state (which contributes about 90,000€ per year), the program also has corporate partnerships with such companies as L'Oreal, BNP Paribas, Suez, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, and Accor.⁷⁸

V. Opposition

This program has not been without controversy. The majority of those in opposition to the program point to the fine line between democratization of the admission process and the idea of meritocracy.⁷⁹ Meritocracy in the French context refers to the Republican idea that because processes have been crafted to search for

⁷⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po."

merit and to treat each candidate equally, all deserving candidates have a fair chance. However, proponents believe that CEP is essential for introducing diversity into the student body, (officially socioeconomic diversity as well as unofficially racial diversity).⁸⁰

Shortly after the program was put in place, the National Interuniversity Union, a right-wing union, took CEP to the Court Tribunal of Paris on the grounds that it violated the French value of equal opportunity since only some areas were eligible for the special admission track. The National Assembly and the Senate became involved and the verdict eventually granted Sciences Po the ability to continue with the program on the condition that it must reach out to more schools.⁸¹ The program has met this requirement, expanding the program from 7 schools to 85 schools today.⁸²

The program has also been called into question on the grounds that it discriminates in favor of students from certain backgrounds and also because it is Sciences Po that chooses the partner high schools.⁸³ The Union Nationale des Etudiants de France (National Union of French Students) has called the program a band-aid solution put in place instead of fixing the real problem, the discriminating nature of the concours.⁸⁴

Further opposition has stemmed from the program admitting students not traditionally found at Sciences Po. Between 2002 and 2005, 70% of students admitted have been of African descent, specifically Algerians with a rate of 32.9%.⁸⁵ Other

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

⁸²Po, "Procédure Conventions Education Prioritaire".

⁸³Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 56.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁸⁵Donahoo, "Reflections on Race: Affirmative Action Policies Influencing Higher Education in France and the United States."

statistics from Sciences Po itself reports that about 2/3 of the admitted students have at least one parent born outside of France⁸⁶ and in each promotion between 50 and 70% of students are the children of those unemployed or laborers.⁸⁷ It is important to note that opposition comes less from the program's admittance of lower socioeconomic students but more so from expanding admission to students of immigrant background.

Though resentment of immigrants is nothing new in France (or anywhere else), over the past few years France has experienced a consistent rise in xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment, as exemplified by the rise of the National Front. The National Front's platform, like many far right wing parties in Europe, emphasizes relieving tax pressure, unemployment, criminality, and immigration.⁸⁸ Supporters of this party are particularly enamored with its emphasis on keeping France French. Jean Marie Le Pen (the former President of the National Front from 1972-2011) in particular has come under fire for his anti-Semitic and Anti- Muslim comments. All this came to a head during the 2002 Presidential elections when Le Pen saw an unprecedented amount of support and even advanced to the second round, shocking both France and the rest of Europe.

In the realm of education, anti-immigrant sentiment has also become an issue. Research on middle school choice in particular suggests that parents go to great lengths to avoid sending their child to their district middle school, ultimately

⁸⁶ Po, "Procédure Conventions Education Prioritaire".

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Philippe Bonnetain, "Behind the polling-booth curtain and beyond simple speculations: Toward a causal model of far-right voting behaviour - Some evidence from French presidential elections of 2002.," *Canadian Journal of Political Science-Revue Canadienne De Science Politique* 37, no. 2 (2004).

choosing racially homogenous schools. One study focusing on the Bordeaux educational district of 333 middle schools found that middle schools in this area are highly segregated. A very small percentage of middle schools were disproportionately educating a high percentage of students with ethnic backgrounds of North African, Black Africa, and Turkish decent while the remainder of schools in this district were educating very low populations of ethnic students.⁸⁹ Another study showed that both race and class are considered in middle school preference.⁹⁰ A third study showed that in Paris, parents are less likely to send their children to middle schools that are racially diverse.⁹¹ It seems that views on diversity in education may be having an impact on middle school choice, with many parents choosing schools with little to no racial diversity.

With these growing trends against immigration in politics, education, and other areas of French society, the framing of the Sciences Po program has been crucial to its survival. Along these lines, the program has been careful to operate under the umbrella of the need for greater geographic and socio-economic diversity, even as the majority of admitted students have in fact been of immigrant background. Throughout this thesis the reader will see the many efforts that the CEP program has made to make the program more legitimate to French society.

⁸⁹ Georges Felouzis, "Ethnic Segregation and its Effects in Middle School Choice in France," *Revue Francaise De Sociologie* 46(2005).

⁹⁰Bridget Byrne, "Not just class: towards an understanding of the whiteness of middle-class schooling choice," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009).

⁹¹ Maroussia Raveaud and Agnès van Zanten, "Choosing the local school: middle class parents' values and social and ethnic mix in London and Paris," *Journal of Education Policy* 22, no. 1 (2007).

VI. Republican Model and its Frameworks

In addition to the program being designed for legitimization purposes, it is also limited because race-based admissions programs (such as American-style affirmative action programs for example) are illegal in France. This leads to a very important obstacle for the CEP program as well as any other initiative which attempts to extend opportunities to specific groups: the Republican model. In the French context, the Republican model extends back to the French Revolution that, in addition to giving birth to such French ideals as equality, liberty, and brotherhood, also gave birth to the French ideals of color-blindness and meritocracy. The longstanding Republican tradition of a color-blind framework or the idea that all are French, thus all are equal and should be treated as such, is a tradition that has notoriously deepened social inequalities born of racial discrimination. This tradition has also worked to tie the hands of policymakers aiming to correct them since, without being able to specifically identify those groups that have been discriminated against, it is extremely difficult to put in place reparative initiatives.

This notion of color-blindness is not only limited to official policies but also has an impact on the way that French citizens discuss differences and issues of group membership, race in particular. Some have even gone as far as to say that race is a taboo subject in France. On this subject, one scholar offers the following anecdote:

Once, when I was two years old, my parents took me to a supermarket in Paris. I got lost...As happens frequently to lost little children, I wound up at the customer service desk. A kind lady working there made the following announcement over the PA system: "A little boy has been found. He is around two years old, and is ... err ... dark-haired. His parents are requested to pick him up at the customer service desk." After more than half an hour, my parents met at the checkout, realized that I was nowhere in sight and anxiously began to search for me. Finally, they went to the customer service desk, where the lady complained that it had

taken them a long time to come and find me. Had they not heard the message constantly repeated over the PA system? Stunned, my parents responded that they did not connect me with the announcement because it described a small “dark-haired” boy. Embarrassed, the lady then said: “Well, let’s say, in any case, he is ... how can I put it? ... He’s pretty dark-haired, no?” Dumbstruck, my parents countered: “Dark-haired, you should have said a little ’black’ boy; then, we would definitely have made the connection!”⁹²

This anecdote was simply meant to express to the reader just how uncomfortable discussing race is in France. While abroad I too noticed this difficulty with discussing race. Yet even with this race taboo the curiosity and desire to categorize people remains. As an African–American, the French were quite curious as to my own background. Walking around Paris I was often asked where I was from only to be immediately asked where my parents and grandparents were from. This speaks to the difference in the American and French framework, where in France if someone is a person of color they are assumed to be an immigrant rather than being from a family that has been in a country for generations, as is the case with African-Americans descendants of slaves. This is just one way that the American and French concepts of race differ that the reader should keep in mind throughout this thesis.

Continuing with an explanation of the Republican model and its frameworks, in 1905 France became an entirely *laïque* or secular state which effectively made clear that the only group which would be recognized was the French citizenry as a whole.⁹³ Of the Republican model it has been said that, “the nation-state must always give preference to collectivity over the individual.”⁹⁴ A second, more well-known quote used to describe the Republican ideal of color-blindness was said by the Comte de

⁹² Louis-Georges Tin, “Who is Afraid of Blacks in France? The Black Question: The Name Taboo, the Number Taboo,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 26, no. 1 (2008): 33.

⁹³ Langan, “Assimilation and Affirmative Action in French Education Systems,” 50.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

Clermont-Tonnerre, “We must deny everything to Jews as Nation, in the sense of a constituted body, and grant then everything as individuals.”⁹⁵ This was said during discussions over the rights of French Jews in 1789, a period when ignoring particular group identities was deemed a necessary component of building toward a unified nation.

In addition to being part of a long-standing Republican model and a color-blind framework, Article 1 of the 1958 Constitution actually dictates that race should not play a role in the selection of applicants: “The Republic guarantees the equality of all citizens in the eyes of the law, regardless of origin, race or religion.”⁹⁶ Although color-blindness is intended to take race, ethnicity, and group membership out of the equation when making decisions or allocating goods and services, in many cases the color-blind framework works alongside access racism and discrimination to perpetuate inequalities by restricting direct efforts to correct inequalities that have been born of discrimination. For this reason programs such as CEP must work through proxies such as geography in order to impact its target population, second and third generation immigrants and students of low-socioeconomic status.

Given this dedication to the Republican model, it is easy to see how some French have seen France’s growing multicultural population as a problem for the Republican frameworks, which claim to ignore cultural, religious, and racial differences. Americans studying race in France are often shocked to learn that France does not keep statistics based on race or religion, making it impossible to know for sure just

⁹⁵ Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader, "Introduction," in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, ed. Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 2.

⁹⁶Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 55.

how many people of color and different nationalities there are in France. New immigrants as well as the French-born second and third generation immigrants are asked to assimilate, or adopt Republican ideals and hide individual or group difference.

The problem that arises then is the friction between the Republican pull to treat all French citizens equally alongside the knowledge that there are large groups of people who are being discriminated against and who are not being afforded the same opportunities or *égalité des chances* (equal chances). This friction has in large part led to the creation of positive discrimination programs, a concept that has frequently been likened to American affirmative action. In reality, these two types of programs are quite different and only share the goal of working to ensure equality of opportunity. The reason for the major differences in these programs has a direct connection once again to the Republican framework of color-blindness which stipulates that race cannot be used as a criterion for any program or initiative. As a result, positive discrimination programs, like CEP, are regionally based and targeted at troubled regions rather than aimed at any ethnic group in particular. In this tradition the CEP program targets high schools located in poor areas and in recent years, poor areas in France's overseas departments as well. Consequently since ZEP areas are largely inhabited by ethnic minorities, the CEP program can be understood as a form of indirect affirmative action.

VII. 2005 riots as Turning Point

Although the program was called into question by liberals and conservatives alike, 2005 proved to be a turning point for the CEP program as well as for France. In

2005 riots took French banlieues by storm. These riots began when two teenagers died in the Parisian banlieue region of Seine-Saint Denis while trying to escape from police. In the days that followed, cars were set on fire and riots broke out in other banlieues, eventually spreading to banlieues surrounding other large French cities.⁹⁷ These riots were seen as a reaction to the poor ways that France dealt with integrating immigrants and proved to be a turning point in the French government's efforts to better integrate immigrants and those of immigrant background. After the riots, more emphasis was placed on expanding educational opportunities as a way to quell violence. Though Jacques Chirac⁹⁸ himself was critical of the Sciences Po initiative, he did recognize that it was important to make efforts to diversify the French Elite. Immigration scholars echoed the idea that for a nation-state's stability it is important to properly integrate immigrants into the nation-state.⁹⁹

Under Jacques Chirac's administration in 2005, free preparatory courses were put in place to help students with at least a "good" on their baccalaureate to prepare for the concours. Chirac viewed this as a better option than positive discrimination efforts such as the CEP program. This was not the first time that educational policy was extended as a carrot to immigrants in order to discourage violence, however. In fact, during the Algerian War between 1959 and 1961 the government put in place a quota at ENA (Ecole Nationale d'Administration, one of the very prestigious grandes écoles which produces senior officials in the French government¹⁰⁰) to allow 130 Algerian

⁹⁷ BBC News, "Timeline: French riots, a chronology of key events,"(2005), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4413964.stm>.

⁹⁸ President of France from 1995 to 2007

⁹⁹Joppke, "Transformation of Immigration Integration: Civic Integration and Antidiscrimination in the Netherlands, France, and Germany."

¹⁰⁰ Langan, "Assimilation and Affirmative Action in French Education Systems," 61.

students to enter.¹⁰¹ In this way the French government was re-implementing a classic approach of dealing with immigrants rather than a fresh one.

The riots also inspired other education-based integration efforts from the private sector. For example, the prestigious think tank Institut Montaigne suggested that all concours prep classes should admit at least some ZEP students per year while scholar Patrick Weil (and some from the Socialist Party) suggested that “5-7 percent acceptance of the best students from all lycees” should be allowed to attend grandes écoles.¹⁰² In addition to pioneering the CEP program, President of Sciences Po Richard Descoings has overseen the creation of a publicly and privately funded new school in Seine-Saint Denis, which opened in September 2007 and has a direct relationship to Sciences Po as a feeder school.¹⁰³ Unfortunately there appears to be no available information on this program.

For his part Nicolas Sarkozy has shown interest in positive discrimination both as Minister of the Interior, especially after the riots, and as President. Though Sarkozy had a problematic history with the banlieue population during his term as Minister of the Interior, in recent years he has repeatedly suggested the need to help this population. During his 2007 Presidential campaign he drew criticism for arguing in favor of positive discrimination for certain groups. He insisted that, "There are parts of France and categories of French citizens who have loaded on their heads so many handicaps that if we do not help them more than we help others, they will never

¹⁰¹Ibid., 51.

¹⁰² Ibid., 58.

¹⁰³Ibid., 59.

escape."¹⁰⁴ Most notably Sarkozy's administration has established a school geared towards studying positive discrimination and placed Descoings as the lead researcher. This state-sponsored initiative also includes 1 year internships specifically for ZEP students, including tutoring from Sciences Po students.¹⁰⁵

VIII. Conclusion

The reason behind CEP's existence is complicated yet ultimately rooted in Sciences Po's efforts to ensure the Republican value of equality of chance for some qualified ZEP students. In this light, it is ironic that a great deal of opposition has built up against the program on the grounds that it violates Republican traditions. Proponents and opponents of the program both believe in the principles of meritocracy, equality, and color-blindness, though it appears that their differences revolve around their interpretations of these ideals. The opponents say that CEP is a threat to the French value system because it exempts certain students from having to participate in a national competition, therefore violating meritocracy or the idea that everyone has an equal chance no matter their background to excel if they are the best and brightest of France. The proponents respond to this criticism by saying that the traditional admission process is the problem because it does not actually ensure meritocracy. If you are poor and/or if you are from certain ethnic backgrounds, you are excluded. To prove this one need look no further than the racially and socio-economically homogenous Elite. Regardless, the program has overcome major obstacles and, since 2005, has been particularly praised for its efforts to integrate

¹⁰⁴ Elaine Sciolino, "France Seems To Try Acting Affirmatively On Muslims," *New York Times*(2004), <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/15/world/france-seems-to-try-acting-affirmatively-on-muslims.html>.

¹⁰⁵Langan, "Assimilation and Affirmative Action in French Education Systems," 59.

immigrants and students of immigrant background into the future Elite of France, potentially inspiring other grandes écoles to follow suit with their own efforts.

The next chapter will include a detailed analysis of CEP students' responses to survey questions.

CHAPTER THREE: DETECTING AND BREAKING HABITUS IN CONVENTIONS EDUCATION PRIORITAIRE: STUDENTS

“I still live in the banlieue. Every morning I pass through the banlieue, through the ghetto, to Saint Germain des Prés, the largest, most beautiful neighborhood of Paris. It’s clear that my experience is different... but after [Sciences Po] I feel that the difference will stop there.”

-CEP student, second year

I. Introduction

This chapter will analyze survey responses from current students in the Conventions Education Prioritaire program. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the role habitus plays in the educational trajectory of these students and to what extent, if any, the program is working against habitus.

To review, Pierre Bourdieu describes habitus as,

generative schemata of classifications and classifiable practices that function in practice without acceding to explicit representation and that are the product of the embodiment, in the form of dispositions, of a differential position in social space defined precisely by the reciprocal externality of positions.¹⁰⁶

In essence, habitus is the idea that people are continuously sorted and generalized into certain categories by processes and practices, which Bourdieu recognizes as being unconscious. For the purposes of this thesis, the concept of habitus is the process which perpetuates and deepens the gulf between the French Elite and everyone else. The French educational institutions, in particular the grandes écoles, work as a chief agent of habitus in French society. This chapter will focus on determining the impact habitus has on these students, as well as to what extent CEP serves as an intervening variable in this process.

¹⁰⁶Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*: 2.

Data à la française

In order to determine if in fact a certain degree of habitus is present and working against the goal of diversifying the Elite (the chief outcome of interest for this thesis), it seemed only appropriate to ask current CEP students.

This data was not easy to obtain. The biggest obstacle was the Republican model. As outlined in the previous chapter, obtaining information based on race or on individuals based on group membership is outlawed in France. Though this law was put in place to make France more cohesive as a citizenry, the unintended consequence is that when researching issues in France where racial demographic information is crucial, it is simply unavailable and very difficult to extract. Researchers have needed to become quite creative to gather this information given that collecting data on race in France is tantamount to going against the Republican model and its frameworks, particularly color-blindness.

Going into this research project with knowledge of France's restrictions, I took several approaches. The first approach was to ask Sciences Po for data on CEP students. Surely if such an expensive program was being implemented, students must be tracked in some way, I reasoned. In November I contacted a professor from Sciences Po whose class I took while I was abroad to inquire about the existence of this information. In January she replied with the following statement,

I apologize for getting back to you only now, I was waiting for another professor's advice. It seems the data available is only the one that Sciences Po publishes and which you can find on their website.¹⁰⁷

I also asked students in the CEP program and received the same response, that there was no data specifically tracking these students. My suspicion is that either this

¹⁰⁷ Bénédicte Robert, e-mail message to author, January 9, 2011.

data really does not exist or Sciences Po is reluctant to share this raw information with outside researchers, preferring instead to display information through very limited statistics available on their website. For the purposes of my research question, to determine to what extent CEP has been successful in diversifying the Elite by overcoming various manifestations of habitus, their published data was insufficient. I wanted information directly from students, on their ethnic origin, that of their parents', and their raw impressions of the program.

The second approach to collect this data was to go to France myself over winter break to speak with CEP students. Through this trip I was able to meet face to face with my principal contact, a second year CEP student, and gather some information. He also helped me to arrange my only qualitative interview. Unfortunately I was not able to obtain more interviews since my trip coincided with Sciences Po's final exam period.

The third and final research approach was a survey comprised of 20 open-ended questions (based on questions used in the qualitative interview) administered online via Kwik surveys, an online survey tool.¹⁰⁸ The link to this survey was e-mailed to current CEP students with the help of four contacts at Sciences Po (also in the CEP program). The survey was in the field for a total of six weeks. Survey results trickled in slowly and several approaches were employed to increase participation. Six surveys were returned bringing the total number of respondents to seven.

The remainder of this chapter will include an analysis of these survey responses and the sole qualitative interview. It analyzes students' experiences before, during,

¹⁰⁸ The survey was written in the French language with help from native speakers. Responses too were translated to English with help from native speakers to remain consistent with the original meanings of respondents.

and after the program as well as their thoughts on the societal impact of the CEP program.

II. Habitus in Survey Results

Who were these students?

Survey results revealed that participants were from lower-socioeconomic statuses than the typical Sciences Po student and that this group was also racially diverse, and therefore, a good representation of the CEP program's target population. Of the seven students who participated in this study, four students were in their fourth year (first year of the Masters program) and three students were in their second year. Of the seven students, only one was born outside of France, in Algeria, but came to France at a very early age. The majority of these students, with the exception of one, are children of immigrants from Morocco, Comoro Islands (located near Mozambique), and Algeria.

The occupations of their parents were diverse and included two civil servants (the respondent whose parents were born in France), a nursing home assistant, a manual laborer, a locksmith, a housewife, a porter and a janitor. Three were unemployed and two were retired persons. Although one student came from the south of France (Perpignan), the rest of the respondents came from the suburbs of Paris, three in particular from Seine-Saint Denis. As was mentioned in chapter two, Seine-Saint Denis has received quite a bit of extra resources from both the government and Sciences Po following the 2005 riots that began there, which were largely linked to immigrant unrest.

Before Sciences Po

How did you find out about Sciences Po/CEP?

All seven students found out about the program from their high school, either in an information session, by word of mouth or from specific teachers. Two students had not heard of Sciences Po at all until high school. One of these students said, “I first heard of CEP from my history and geography teacher. She told me that there was a school in Paris called Sciences Po and that I had the profile to participate in CEP.” The other student said that he did not hear about Sciences Po or CEP until nearly the end of his high school career.¹⁰⁹ Two students specifically stated that they did not hear about the program until their last year of high school.

How students learn of Sciences Po is important to a study on habitus. As was mentioned previously, lack of knowledge about the grandes écoles is one manifestation of habitus, working against certain groups to keep them out of these schools and, in the long run, out of the Elite. Whereas some students from more privileged backgrounds have tailored their entire academic careers towards strengthening their candidacy for a grande école, students from poorer backgrounds in many cases only learn about the grandes écoles when it is already too late to compete. While proponents of meritocracy and equality (at least the theoretical versions) may not see this as an obstacle, in reality this is an example of one way that habitus plays out early against certain groups.

Through these students’ responses, we see just how crucial the role of the teacher is in spreading knowledge of Sciences Po and the CEP program. This helps in

¹⁰⁹ I know the gender of this respondent because he was the sole interviewee. I was also able to determine the gender of other respondents due to the nature of the French language which, when referring to oneself, requires that agreement be made according to one’s gender.

breaking an important form of habitus that the students themselves often perpetuate, that of self selecting out of the process. This phenomenon was described earlier by Bourdieu when he said that, “the chosen also play a role in successful cooptation in choosing their choosers by offering themselves up for the choosing, while others spontaneously exclude themselves from a competition that would exclude most of them anyway.”¹¹⁰ With the intervention of teachers, however, this process of self-selection, self-censorship, or self-fulfilling a prophecy of exclusion, is thwarted, albeit later than desired. High school is deemed a less desirable time to thwart self-selection when considering that some students never have a mental block about entering a *grande école*, have known about these schools, and have prepared to enter them for a long time. Thus, while learning about a *grande école* and having some time to prepare to enter is good, in comparison, later-informed students are still behind.

Admission Process

As outlined in the previous section, the CEP admission process requires students to write a synthesis of press on an issue of their choice, a critical essay, and then defend these two papers in front of two juries, one at their high school and another at Sciences Po. Although one respondent described the admission process as being long and stressful, overall opinions about the CEP admission process were positive, with two students saying that they had “very good memories.”

Respondents particularly enjoyed the freedom to choose a topic of their choice. One respondent replied, “I worked on the strategy of the National Front, during the Presidential elections of 2007. I was and am still a fierce adversary of this party, and I wanted to study it to understand it. My press review took me to meet members of the

¹¹⁰Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*: 141.

National Front in Perpignan, where the party won a lot of support.” Another respondent replied that he worked on the political crisis in Lebanon, another on the Socialist Party in France, and another respondent prepared his report on Al Qaida.

When respondents were asked about their overall thoughts on the admission process, whether it was a good process or whether there were any problems with the process, on the whole respondents replied that it was either “good” or “excellent.” One respondent justified this stance saying that it is an excellent process because “it allows the diversification of Sciences Po students. It diversifies the student body socially but also it permits bringing to the school other ideas as well as different horizons and cultural universes.” This respondent added that, “For me it is essential that this process depends on the social origin of students and not on their ethnic origin.” Another respondent who also rated the process as excellent said, “The proof is that students admitted with CEP succeed as much as the others at Sciences Po.” Thus, he judged the admission process on its ability to correctly identify and admit students who would go on to succeed at Sciences Po.

Two respondents commended the program for judging students based on such characteristics as “research work, writing, oral expression, spontaneity in answering questions and a reflection on the professional future of students.” In addition, students liked that they were not judged solely on their baccalaureate grades but that their high school grades were also considered. This is significant because whereas high school grades give an indication of a student’s in-school academic performance, the baccalaureate gives students distinctions based on their performance in comparison to students from across France.

Scholars have noted that in general minority students perform at lower levels than other French students on this exam. Indeed, in speaking specifically about the baccalaureate performance of CEP versus non-CEP students, Sabbagh has noted that, “although Sciences Po insists that the admission rates in the two populations of applicants are roughly comparable, there *is* a substantial gap between their [CEP students’] level of academic performance as measured by the grades and distinctions obtained by the baccalaureate.”¹¹¹ Reasons for these differences in baccalaureate results can be traced back to a specific Republican framework, that of equality. That is, the baccalaureate is the same for all French students. The basic baccalaureate exam is designed to test for knowledge that every French student is supposed to know. It covers areas such as Math, English, History, Economics, and Spanish or German as a second language. Some students may also take a Philosophy and oral French exam as well. The test period is one week and each exam lasts about four hours. Looking only at the content of this exam, one can see that there is the same issue of social bias that exists in the traditional Sciences Po exam. Students from immigrant background, for example, may not be as familiar with the areas tested as those students who have lived in France all of their lives. Even a native French student described her baccalaureate experience as being, “very hard and a stressful week.”¹¹²

When I asked one Sciences Po student (non-CEP) why she thought ZEP students may have more difficulty with the exam than non-ZEP students, she explained that, “private schools and good public schools can prepare their students much better, with better classes, and more *concours blancs* [preparatory baccalaureate exams].

¹¹¹ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 53-54. Unfortunately the average baccalaureate scores for CEP students or even for the average Sciences Po student, is not publicly available.

¹¹² Violette Saint Bris, e-mail message to author, April 7, 2011.

Therefore, often times the ZEP students will not have grades as high as the Parisian privileged students.”¹¹³ Here then the explanation for the gap in baccalaureate results centers on whether one has access to expensive preparation materials.

However, one scholar, Laurent Dubois, offered a different reason for the gap in baccalaureate results. He describes a conversation that he had with a schoolteacher in Guadeloupe who over the years noted that even his brightest students received mixed baccalaureate results. The schoolteacher noted that his students tend to do well on the written portion of the exam but get lower results on the oral portion, which pulls their overall score down. He insists that it is not the students’ French that is poor; they are excellent, articulate speakers. Rather, he observed that,

the examiners who give these students low grades almost always come from metropolitan France. When they are face-to-face with the students, they of course notice their race (usually they are black, of African and/or Indian descent, as are most people in Guadeloupe) and this informs the grades they give. The students are, he believes, quite simply the victims of well-ensconced structural racism.¹¹⁴

This schoolteacher therefore attributes differences in baccalaureate results to racism, which Dubois notes cannot be proved because it is illegal in France to track students based on race for any reason, even to determine the existence of discrimination.¹¹⁵

Thus, the difference in baccalaureate results could be attributed to a lack of knowledge in the test areas, a lack of preparation materials, or experiences with discrimination in the baccalaureate process itself. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact cause, it is clear that a disparity does exist between the scores of students from ZEP areas and non-ZEP students. Consequently, for students coming from ZEP

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Laurent Dubois, "Republican Anti-Racism and Racism: A Caribbean Genealogy," in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, ed. Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 23.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

areas, high school grades are preferred over baccalaureate results because they are seen as offering a more accurate view of a student's academic potential.

Returning now to the survey responses on the admission process, another respondent, while agreeing that the process is good, offered the following critique:

I think that it's a good process that suffers from a big problem of legitimization even though it has been established for more than 10 years now.¹¹⁶ The proof is a *concours* [competitive process] like all the other concours at Sciences Po Paris but it is perceived as being a channel for the poor. There is very little communication around this admission process. Also, this procedure puts a light on very few students (only 4-5 slots max are allotted for each school). Finally, I find that this is a partial project for the moment since the foundation of the problem, the problems of schools in the banlieues (absent teachers, incomplete programs) are not at all treated, but Sciences Po cannot reform all of the French educational system!!

This response is interesting not only in that it is rich in information but also in that it captures so many of the effects of habitus. First, the problem of legitimization was highlighted in terms of how some outsiders see the program as being illegitimate. Although the respondent did not offer more on what types of groups felt that the process was illegitimate, as mentioned previously, it is a fear that employers may begin to make distinctions among Sciences Po students. Ideas about the legitimization of the program can thus have implications for graduates who participated in the CEP program¹¹⁷ or who were perceived to have participated, i.e., students from non-traditional socio-economic or racial backgrounds. This issue of potential employment discrimination will be revisited later in the chapter when we discuss in more detail the fear outlined by Daniel Sabbagh that employers may begin to discriminate against CEP graduates.

¹¹⁶ The program has actually been established for exactly 10 years, not more.

¹¹⁷ Although I refer to Conventions Education Prioritaire as a program in this thesis, in the survey, CEP was not referred to as a program since some students believe that CEP stops at the point of entrance and does not extend throughout their time at Sciences Po.

In addition, Sabbagh has observed that in order to thwart some tendencies to see the program as illegitimate, Sciences Po itself began to take measures early on to “legitimize” the process. An example of these practices that he highlights in particular is extending the number of jury members for one of the oral interview panels.¹¹⁸ These changes, in an effort to make the process more legitimate to the public, may in practice actually work against the very group that CEP is aiming to help, specifically if the admission track becomes too difficult.

While legitimization in and of itself is not directly related to habitus, with connection to the main outcome of interest, that of diversifying the Elite, it is important. If the program is not deemed legitimate by those who are the gatekeepers in French society, the Elite may remain homogenous. To this effect, and perhaps as a measure to circumvent these fears surrounding legitimization, Sciences Po has sought out corporate partners for the program. Regardless of these efforts on the part of Sciences Po, if some individuals and corporations still do not see the program as legitimate, no amount of measures put in place to make it more so are going to persuade these individuals.

Returning to the response, it also touches the interconnected ideas of whether the program is reaching out to enough banlieue students and of the selectivity of the program itself. Can the program be effective in breaking habitus and diversifying the Elite when the program only admits a maximum of about 4 to 5 students per high school?¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po."

¹¹⁹ I could not confirm the number of slots per high school for CEP because it is not public information.

For its part, the program has in fact opened the program to more students by allowing more schools to participate in the program. This creates a dilemma. On the one hand, overall expansion of the program is good and helps to reach students from many different parts of France. On the other hand, by expanding the program, it appears that Sciences Po is also decreasing the number of slots available per high school. For example, in looking at data from 2001 (the first year of the program), 7 schools participated and 17 students were admitted.¹²⁰ This means that in this year 2.4 slots on average were allotted per school.¹²¹ In 2011, 85 schools participated and 130 students were admitted.¹²² This means that 1.5 students on average per high school were admitted to Sciences Po through the CEP program. Whether there are some high schools or areas that receive more slots than others is unclear. But if the program is such that each school receives an equal number of slots, it appears that as the program expands the number of slots per school decreases. As we will see in a later section on friendships and the social experience, this may have unintended social consequences for students if some are coming to Sciences Po alone.

Finally this survey response mentions one of the big systemic inequalities that have created the need for such programs as CEP- failing schools in the banlieue. This is a big component of habitus and determines why the poor are so often excluded or ill prepared to compete in this system that is fundamentally seen as meritocratic. Though Sciences Po's intervention helps to even out this dynamic for a select number of students, in the end, the program does nothing (or very little) to correct the

¹²⁰ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 4.

¹²¹ This number was determined by dividing these two numbers.

¹²² Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 4.

systemic issues of poverty, failing schools, and racism/ xenophobia that permeate French society.

Given that other responses were largely positive and that this response was a critique more on the program than the admission process, it appears that students are mostly satisfied with, and even enjoy, the admission process. By its existence alone the admission process appears to be breaking habitus, offering a path of entry that circumvents some of the main obstacles which normally keep students of different racial and socio-economic backgrounds out of Sciences Po, such as baccalaureate scores, the social bias of the traditional Sciences Po entrance exam, and the need for expensive preparation. In this alternative track, students are assessed more on their ability to research, to defend their stance, and to be spontaneous and creative; elements that do not require extra financial resources.

At Sciences Po

This section seeks to determine if habitus plays a role throughout students' experiences at Sciences Po: both academic and social. With regards to breaking habitus and the long-term goal of diversifying the Elite, both academic and social experiences at Sciences Po are important. This period is when students begin to gain what Bourdieu refers to as *culture générale* (general culture), a certain way of being and thinking expected of *grandes écoles* graduates and by extension the Elite. At the end of one's time at Sciences Po, students obtain the ultimate shield against habitus-symbolic capital, or achievements, honors, awards, recognition, prestige, or titles that graduates of *grandes écoles* share.¹²³ But first, there is the journey of navigating oneself through school specific forms of habitus (adapting to Elite education, finding

¹²³Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*: 81.

one's way socially, persevering through unexpected difficulties), which threaten to take hold of students and impede their progress. These forms of habitus are primarily made clear through the academic and social experiences of students.

Academic experience

Academic experiences were captured using two questions. The first was the following joint question: "How have you found your academic experience at Sciences Po? Was it difficult, easy, etc.? Did you have a tutor at Sciences Po?" The second question was: "Sciences Po has a reputation of being academically difficult. Describe a situation where you found Sciences Po to be difficult."

All respondents agreed that their first year at Sciences Po was difficult, though for a variety of reasons. Upon matriculation students associated with the CEP program can opt to have a tutor. Tutors are usually other students; sometimes these students are also in the CEP program. Of the seven students surveyed, two did not have a tutor during their first year and one did not indicate whether he had a tutor or not. Although students may have a tutor for the entire year, the students who participated in this survey only used them for a relatively short period of time to help them adapt to Sciences Po. There is some variance in opinion on just how helpful the tutors were. While one respondent said that the tutoring workshops helped them "a lot" in understanding the methodology, another respondent said, "Yes I received a tutor but I stopped rather quickly, I did not find it useful or feel the need."

Of the two students who did not use the tutoring services, one said, "I did not receive a tutor. In the beginning it was very difficult because I did not know how to do what my professors wanted from me." The other student who did not have a tutor

actually needed to repeat his first year. Although he did not point to academic reasons, he stated that he regretted his decision to not have a tutor and now encourages other students to get one when they enter.

Shifting gears slightly, if this student did not fail primarily for academic reasons, what indeed was the cause and is repeating one's year a normal occurrence for other students? As this was the sole interviewee, I was able to ask him to elaborate on whether repeating one's first year at Sciences Po was normal or typical, having heard of other students who needed to do so as well. To this question he replied, "No not normal. [Failing is] not really because of work but due to moving from high school to a new environment that we are not used to. I wasn't very serious my first year, I didn't go to all of my classes, it's university, you want to have fun." He continued, "But it could be worse. There are some students who come from the Conventions program and stop completely." I then asked him why he thought students stopped. He replied that,

for some students they come from far away so they want to discover more Paris than the university, there are social reasons, family reasons. Clearly though the work is not the most difficult... so it's not the work that's the most difficult, it's really more so in your head.

He elaborated on this point saying that the work is different from *lycée* or high school in that it is fewer hours in the classroom, more presentations and less work outside of class. Even though "there is not a lot of work," he cautioned that students "must be serious." His opinion that a CEP student's experience at Sciences Po is difficult more so due to the change in social environment than the academic workload was echoed by other respondents as well.

To this effect one survey respondent replied, “My experience is very positive. Difficult in the beginning, but more by the change in the social environment than by the work demanded.” On the question of whether they had a tutor or not, another respondent also hinted at a social element, replying, “Yes, I had a tutor with which I had a good relationship. He was not necessarily there for academic support but more so for social support.” This is a topic that will be revisited more thoroughly in the next sub-section on students’ social experiences at Sciences Po.

Though the first year was difficult for students, they seem to have figured out what is at least expected of them by their second year and in some cases by the second semester. On this subject one respondent said, “I didn’t feel behind. That demanded a work effort a lot more sustained than high school and I needed at least the first semester to adapt myself but after it was fine.”

Another respondent, who did not indicate whether he had a tutor or not, wrote, “In the beginning, I found that it was difficult. More specifically, there was a lot of work and the work had to be of good quality. But I got organized and took up good work methods and got there.” A third respondent agreed with this sentiment saying, “It’s a difficult experience in the beginning and demands a perpetual rigor. But one finishes by understanding how the system works and how to blend in.”

As with many college students, however, knowing what is expected does not always mean that one will perform. One respondent says, “Beginning with the second year, my grades were better and I understood how to work better. Today I am underneath the performance of other students, but I think that if I wanted, I could match them. In fact I do not work as much as I should, I don’t aim at excellence and

my results satisfy me.” Another respondent replied, “Concerning the second year, it’s more of a slackening on my part than a real difficulty in doing homework.” When asked about a time when they found Sciences Po to be difficult, respondents pointed to the difficult oral exercises, exam periods, large amount of readings, and a lot of work to do under severe time constraints.

This section on the academic experience of CEP students at Sciences Po reveals a number of dynamics. On the subject of tutors, it does not seem as if their presence is overwhelmingly helping students, given that many opt out after a short time. This does not mean, however, that tutors are not helpful in the very beginning of the process. Students have said that some tutors have been helpful in providing a support system. With regards to the first year, as can be expected, students struggled though it appeared that these issues were more so connected to social difficulties rather than academic struggles, an aspect that will be explored in more detail in the following section. By the second year the students surveyed appeared to be doing fine academically. As one survey respondent put it, “In the beginning of the first year I had a little trouble in comparison to others... but after there were no longer any differences.”

Although the failing and dropping out of some students is of concern, most students continue on and are excelling. This is important to our discussion on habitus because if these students can survive the Sciences Po academic experience, their chances of eventually diversifying the Elite are that much greater.

Social experience

As we have seen in the previous section, CEP students are generally doing well academically. However, we have also seen that the issue of these students' social experience has come up frequently. This section will explore in more detail some of the social aspects of their experience at Sciences Po.

Social experiences were captured using three questions. The first: "Have you felt that your experiences at Sciences Po are different from the experiences of other students who entered by the traditional process? If so, how?" The second: "When the CEP program made its debut, a lot of students at Sciences Po were against the CEP. Have you found students at Sciences Po who entered through the traditional track to be welcoming?" And the final question: "Do you have a lot of friends outside of CEP?"

On the social issue, although students appeared to be divided, the majority answered that they did feel that their experiences at Sciences Po were at least somewhat different. The quote opening this chapter is in fact in response to this question of difference. This comes from my principal contact within the program who replied that his experience was mostly different because he still makes a daily commute from the richest to the poorest areas of Paris but he feels that once he graduates, these differences will disappear. Another respondent also replied positively to this question saying,

no not really. It is evident that there are people more gifted but my results are not lower than people who entered by the concours or by very good mention [baccalaureate distinction indicating that a student scored at least 16 out of 20]. The difference is from the point of view of general culture, which is explained by different social statuses.

A third respondent replied, “I don’t like stigma, but it is true that we do not all have the same academic path. This is verifiable through our respective levels of general culture and English. Otherwise, on a subject other than money, we are all on the same equal footing. From now on, the gap between the grades is tightening.”

These three responses highlight both academic and social differences. Other respondents chose to focus primarily on social differences. One such respondent replied, “Sometimes, I have the impression that some students are really not on the same planet as me. But that is translated by their attitudes outside of school or their diverse opinions.”¹²⁴ Another student said, “It’s inevitably different; I would not say that it’s better or worse. It’s just different. This difference is tied to the history and prestige of Sciences Po which permits students to study in extraordinary conditions.” The sole interviewee also replied that he felt there was a difference between those who came through CEP and those who came through the traditional process.

It is clear that some students feel as if they are fundamentally different from other non-CEP students. Even more importantly, we see that the academic and social experiences of these students (like most college students) are very much intertwined.

Another question which focused on understanding CEP students’ social experience at Sciences Po was that of reception once there. When CEP students were asked whether other students at Sciences Po were welcoming, students reported that this was not a major issue. One respondent replied that students were very welcoming and that he has very good memories. Another respondent observed that in general students were indifferent saying, “The other students were as a majority indifferent to my entrance process.” Only two respondents hinted that there was any amount of

¹²⁴ Because of the wording it is not clear whether the respondent meant this positively or negatively.

resistance to their presence. To this effect one respondent said, “Yes [students were welcoming], I did not have any problems with integration. It’s only recently that I met a weak minority of students who were against the CEPs and social aide.” Another said, “Yes [they were welcoming], rather. No one openly told me that they were against. I do not know what they really thought but once the first weeks passed, the question was no longer asked.” These responses suggest that non-CEP students were either welcoming or indifferent with only some students, a small minority, taking issue with the presence of CEP students publicly. Another respondent offered a perspective that was quite different. He said,

the students from the traditional process were rather welcoming with me. In contrast, it was me who held back. My timidity did not help; I stayed with a friend who came from my school during the first six months. Then things were simpler, and I wove real friendships with the other students.

This response suggests that even though non-CEP students are welcoming, it helps for CEP students to have a friend to navigate the social scene with. This leads our discussion to the next section on social experiences – friendships.

Whether a student has made friends with students outside of their socio-economic and racial group is typically a good indicator as to whether the student is integrating and feels comfortable at one’s school. Therefore it was important to ask whether students had friends outside of the CEP program. Responses were again varied. One student was very enthusiastic about his new friendships formed once at Sciences Po replying, “Yes, I have a lot. I like diversity, I like to mix. I have a need for this diversity, whether ethnic or social.” The majority of responses, however, suggested that although CEP students hold on to their friendships from high school, they also form some new ones once at Sciences Po. One example of this was the following

response, “Yes, the majority of my friends come from the “classic” procedures. However my best friend (who is also my roommate) comes from CEP.” Another respondent replied, “Just enough for me to not respond negatively to this question.”

It is important to note also that due to the wording of the question, there was a tendency for some students to interpret this question as meaning students from outside of Sciences Po rather than students who entered Sciences Po through the traditional admission process, as was the original intention behind this question. An example of this is the response, “Yes I stay connected with the majority of my friends from high school.” Due to this discrepancy, a response such as, “Yes a big majority,” can be interpreted to mean at least two different things. However thanks to the ambiguous wording, we are able to get more insight into the overall dynamics driving friendships that may not have been perceived if the question were more specific.

Returning to the responses, there are other students, like the interviewee, who have made an easier social transition due to the presence of other CEP students at Sciences Po. To this effect he said, “For me I was lucky, I knew people here but there are others who come here alone and stayed alone for three years, it’s a question of integration.” This response connects most closely to our earlier discussion on the apparent trade-off of expanding the program to more high schools versus reducing the number of slots per high school. That is to say, if the program reduces the number of slots per high school, more students may come to Sciences Po alone and stay alone. In this way reducing the number of slots per high school may make it more difficult for students to socially integrate.

Regarding survey responses on friendships, on the subject of whether he has friends outside of CEP the interviewee replied, “A lot? No. There is a little habit of staying with each other in a little group but OK I have friends outside of CEP.” Another respondent seemed to not make much of an effort to make friends at Sciences Po stating, “I deeply wish to keep a link with my friends from high school or other. Also, my friendships are not confined to Sciences Po (that would be a shame.)”

While it is encouraging to know that students like the interviewee are settling in to Sciences Po thanks to friendships, these pre-established friendships or friendships only with people who share the same socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, can sometimes remove the need to make friends with non-CEP students. The reality appears to be that, at least for some CEP students, there is a tendency to stick together as a unit of CEP students or focus only on maintaining friendships from high school rather than making new friends with non-CEP students. However, as was observed earlier, it is easier for students to navigate this new social space with someone they already know and can even help them to feel more comfortable reaching out to new people.

Guarding childhood and high school friendships is not at all something practiced only by CEP students. In fact, it is typical of French friendships in general. This is specifically due to the nature of the French university where, in contrast to American universities, French students do not live on campus. Instead, they live at home throughout their time at university and well into their young adult years, making the center of their social life their neighborhood instead of the university. This is one main reason why it is difficult for American students on exchange to form friendships

with French students. The French simply go to school and go home; they generally do not hang out around campus because in many cases, there is no campus, only a collection of buildings.

Given this information and the fact that CEP students are being placed in an environment that is largely outside of their comfort zone, it is understandable why closed patterns of friendship have formed. However, with regards to habitus, this phenomenon is perpetuated by the absence of friendships primarily because, if friendships and social mixing are not taking place, CEP students have less of an opportunity to gain social capital from other Sciences Po students. CEP students do not get social capital if there is no immersion into the Sciences Po culture. Social capital brings traits that are equally important to entry into the Elite, alongside smaller forms of symbolic capital such as awards and the ultimate symbolic capital: a Sciences Po degree. Bourdieu would argue that both social and symbolic capital are important and necessary.

What would this social capital look like? It could be anything that would prove helpful in integrating into the Elite. For example, ways of being, ways of talking, knowledge of certain topics, that are expected to be common knowledge among the Elite. This is also an ideal time for all students, not just CEP students, to network. With such alumni as the Prince of Monaco and fellow students such as the children of corporate CEOs, making these connections can be crucial to obtaining prestigious jobs and internships but also towards cementing one's place in the Elite for life. CEP students should take full advantage of this opportunity.

Along these lines, there is of course the fear that rather than the school becoming more diverse to fit students, CEP students are being asked to adapt to the school. Thus the goal of diversification may in fact be more visual than anything.

In addition, the lack of friendships among CEP and non-CEP students is an issue because non-CEP students are not truly benefitting from the new diversity present. This last point is important because on a global scale for Sciences Po, giving students a competitive advantage in the corporate and academic world has become a major initiative under the leadership of Sciences Po President Richard Descoings. Making Sciences Po more diverse is part of this initiative. This relatively new emphasis on making Sciences Po more global, more diverse and more internationally competitive will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

This emphasis on social integration and social capital begs the question of whether it is necessary for students to blend in an effort to gain social capital. Is social capital really that important to the entrance and diversification of the Elite? Whether one agrees or not that social capital and social interaction are important, CEP students' survey responses suggest that their lack of social integration is having a negative impact on their academic experience. For these students social discomfort and loneliness are feelings that can ultimately endanger the goal of diversifying the Elite, especially if students decide to leave Sciences Po in search of a place where they feel more comfortable. Therefore, from a social capital perspective, a student perspective, and from a Sciences Po perspective in general (which claims to be international and know the value of exposing its students to diversity to make them better citizens and future employees), there needs to be more of an effort from the

school to not only better integrate CEP students early on but to also facilitate social interaction between CEP and non-CEP students.

After Sciences Po

The experience of students after Sciences Po is crucial concerning whether the Elite has in fact been diversified. Where are students going? Are they choosing a variety of Elite fields to enter or is there a heavy concentration of CEP alumni in only a few fields of the Elite? Unfortunately, it was difficult to obtain this crucial information from alumni currently in the job market. As a result, third year experiences and choice of Master's program were used as proxies and early indicators to determine what professional areas students are choosing to enter.

These are good proxies given the structural differences between the American and French higher education systems, specifically the Sciences Po and grandes écoles system. Unlike some American students who work towards a four year Bachelor's degree and may elect to continue immediately with their education, take time off, or stop studying altogether, students at Sciences Po generally remain there for five years. During the first three years they work toward their undergraduate degree and the last two years they enter one of Sciences Po's Master's programs. This is to say that they become immediately specialized in one of these areas. In this way, the areas that students choose are typically a good indicator of what field they plan to enter. In addition, all respondents were asked what third year experience they chose given that the third year at Sciences Po is reserved for either study at a foreign university or an internship. Both the choice of Master's program and the third year experience are good indicators of students' interests and trajectories.

Third year experience

The question on the subject of the third year experience was: “what experience did you choose during your third year and why?” Some younger students also answered this question, based on what they hoped to do during the following year. Of the seven respondents, six said that they either chose or will choose an internship over study at a foreign university. The exception was the interviewee who studied at a university with a very good finance and management program (his Master’s concentration) in Quebec City, Canada.

Of particular interest to this thesis’ main outcome of interest are the reasons for choosing an internship over foreign study. The interviewee offered one reason for this. While I was preparing to interview him, he explained that he did not speak English very well, which is why he chose to study in Francophone Canada rather than in the United States or in another Anglophone area. Another respondent made this decision as well, choosing an internship in Montreal. This is expected given that English, a subject that appears in the traditional admission process but not the CEP process, is typically a difficult area for CEP students, setting them aside from other Sciences Po students. One may recall that a respondent stated as much during the section on academic experiences saying, “It is true that we do not all have the same academic path. This is verifiable through our respective levels of general culture and English.” The interviewee further commented that classes in English “may be” the only limit at Sciences Po for CEP students.

With Sciences Po becoming increasingly more international, difficulty with English is an area which typically divides CEP and non-CEP students in the

classroom. This is however, not true for all CEP students. In fact, some survey respondents reported that they spent their internship in the United States to specifically work on their English.

Other reasons accounting for the choice of internship over foreign study were offered directly from respondents through the open-ended survey. The majority of students said that they chose an internship in order to gain general professional experience or in a particular field. One outlier respondent in their second year, however, offered the following response: “I would like to go to Hong Kong in the third year. I believe that the third year abroad must at the same time disorient you totally but also form your personality...I think that this year will be rich with lessons.” Thus, their reason for choosing an internship was less about gaining professional experience and more about personal growth. Another respondent replied that in addition to gaining professional experience they wanted the opportunity to go to New York, while a third respondent replied that he would like to have an internship at an embassy, “for the simple reason that the world of diplomacy makes me dream.”

For these reasons survey respondents generally gravitate toward an internship over study at a foreign university. This decision may also be indicative of other reasons, although this could not be determined based on the available data.

Master’s Program

This brings us to our second point of concern in the realm of experiences after Sciences Po: the Master’s Program. Choice of a Master’s program was determined using the question: “What Master’s did you choose and how did you make this decision?” At Sciences Po students can choose to obtain a Master’s degree in twenty-

five different areas.¹²⁵ Although preliminary questioning on this subject suggested that CEP students typically gravitated towards Finance and Strategy, survey results revealed that there was some variation. Of the students surveyed, there were two students who chose to obtain a Master's in Economic Law from Sciences Po's law school, one student who chose a Master's in Human Resource Management, two who chose a Master's in Public Affairs, and one student who chose a Master's in Finance and Strategy. The seventh respondent was not yet sure which field they would choose. These results at a minimum show that students are preparing to enter a diverse range of fields occupied by the Elite. However, another facet of interest is the reason for which students chose these fields.

One respondent replied, "I chose the Master's in Human Resource Management because the fifth year is a change and I wish to work at a faster pace. And because during my third year, the jobs that were given to me and that I preferred were related to Human Resources." For the two respondents who chose law, they replied that it was simply a matter of wanting to be a lawyer and being passionate about law.

One of the respondents who chose public affairs offered an atypical answer, responding that, "[their] desire to serve France and to return the favor which was

¹²⁵ Sciences Po students may obtain a Master in the following areas: Master in Development Practice, Master in Environment, Sustainable Development and Risks, Master in Environmental Sciences and Policy, Master in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action, Master in International Development, Master in International Economic Policy, Master in International Energy, Master in International Public Management, Master in International Security, Master from the School of Communication, Master in Judicial and Legal Services, Master in Economic Law, Master from School of Journalism, Master in European Affairs, Master in Public Administration, Master in Corporate and Public Management, Master in Economics and Public Policy, Master in Finance and Strategy, Master in Human Resources and Management, Master in Governing the Large Metropolis, Master in Marketing and Studies, Master of Experiments on Arts and Politics, Master of Public Affairs, Master in Regional and Urban Strategies, Master in Urban Planning.

Sciences Po, "Graduate and Postgraduate programmes: Master's, professional schools and doctoral programmes," <http://www.sciencespo.fr/en/content/26/graduate-and-postgraduate-programmes>.

given to [them] during [their] first year, to enter this school” was the reason they chose the public affairs program. The other respondent who chose to study public affairs said he chose it because, “I would like to work in a high political office a little later.” Scholars would take interest in these responses, particularly hearing the phrase “desire to serve France,” from a CEP student. This is largely because a significant hope expressed in much of the literature is the idea that the CEP program will encourage children of immigrants to feel a deeper connection to France.

For the students who were already in a Master’s program, the additional question of “what do you want to do after Sciences Po” was asked. One respondent answered that they wanted to “work in the media sector, beginning by integrating administration and human resources of a media enterprise (newspaper, magazine, television station, production company, etc.)” Another respondent added that they wanted to “work in economic law for their first job as a business lawyer.” A different respondent wrote, “I wish to complete Sciences Po with an LLM degree then pass the bar so that I can become a lawyer.” The interviewee even told me that though he is studying for his Master’s in Finance and Strategy he would actually prefer to be a professor rather than to work in the finance industry.

These responses provide a good idea of what CEP students hope to do after Sciences Po. It appears that CEP students are not concentrating themselves in only a select few postgraduate areas but that they are in fact taking advantage of the curriculum. By doing so now, it is the hope that later these students will help to diversify the Elite by entering not only Finance and Strategy, Human Resources, Economic Law, and Public Affairs, but also Journalism, Urban Planning, Public

Policy, and a host of other fields typically controlled by the French Elite. Most importantly it shows, at least in this small sample, that CEP students are not overwhelmingly choosing Finance and Strategy and other areas based solely on the need to provide financial support to their families. While this concern may of course be on their minds', it does not appear to limit students' professional aspirations.

General Thoughts on CEP

In addition to being asked questions about their experiences before, during, and after Sciences Po, respondents were also asked three questions about their general thoughts on issues relating to the program.

Sabbagh's fear

The first question was on the fear held by some people and raised by Daniel Sabbagh (outlined in chapter one) that because of the CEP program, employers may begin to make distinctions among Sciences Po graduates. The question was posed in this manner, "There is a theory of Daniel Sabbagh, a specialist on CEP, which says that employers may make distinctions between students who were recruited by the CEP program and other students who were recruited by the entrance exam, what do you think of this theory?" The intention behind this question was to determine not only thoughts on this theory but also CEP students' thoughts on how they felt they would be perceived outside of Sciences Po and to determine if they had heard of any CEP graduates who have felt that distinctions were being made.

The overall reaction to this theory was that of doubt. Respondents in general doubted that this phenomenon would play out at all. One respondent said, "I respect it even if I do not share his opinion. We passed the same tests of our schooling. After

that we all have the same diploma.” This sentiment, that after Sciences Po academic differences will be erased, was also shared by another respondent who wrote, “I find that, above all since being in Master’s that the difference between a CEP and non-CEP are erased more and more. I do not see then how the recruiter is going to make this distinction.” A third respondent was also very clear on their thoughts surrounding this question of distinction saying, “I do not think so. I have had a lot of interviews, I have had internships in Parisian cabinets and never have they evoked the admission procedure at Sciences Po.” A fourth respondent had this to say,

I don’t believe it. The employers could and have already made distinctions between those who are of foreign origin and the others or those who come from the banlieues and the others. But at Sciences Po whether you are from CEP, admitted on the concours or on baccalaureate mention, we take the same exams and obtain the same diploma. We leave Sciences Po with the same qualifications.

While these four respondents were very doubtful, other respondents expressed doubt as well but did not appear to have as firm a stance. One such student wrote, “I hope that this will not be true. And I don’t believe it. I do not see how the recruiter could know that one comes from CEP or not. And if it’s the case that would be stupid.” This issue of how the recruiter would know whether a student was CEP or not, is a theme throughout responses. The issue here is not whether the recruiter would know for certain if a student was in the CEP program but to what extent recruiters would try to guess and then make a distinction. Were this fear to play out in the job market, it would largely impact Sciences Po graduates who are people of color, visibly of immigrant background, or have a name that is not traditionally French. The specific fear here is that despite CEP students possessing the same diploma, the existence of the program would have put some recruiters on their guard,

“casting a cloud of suspicion on their [CEP students’] academic performance.”¹²⁶

Although employment discrimination could not be determined for certain, it is nevertheless a consideration.

Another respondent had a positive spin on the question writing, “I think that if this distinction exists, it will play to the advantage of students issuing from CEP because we are as competent as the others, and possess a plus in the field of differences in attitude or in culture. Now, the company looks for a diversified and not-uniform staff.”

With regards to Sabbagh’s fear the interviewee also expressed some optimism, albeit with a hint of pessimism saying,

I don’t think that there is really a big worry. Maybe there will be a fourth [of employers] who will make a distinction but in general they will see that you have a Master’s from Sciences Po, which gives a lot more value to a candidate already... I imagine that there is a little apprehension on the part of the company but I think that in the end it is the schooling that matters because you were at Sciences Po, studied classic courses... But after I say that I have not yet finished my Master’s so when I go looking for work... [he laughed] But I know people who got a job, an internship with no problem... but I’m going to see... I think that there is not a problem.

In general the responses to this question reveal that students are not worried that distinctions will be made between themselves and non-CEP students. They did not report any circumstances of other CEP graduates who have experienced difficulties in the work force either, which is a good sign. In terms of habitus and Bourdieu’s theory on different forms of capital, it appears as if the symbolic capital, the achievements, honors, awards, recognition, prestige, or titles that graduates of grandes écoles share, is working in favor of both CEP and non-CEP students alike.

¹²⁶ Sabbagh, "Affirmative Action at Sciences Po," 54.

Societal Impact of CEP Program

The next question focused on the CEP students' thoughts on the societal impact of the CEP program. It specifically asked, "Do you think that CEP will have an impact on the difficulties that France faces with discrimination, assimilation, and diversity?" This question has roots in the literature on the CEP program, which expresses the belief that the program will be good for French society, helping France to deal with some difficulties surrounding its growing multiculturalism. In particular, this literature suggests that the program may help the children of immigrants to feel more connected to France. I wanted to ask CEP students what they felt about this idea. In general their responses were not very optimistic.

One respondent simply replied, "Very little." Others offered more detailed responses to the same effect. One such respondent wrote,

I do not think that the CEP will have any impact on these difficulties. This procedure absolutely does not resolve the problem, which is at the base. We must act in the neighborhoods for everyone and in priority for those who refuse to evolve. A procedure to take out the best from their original environment can make a way as well, but avoids treating the root of the problem.

This response absolutely reflects the reality of the CEP program which focuses on removing a select few students from ZEP areas rather than concentrating on the base problem. Once more it is the sentiment that while the program does not resolve the problem, it is a start.

Another respondent focused on the long-term effect of CEP writing, "[the CEP] will permit the integration of diverse students often in the spheres which were exclusively white but the impact stays minimum, it will be important when other institutions follow in the footsteps of Sciences Po." This comment brings up the issue

that Sarkozy himself seems to recognize and that Descoings has been saying as well: that Sciences Po cannot diversify the Elite on its own.

A third respondent replied, “It is certain that the CEP, and the students coming from this path, participate in forming a new image of France: a France of ‘all colors.’” Along these lines a fourth respondent wrote that, “Sciences Po shows a great example that can make the men in power rethink.” He also wrote that, “The problem of discrimination must be battled at the national level and in all domains, not just in the realm of the university.”

Taken together, these last three responses speak to the overarching outcome of interest for this thesis, that is, the diversification of the Elite. The idea that respondents believe in some part that the program is helping to diversify professions that have primarily been held by whites and to diversify the image of France is significant.

A fifth respondent focused less on the societal impact of CEP and more so on its impact on their own life, writing, “It’s a beginning, personally that opened horizons to me and I see a lot further for my professional future.”

The final respondent on this question, the interviewee, called CEP a “good example.” He said, “I think that the program is a good example, the program is not really [positive] discrimination based on the color of one’s skin or ethnic origin, it is more so a social question. It’s ‘we are going to search for students of lower-socioeconomic status, of poor neighborhoods,’ so there are students who are black or Arab but there are also quite a few “classic French” students [white] who grew up in the same neighborhood as you and the program is for them too...”

These responses primarily repeat the sentiment that this is a good, even an excellent program. However, it is not quite having the impact on society that scholars hoped for because it is small. One respondent said it best in saying that CEP will be important once other schools follow in Sciences Po's footsteps.

Impact on Students from ZEP Areas

The final general question also speaks to the societal impact of the CEP program and was born out of the literature as well. It asks, "Do you think that the CEP has an impact on students who come from ZEP areas who are not participants in CEP?" Scholars believe that the program will help children of ZEP areas to feel more connected to France, inspiring them that one day they, too, can have the chance to go to Sciences Po. And even if one has missed the chance to do so, the hope is that the program will at least spread the idea that an effort is being made to make France more inclusive for all. Thus, this question was asked in order to learn more about the real effects of the CEP program as opposed to the hopes of scholars.

Two respondents either said that they did not understand the question or replied that they did not know. One respondent who had an opinion on this question wrote, "I think that it [CEP] will have a short term impact: it will sometimes allow them [ZEP/banlieue students] to regain their confidence while participating in an Elite procedure, even if they are not actually selected for Sciences Po. However, in the middle and long-term, the effects of their social environment count more than this brief 'elitist door.'" This response encapsulates sentiments that despite efforts, Sciences Po is still seen as Elitist and that this is a major barrier in the fight against self-selection. It also indicates that in general, the effect of the CEP program on ZEP

students is somewhat brief in comparison to the effects of one's environment. Though this was the one survey respondent to mention the effects of the environment on students, it certainly is a key issue that goes hand in hand with educational reform. Just how can educational reform take place without at least some neighborhood reform as well? Despite the beliefs of policymakers (as expressed in chapter two), educational reform alone will not make immigrants and their descendants feel more of a part of France, nor will it ease discontent. Reforms across the board must take place simultaneously to effect real change in these communities.

Along these lines the interviewee stated that, "I am not sure if there will be a strong impact because there is still a minority who participate in the program who were already good students... so the impact on other students I believe will not be enormous. And me, I didn't know about Sciences Po at all before I went through the concours, before the bac [baccalaureate] so there is still work to make sure that good students know about the program before their last year in high school."

It is interesting to note, however, that some survey respondents felt that the program was having a positive impact on students in ZEP areas. One respondent replied, "Yes, it's a project to bring hope for certain [people]." Another agreed, writing, "Indirectly, yes. They say to themselves that 'He did Sciences Po; I can do other things on the same level, or even better.' Everything works to disinhibit them."

There was one overwhelmingly positive response where the respondent had this to say, "Of course [the CEP has an impact]. The students of CEP of Sciences Po can represent models of success in their neighborhoods. It's a very good thing." This response represents well the hopes of CEP administrators themselves (a subject that

will be revisited in the following chapter), that through seeing current CEP students, others in ZEP areas will be inspired by their positive example.

The opinions on whether the program is having an impact on inhabitants of ZEP areas appear to align at least some with the hopes of scholars. Those outside of CEP benefit from exposure to the alternative admission track, and students see the program as inspiring others to do more. The idea that a lack of inspiration is a problem is a problematic concept given that the lack of diversity in the Elite is less an issue of inspiration and more so an issue of opportunity. Students may want very much to attend Sciences Po or another grande école. However, systemic inequalities still form obstacles and are often insurmountable without at least some intervention in the process of habitus, which permeates the admissions processes at the grandes écoles.

III. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to focus on the role habitus plays in the educational trajectory of CEP students and to what extent, if any, the program is working to correct or minimize the impact of this phenomenon. In an effort to get a raw impression of habitus, students were asked to respond to a survey on topics ranging from the CEP admission process, their social and academic experiences at Sciences Po, their future plans and their general thoughts on CEP.

These responses revealed that habitus is in fact present in varying degrees on all three levels relating to the Sciences Po experience. Yet, in addition to detecting habitus, the larger question that concerns our outcome of interest is whether Sciences Po is in fact breaking habitus to further the goal of diversifying the Elite. The answer is one that often appears throughout French society, “oui, mais...” or, “yes, but...”

What exactly does it mean to break habitus in this situation? Returning to the hypotheses outlined in chapter one, breaking habitus can imply a number of aspects, including proof that graduates have been launched into fields that the Elite occupy, proof that extensive efforts have been made to combat self-selection among students, overwhelmingly positive experiences at Sciences Po, and spread of social, symbolic, and economic capital. Respondents revealed that some of these goals have been reached while changes need to be made to CEP in order to fully realize other goals.

Before Sciences Po

Considering a students' experience before entering Sciences Po, survey results revealed a disturbing manifestation of habitus, namely that students did not learn of CEP, and in some cases Sciences Po, until high school. Students need to learn about the program earlier to avoid self-selection and to adequately prepare for the admission process. Responses also revealed that teachers are important in spreading knowledge of CEP, suggesting that more teachers should focus on planting this seed early on.

We saw that the alternative admission process is working to break habitus by allowing ZEP students to circumvent the traditional admission process. CEP students feel comfortable with this process and confident that it is a fair mode of evaluation. That this new admission process does not require additional financial resources for preparation is in fact a significant break with habitus *for a select number of students*.

Concern with legitimization, or whether outsiders view CEP as compatible with Republican ideals, reappeared in students' responses. Sciences Po has made efforts to make the program appear more legitimate yet one wonders if these efforts will have a negative impact on their main goal to create a fairer system for ZEP students.

The issue of the program's size also reappeared, notably the idea that it needs to expand.¹²⁷ However, if expanding the program means reducing the number of students per high school, this may have unintended social consequences for CEP students. Concern with making the program more legitimate and the program's size are two unresolved issues facing CEP.

At Sciences Po

In the academic realm, students generally reported that it was the lack of general pedagogical knowledge, such as understanding what professors expected, that proved to be the most difficult. For that reason students struggled during their first year academically, but by their second year they figured out what they needed to do to succeed. This was not true for all students, as some either needed to repeat their first year or dropped out completely. Most respondents reported that they had tutors but that they were only used for a short period of time or used more for social support rather than for academic support. In terms of habitus, it appears that students are doing a good job of combating its effects though there was some time spent in the beginning in which students' main priority was adjusting to an elite institution, whereas non-CEP students may not need to spend this time.

The biggest cause of concern with relation to habitus while at Sciences Po is in the realm of the social experience. Although some CEP students appeared to be socially integrated, others appeared to be struggling to make new friends, sticking with only CEP students or focusing more on existing friendships. This poses an issue

¹²⁷ This was mentioned in chapter two when the program was taken to the Court Tribunal of Paris because only some areas were eligible for the special admission track and not others resulting in CEP being ordered to expand the program to more schools.

for the transfer of social capital both ways, between CEP and non-CEP students. Social capital is arguably a crucial element for CEP students to obtain in particular because forming bonds with their Sciences Po peers can also mean making important professional contacts, solidifying one's ties to the Elite.

Responses on academic and social experiences revealed that the first year is the hardest where social factors play a major role in success. Accordingly, more efforts need to be made by Sciences Po to help CEP students better adjust socially.

Post Sciences Po

Although this survey was unable to reach respondents in the job market, from the responses that were received, it appears that CEP students are selecting a variety of professional areas to enter that have been typically occupied by the Elite. Additionally, respondents did not report any information suggesting that they or other CEP students have been discriminated against in the job market. There is some concern that CEP students are overwhelmingly choosing internships over foreign study. Then again, if CEP students have the opportunity to form professional relationships early, this may be preferable given Sabbagh's fear that employers may discriminate against CEP students. Therefore it appears that the stage is being set to diversify the Elite by launching graduates into a variety of fields with little to no obstacles, a big achievement for the program.

General thoughts and conclusion

As relates to the societal impact of the program, in general it is held that the CEP program is a beginning, a small scale fix to a much larger issue. It was not seen by current CEP students, as expected by Sciences Po, to have a substantial impact on

ZEP students. This section also revealed that in terms of Sabbagh's fear most students expressed doubt that employers would begin to make distinctions. Overall students tend to agree, that, while some differences exist between themselves and non-CEP students, upon graduation and entrance into the workforce, these differences cease to be. In terms of habitus, this can be interpreted as faith in the power of symbolic capital (in this case a Sciences Po diploma) to change their life's trajectory.

In conclusion, one returns to the answer "oui, mais." Yes, the program is making big inroads, breaking some manifestations of habitus for select students and overall is a good program. But it needs work and is too small. Though, as one respondent said, "Sciences Po cannot reform all of the French educational system!!"

The next chapter will analyze official materials on CEP and include a discussion on legitimacy efforts on the part of CEP administrators and how the CEP initiative fits in with larger changes currently being made at Sciences Po to make graduates and the school more internationally competitive.

CHAPTER FOUR: DETECTING AND BREAKING HABITUS IN CONVENTIONS EDUCATION PRIORITAIRE: ADMINISTRATORS

“Training the next generation of these elites, which must represent all facets of society, is a crucial challenge. At its own level, Sciences Po has made the decision to help reactivate social mobility. Diversity is an objective that permeates all our strategic decisions...”

-Richard Descoings, Sciences Po President¹²⁸

I. Introduction

As Chapter three analyzed survey responses from current students in the Conventions Education Prioritaire program (CEP), the purpose of this chapter is to discuss CEP from the perspective of the program’s administrators and policymakers. In an effort to better understand to what extent the program is breaking habitus, it is crucial to understand how the administrators view CEP in comparison to how the students experience CEP.

This chapter will include an analysis of a presentation on CEP published by Sciences Po as well as other official information as seen on the school’s website. The presentation, a five page document sent to me by a program administrator, will be the chief focus of this chapter.¹²⁹

This document, titled “Objective: Equal Opportunity, The Priority Education Agreements,” was designed to describe the program to a general French audience,

¹²⁸Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 1.

¹²⁹ I personally contacted Hakim Hallouch, the Diversity Manager of the CEP program, on February 27th. In this initial contact 12 open-ended questions were sent. Monsieur Hallouch replied promising that answers to my questions were being compiled and that the office would get back to me soon. He also included a 5 page presentation on the CEP program in English. After reviewing the presentation I sent a revised list of questions to the CEP office excluding those that were addressed in the presentation with the addition of one new question for a total of 7 open-ended questions on March 8th. I have not received any responses to these questions. While it is regrettable that I do not have any official administrator responses to include, I am not confident that any responses received would have been an open and honest evaluation of the program or deviated at all from the information that Sciences Po has published stating that the program is an all-around success.

and seems especially targeted at those against the program on the grounds that it undermines Republican values. In other words, this presentation both informs the public as well as fends off criticism. With this in mind, the reader should pay particular attention to the wording used in the presentation and to the frequent mentions of the Republic, either by name or by references to its frameworks, such as equality and equal opportunity.

This chapter will be organized around questions that I found useful while analyzing Sciences Po's official stance on the CEP program. In general, the goal of this chapter is to focus on unpacking some of the issues that arise based on how the program is presented versus the realities of the program as experienced by CEP students. The analysis will primarily highlight two themes. First, the extent to which Sciences Po has framed the program to be as legitimate as possible; and second, how the program fits in with the overall goals and initiatives of Sciences Po to become an internationally competitive university.

II. Questions

Why did Sciences Po implement this program?

In our investigation of habitus, this is an important question. The presentation described the reason for implementing the program:

Sciences Po noted the lack of social and cultural diversity in the student intake of the big selective French educational establishments. Four major handicaps are experienced as obstacles to this removal of social barriers...The Priority Education Agreements aim to restore equal opportunity by overcoming simultaneously these four obstacles.¹³⁰

It is intriguing that Sciences Po itself has outlined select obstacles as being the main reasons that the intake at the grandes écoles is not more diverse. With regards to

¹³⁰ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 1.

this thesis, one can rename these four obstacles, referred to by Sciences Po as “social barriers,” as specific forms of habitus that CEP was designed to break or neutralize.

The first obstacle to diversity identified by Sciences Po is that of “the lack of financial resources.”¹³¹ Bourdieu would refer to this as a lack of economic capital. With regards to the traditional admission process, namely the Sciences Po exam, economic capital plays a huge role. As previously mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, one of the reasons that the admission exam is unfair for some students is because it almost requires that students and their families invest a lot of money in preparation materials and courses in order to be competitive candidates. Some sources have placed the cost at around \$8,000 for a nine-month course.¹³² Students from educational priority zones (ZEP) and other economically depressed areas cannot afford such preparation, leaving many unprepared to compete in this process that is widely seen as meritocratic. Consequently, the CEP program is seen by Sciences Po as addressing this issue for some students by offering a track where students of fewer financial means may still be successful.

The second obstacle is “the fact that family and friends are unable to provide specialized information.”¹³³ Bourdieu would refer to this as the lack of culture générale that has historically been associated with the Elite. This phenomenon generally refers to the idea that some students come from the Elite and therefore have access to family and family friends who can offer advice, tips, or information on exam preparation, and even job opportunities later on. In contrast, other students may come from families where no one has gone to college or even sees the importance of

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Langan, "Assimilation and Affirmative Action in French Education Systems," 54.

¹³³ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 1.

going to college, much less a selective university. In this way some students who represent the status quo of the Elite get more of an advantage through acquiring essential skills and ways of being while others are far less prepared. In the traditional admission track this specialized information matters a great deal more than in the CEP's admission process.

The third obstacle is “the social bias linked to the very nature of the selection tests.”¹³⁴ This obstacle is also linked to the concept of general culture as well as social capital. As outlined in chapter two, the traditional Sciences Po concours is composed of five parts which include: an essay on the subject of 20th century history, an analysis of text, a foreign language component, an essay based on a surprise topic, and an oral examination. Though this exam is largely held to be fair for all prospective students, there are some elements of this admission process that work to exclude certain groups of students. The foreign language and history components have been targeted in particular on the grounds that these sections are more difficult for students of immigrant background. In fact, a few of the survey respondents in the previous chapter specifically mentioned that English was a difficult subject area for them even after they have spent some time at Sciences Po.¹³⁵ As a result, the entrance exam has come under fire by Bourdieu and others as reproducing a homogenous Elite. This is perhaps the biggest contribution of the CEP program, to provide a way around this heavily biased admission process for a select number of students.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Sciences Po encourages its students to take academic courses in English. In the class that I took at Sciences Po in English, Education Policies and Social Inequalities, half of the class were students from Sciences Po and the other half were international students, about a third were native English speakers.

The fourth and final obstacle according to Sciences Po is that of the “tendency to self-censorship.”¹³⁶ We have seen this phenomenon before. It refers to the idea that students from Elite families seem to know that they belong to the Elite while students from socio-economically depressed areas and non-Elite families tend to feel that membership in the Elite is out of their reach. This is generally something that develops early on in a student’s educational career.

These are all goals that Sciences Po refers to again and again when discussing the CEP program. And yet, it is interesting to note that the CEP program alone is seen by Sciences Po as the way to fight these obstacles. In other words, Sciences Po has found a major problem with their exam (that of social bias), and created an alternative admission track as not *one* solution to the problem but as *the* solution to the problem. Indeed, there appears to be no further discussion on what else Sciences Po can do to fix the rather large obstacle of social bias that exists in its own entrance exam. The program offers a way around this issue for a select number of qualified students. However, given that the CEP program is still relatively small and thus cannot admit all qualified students, many students each year are not able to enter Sciences Po through any other means. Along these lines one must ask: why did Sciences Po choose to create the CEP program instead of revamping its entrance exam in order to be fairer to all students? This reality seems contrary to its concern for social bias as indicated in the presentation.

Some may argue that because the process has existed for so long, changing a longstanding tradition is unfathomable. Yet the idea of changing the admission process at a prestigious university is certainly not unheard of. In fact, I point to the

¹³⁶ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 1.

recent decision made at England's prestigious All Souls College at Oxford University to change their grueling, centuries old admission process.¹³⁷ This process, which has been used in some form since 1878, consisted of giving applicants three hours to write an essay on one word (usually a noun such as 'death' or 'innocence') given by the admission committee. When asked why the school chose to change the format, the head of the college answered that, "For a number of years, the one-word essay question had not proved to be a very valuable way of providing insight into the merits of the candidates."¹³⁸ While it is true that the All Souls College is a higher academic level¹³⁹ than Sciences Po, the purpose of this comparison is to show that it is possible to change an admission process at an established, selective university. One hopes that in the future Sciences Po will consider following in Oxford's footsteps and change an admission process that they themselves have recognized as discriminatory.

What does the Conventions initiative consist of?

Is CEP only an admission program or does it continue in some way throughout a student's time at Sciences Po (beyond the tutoring program)? Given some of the social and academic difficulties that students stated in the previous chapter, a comprehensive understanding of *everything* that the program entails is particularly helpful. The presentation, however, portrayed the program to be limited to the admission process saying:

They are required to produce a press file on a theme of their choice and defend it before an eligibility jury organized at their school. Eligible candidates are then

¹³⁷ Sarah Lyall, "Oxford Tradition Comes to This: 'Death' (Expound)," *New York Times* 2010.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ This institution is highly selective and not open to undergraduates, only scholars and public leaders.

invited to appear before the admission jury at Sciences Po once the baccalaureate results have been announced.¹⁴⁰

That this was the only information offered on what the program consists of is odd given that there is no mention of any student support once at Sciences Po in place specifically for CEP students. For example, although we know that CEP students are offered tutoring once at the school, there is no mention at all of these services or any others in the presentation.

Why is this? One may argue that this presentation was only meant to be an overview of the program and there was simply not enough space for this information. However, it is more likely that Sciences Po feared that any emphasis on specialized services limited to CEP students, especially academic services, would expose the program to more scrutiny from opponents. This information would also not be ideal alongside data that, once at Sciences Po, CEP students' academic results are "comparable to those of students recruited through other admission procedures." This suggests that once more the choice was made to legitimize the program to a wider audience of both friends and enemies of the program. In addition, administrators generally state that there is no distinction being made between CEP students and other students once at Sciences Po.

What does the program do to advertise itself? / What type of work does Sciences Po do in high schools?

This question is useful to keep in mind in light of a troubling manifestation of habitus that we saw in the previous chapter: students learning of CEP and Sciences Po late in comparison to non-CEP students, too late to effectively prepare for the CEP

¹⁴⁰ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 4.

process and too late to avoid the build-up of self-censorship. Referring specifically to survey respondents, none of these students had heard of the CEP program before high school. Two students stated explicitly that they did not hear about CEP until their last year, and one student only a short time before the CEP admission process. Based on this information it was important to investigate what Sciences Po was doing to spread information on the program and whether there was an effort on their part to introduce the program as early as possible.

It does appear that a variety of efforts are in fact being made to make students aware of the program. To this effect it was mentioned in a section of the presentation titled “restoring the value of work and effort” that,

the program is aimed potentially at all students in the establishment. Information and awareness-raising sessions conducted by local and Sciences Po teams start in the first year of senior high school. The emulation effect encourages students to work harder and many of them pass their baccalaureate with distinction, an outcome that - like selective higher education - they hitherto considered out of their reach.¹⁴¹

It is clear from this response that the first year of high school has been identified as an optimal time to introduce students to the program though in reality (as seen through survey responses) this has not always been the case. Furthermore, this thesis previously explained how late knowledge of CEP and of Sciences Po itself is a form of habitus that works against the very students that this program has chosen to identify. Students need to know about CEP as well as Sciences Po (and other grandes écoles) much earlier than senior high school. This is not only an issue of students having ample time to prepare for the CEP process but also of breaking another form

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

of habitus that Sciences Po itself has identified: that of self-selection or self-censorship often seen through the idea that “grandes écoles are for other people, not me.” In order for students to reach for the goal of entering the Elite and to ultimately diversify the Elite, this mindset of self-censorship needs to be squashed or preferably never allowed to develop. The best way to do this is to push for early exposure, particularly of the CEP program.

Returning to the statement above, it also recalls a point raised in the previous chapter, that of the societal effects of CEP. This excerpt refers specifically to an “emulation effect,” presumably the idea that spreading knowledge of CEP and seeing successful CEP students will encourage all students from ZEP areas to do better. This is problematic because it shifts the focus from the social bias in factors like the admission process and the baccalaureate exam, which typically shuts these students out, to the idea that attending Sciences Po is a matter primarily of inspiration. However troubling this stance is, if this emulation effect is widespread and effective in inspiring students, it is a major achievement for this program. Nevertheless it does not solve the problem of qualified students being shut out of Sciences Po (the CEP program can only admit so many) and the grandes écoles in general.

The presentation also identifies the role of the teacher as being important to the admission process, saying, “They [more diverse recruitment procedures] bring into play high-school teachers who are responsible for a preliminary selection and, in this way, reactivate the crucial role in promotion of social mobility assigned to them by the Third Republic.”¹⁴² It is a strategic move to link the role of the teacher in the CEP

¹⁴² Ibid.

process back to the Republic. In doing so it equates the teacher's role to a civic responsibility and duty as outlined under an earlier French Republic.¹⁴³

In order to better dissect the significance of this link, it is important to unpack the historic role of education and, by extension, the role of the schoolteacher that began in the Third Republic. From 1879 to 1886 Jules Ferry, the French Prime Minister, oversaw massive educational reform. These reforms made primary education for all students free and compulsory as well as put in place the concept of a *laïque*, or secular, school. The goal of the French education system became to teach “all children the benefits of Frenchness, regardless of origin or belief.”¹⁴⁴ In other words the educational system established by the Third Republic focused on unifying a nation under secular, Republican values, with the end result being the making of good citizens. Since these reforms, this model has been used to make citizens of peasants,¹⁴⁵ of native peoples in French colonial holdings,¹⁴⁶ as well as of European immigrants of the French working class.¹⁴⁷ Under this model it was firmly established that in the French Republic, where institutions are based on such principles as meritocracy and equality, social mobility was achieved through education. In this way the burden of ensuring that social mobility was fulfilled has historically fallen on schoolteachers who have long been seen as agents of the Republic.

Even today the teaching profession in France continues to be closely tied to the Republic. In order to become a nationally certified teacher it is necessary to pass an

¹⁴³ France is currently in its Fifth Republic (1958-present). The Third Republic, previously the longest running Republic, was in place from 1870-1940.

¹⁴⁴ Rod Kedward, *France and the French: A Modern History* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 2005), 11.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

extensive exam and to attend a number of classes teaching future educators about their role as civil servants.

While I was in France during the winter of 2011, I had an opportunity to sit in on one of these weekly preparation courses with a French friend who is currently going through the process of becoming a nationally certified teacher. Following a long day of information specifically related to pedagogy, there was an hour long class on the role of the teacher in the Republic where such principles as equality and *laïcité* (secularism) were emphasized. There is also the understanding in this preparation that it is the role of the teacher to educate the next generation of citizens, whereas in the American educational system more emphasis is placed on educating individuals.

As a result, when the CEP presentation refers to such concepts as the teacher having a hand in social mobility and “the education system’s capacity to promote social cohesion” it is firmly rooted both in history and current practice. Moreover, by drawing a clear connection between the Republic and the teacher’s role in the Republic, spreading knowledge of the CEP program falls under the umbrella of a teacher’s general responsibilities as an agent of the Republic. This is another clear example of various practices employed by Sciences Po to legitimize the admission process in the eyes of those who see the program as being opposed to Republican values.

What impact, if any, do you think that the CEP program has had or will have on students from ZEP areas?

This question also relates to the previous question, that of CEP’s societal impact. With the following comment, the program’s administrators further discuss what they see as the role of current CEP students:

Every year, former high-school students admitted to Sciences Po return to their old school and talk about their study experiences. They help diminish the tendency to self-censorship that can be summed up by the phrase: "*Sciences Po isn't for people like me.*"¹⁴⁸

As we saw in the previous section, some CEP students have taken up this challenge of inspiring ZEP students while others are not so sure of the larger impact of the CEP program. In particular, there is uncertainty as to whether it is having a real impact on ZEP students in comparison to the rough environments of the banlieues. It appears that in general the program is placing a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of current CEP students to ensure the societal impact of the program through promoting the message of "I did and you can too!" This ignores the sheer burden of what this would mean for CEP students in practice. It should not be the sole responsibility of CEP students to break down self-censorship.

Given the role of the teachers as agents of the Republic and promoters of social mobility, this burden should be shared by teachers, who need to mention the program early and often, and by Sciences Po, who should target a younger audience of students. CEP students have a number of other issues that they need to focus on in order to ensure their own success at Sciences Po against forms of habitus that threaten to impede progress (i.e. social difficulties, academic adjustment).

Scholarship from women's studies and the working class in academia offer some insight on the complicated, and oftentimes emotional, aspect of crossing social barriers. Donna Langston, a scholar on women's studies, describes the dilemma of

¹⁴⁸ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 2.

class identity as captured in the overall question of “who am I now?”¹⁴⁹ As a student moves from one class to another, this movement may also be accompanied by such feelings as guilt, fear of betraying friends and family, and discomfort in either the world of the Elite (academia) or the working class. Langston states that as someone originally from the working class, she still has fears, even late in her academic life, regarding her social transition. She elaborates, “I fear that my life has changed so much that my own people will not care to recognize me. I fear becoming oblivious to my privilege based on education. I fear becoming no better than middle-class people who look down on my family. I fear that by possessing the privilege of education I can hurt those I care about, unintentionally.”¹⁵⁰ This comment speaks to the internal battles that so many students struggle with as their acquired education allows them to climb the social ladder. Other questions that may haunt these students include: Am I being true to myself? Am I being true to my neighborhood? Where do I belong?

Langston also describes the ongoing need to learn and adapt. For example she highlights how certain behaviors, such as bragging on one’s achievements or being highly competitive with one’s peers, while valued in academia and graduate school, would garner disrespect in working-class environments.¹⁵¹

Another scholar, Laurel Black, describes her experiences as a working-class woman among Elites and her own reality of feeling lost and guilty. She writes, “I feel suspended, dangling... I cannot move among the rich, the condescending, the ones who can turn me into an object of study with a glance or word, cannot speak to them,

¹⁴⁹ Donna Langston, "Who Am I Now? The Politics of Class Identity," in *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*, ed. Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 60.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 66.

live in a house like them, learn their ways, and share them with my family without being disloyal to someone. I thought learning would make it easier for me to protect and defend my family, myself, but the more I learn the harder it is to passionately defend anything.”¹⁵² This also describes the feeling that as one acquires education, there is the risk of complicating one’s life and identity, of needing to straddle two worlds rather than feeling firmly rooted in one.

These are two examples from literature of the unforeseen difficulties that students face when moving across social barriers. A high amount of concentration is required to attract as little attention as possible for one’s difference and to balance internal struggles all while shouldering academic responsibilities.

Thus, by asking students to continually go back to their high schools, Sciences Po is placing these students in the position of constantly needing to negotiate their identities as being from the banlieue with their eventual membership in the Elite. This in particular speaks to the students’ personal struggles reconciling a dramatic transition from their past with their future prospects, a dilemma often faced by students of lower socioeconomic status attending selective private universities. Students may experience a two-way isolation as they struggle with feeling caught in between two worlds, not feeling that they exactly belong to either.

In essence, Sciences Po is relying on some of its most vulnerable students to carry this added burden of selling the Elite to ZEP students. It is better to place this burden squarely on the shoulders of teachers who have historically done the work of

¹⁵² Laurel Johnson Black, "Stupid Rich Bastards," in *This Fine Place So Far from Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*, ed. C.L. Barney Dews and Carolyn Leste Law (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 25.

promoting social mobility and CEP administrators, not CEP students who have their own struggles.

The presentation does go on to mention an unintended, yet welcome effect that the program has had on some high schools. Principals and teachers have reported that the program is having “very beneficial effects for the high schools” by encouraging a “dynamic of work in their establishment and have, in particular, helped improve baccalaureate results and reduce absenteeism.”¹⁵³ This seems to suggest that because knowledge of the program is becoming more widespread, ZEP students are working harder and coming to school more often presumably to become better candidates for the few slots their school has available for the CEP program. This is a good sign for the program and for student achievement. However, it must also be considered that even as students are doing better and increasing their results, there is still no guarantee that this hard work will manifest itself in better opportunities. This is particularly true given that acceptance into Sciences Po or other grandes écoles is still difficult for ZEP students due to the biased nature of admissions processes and the small number of slots per school available through the CEP program.

Moreover, while the program’s administrators are very optimistic about the societal impact of CEP, students seem to be divided. The reality may be that CEP influences some ZEP students, who potentially have the chance to enter the CEP program, while others are not being majorly impacted.

How are CEP students faring once at Sciences Po?

Quite a bit of space in the presentation was dedicated to addressing the concern of how students are doing once at Sciences Po. Because we now know from the previous

¹⁵³ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 2.

chapter a great deal about how students are actually faring once at Sciences Po, it seemed an interesting subject to discuss alongside the administration's perception of how students are faring.

The presentation comments on both the academic and social experiences of students. On CEP students' academic experience it reports, "Once at Sciences Po, their [CEP students'] academic results are comparable to those of students recruited through other admission procedures: 9 out of 10 students are admitted directly into the next year."¹⁵⁴ Two points are key in this fact: first, that the majority of CEP students are doing well at Sciences Po, but second, that repeating one's first year may be slightly more common than we were able to discern from the interviewee. Because the statistic is phrased in this way (9 out of 10) and not in percentages, it is difficult to determine to what extent students are actually continuing on to the next year directly.

However, as stated earlier in this chapter, the presentation was published for a wide audience and subsequently tried to avoid scrutiny by publishing results that reflected widespread success. This is certainly not to say that the program has been unsuccessful. This is simply to say that if there are areas that the program has identified as needing improvement it is unlikely that it would appear in such a document. Indeed, there is no information suggesting that the program is less than perfect in the presentation, which is to be expected.

On the social experience the presentation reports that there has been, "Full social integration: student organizations, conference delegates, etc."¹⁵⁵ This is curious given that we have heard from survey respondents that not all students feel that they are

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ "etc." provided by Sciences Po presentation

fully socially integrated. This is problematic mainly because if Sciences Po wrongly feels that there is full social integration, it is unlikely that there will be any efforts to make this a reality. Whether Sciences Po is aware or not that some CEP students struggle socially is debatable, but even if they were aware, again it is unlikely that this would be discussed in this presentation that is available to a wide audience.

The presentation goes on to add in a section titled “Exemplary integration and academic success” that, “the students benefitting from the Priority Education Agreements (what the program is referred to in the English version) participate fully in student life. As conference delegates and active members or leaders of student associations, they contribute to the diversity of viewpoints.”¹⁵⁶ This suggests that social integration is only measured by membership in organizations and being a delegate for the school. This is troubling because there appears to be no information on how happy students are with their social experience. CEP students can be in charge of student organizations and still feel alienated from the school’s mainstream population. For example, through this measurement of social integration, a student who is in charge of the school’s African Student Union rather than the school’s student association is still considered fully integrated. As we discovered in the previous chapter through survey responses, social integration has a huge impact on the academic experience of CEP students. Specifically we saw that during the first year social difficulties sometimes translated into academic difficulties. Social integration also includes the spread of social capital and “specialized integration,” where CEP students can benefit from being fully integrated and not only learn the ropes of the Elite but also make important contacts. By making sure that CEP

¹⁵⁶ Program, “Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements,” 2.

students are actually socially integrated, the entire experience at Sciences Po will benefit.

This presentation also brags that the program has expanded from reaching out to 7 high schools in 2001 to 85 high schools in 2011, with more schools being added each year. However, the expansion of the program may have unintended consequences for CEP students in the social realm. As the program expands, fewer slots will be available for each high school. Given that some of the more socially successful CEP students are so because they have been able to carry over friendships from high school to Sciences Po, there is a chance that more and more students will be the only ones from their high schools, causing them to struggle socially. There is no evidence from the presentation that Sciences Po is connecting expansion of the program to wider consequences for CEP students, in particular their social experiences.

Daniel Sabbagh has expressed the fear of others that over time, employers will begin to make distinctions between Sciences Po graduates who are assumed to have entered through the CEP admission process and those who have not. What are your thoughts on this theory?

From student survey responses we know that in general there is a great deal of doubt surrounding Sabbagh's fear. Students felt that there would not be any discrimination on the part of the employers. Based on the CEP presentation it appears that administrators agree.

In the first of two sections on the career trajectories of CEP students, the presentation states that, "graduates find professional openings in Sciences Po's traditional sectors of recruitment represented primarily by banks and financial institutions, consulting and audit firms, the press and media, and a wide range of companies. Many of these young professionals have found openings outside of

France.”¹⁵⁷ The presentation also goes on to discuss other areas that CEP students enter following graduation, stating that, “some of them pursue their studies, either after a reorientation (change of master's, further internships, a catch-up or gap year) or go on to post-graduate studies (doctorate, preparation for competitive civil service examinations).”¹⁵⁸ These statements essentially indicate that CEP students’ career paths are no different from Sciences Po students entering through traditional means. In doing so, administrators also speak to the issue of diversifying the Elite; if CEP students are entering the same professions as those who typically make up the Elite, they are in fact diversifying fields typically occupied by the Elite.

The presentation suggests that CEP students are not just diversifying the Elite but are also becoming key decision makers saying that, “Five CEP students have been elected to Municipal Councils (Colombes, Saint-Ouen, Bobigny and Bondy) where they exercise important responsibilities.”¹⁵⁹ Yet even as the purpose of this section is to outline the positive trajectories of CEP students, it is titled, “The Right not to be screened.”

The idea of screening specifically refers to access racism and discrimination that many ethnic minorities and immigrants face in the areas of housing and employment. In this context, screening refers to employers choosing tenants or employees based on their ethnic or cultural background. For example, in the job market screening may refer to employers skipping over the resumes of applicants with names that are not traditionally French. In the area of housing a common example of screening is landlords agreeing to rent an apartment over the phone but retracting this decision

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

upon seeing a tenant in person if they are of an ethnic or cultural background that the landlord deems undesirable. As described in chapter two, access racism, or discrimination in employment, housing, and provision of goods and services, has been singled out as a major dynamic working to create inequalities throughout French society. This phenomenon has been blamed for making the life of an immigrant and person of color in France largely associated with poverty, fewer employment opportunities, poor housing, and, of particular interest to this thesis, educational inequality.¹⁶⁰ By naming this section the “Right not to be screened,” Sciences Po is making a reference to the social problem of screening while simultaneously showing how a Sciences Po diploma (in part due to its powerful symbolic capital throughout French society) can help classic victims of screening overcome this reality. In essence, this section demonstrates how a Sciences Po diploma works as a tool, equipping graduates to reach the highest levels of French society, no matter their background.

In addition, we know from survey responses on the subject of Sabbagh’s fear that one student expressed the idea that if there is any discrimination on the part of employers, it will be in CEP students’ favor given that companies are looking to diversify their staff. In the second section of the presentation dedicated to discussing CEP students’ career paths, titled “a firm commitment on the part of the business world,” it is clear that CEP administrators whole-heartedly agree with the idea that diversity has become a focus for companies. This section states that,

there is a genuine demand from business organizations for a more diverse recruitment pool, and in this respect they are often in advance of higher education itself. This demand serves their economic interests but also their desire to be a

¹⁶⁰ Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policy-Making Since the 1960s*.

"responsible corporate citizen" involved in such issues as sustainable development, which encompasses both social and environmental aspects.¹⁶¹

This section thus frames diversity as a need that companies have, which Sciences Po fulfills. In doing so, the CEP program is being framed not as an "extra" or "unnecessary" initiative but more so as an effort to keep up with the demands of the corporate world. The section specifically lists a group of companies that have become partners with Sciences Po on their CEP initiative, companies such as BNP Paribas, la Banque Palatine, Bouygues, Coca-Cola, Deloitte, EDF, ELIOR, la Fondation du Grand Orient de France, GDF-Suez, Gemalto, HSBC, IBM, L'Oréal, SFR Cégétel, la Société Générale, Total, were listed. This framing of the need for diversity and the inclusion of the names of top international companies should remind the reader of earlier efforts to legitimize the program.

While this is clearly an effort to legitimize and sell the program to a wider audience, framing of this initiative under corporate needs is in fact very much in line with the global initiatives of Sciences Po. Since the beginning of his Presidency, Richard Descoings has implemented changes to make Sciences Po more internationally competitive. This goal is given a great deal of space on the Sciences Po website, which highlights Sciences Po as an international university with an international focus and an international network.¹⁶² Sciences Po wants to be recognized as a premier university on an international level through its research as well as its education programs.

¹⁶¹ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 4.

¹⁶² Sciences Po, "An international University: Competitiveness and an international focus," <http://www.sciencespo.fr/en/content/9/international-university>.

The goal of making Sciences Po more international has manifested itself in a number of changes. One is making Sciences Po's student body more internationally diverse. To this effect the school points out on their website that about 40% of its more than 10,000 students have "a nationality other than French and come from 130 different countries."¹⁶³ This percentage most likely includes students from other European countries, international students, as well as students from the CEP program. In addition, there are massive efforts to help students achieve fluency in English and one or more of the other 15 world languages taught.¹⁶⁴ This goal of becoming more international has ultimately translated to a more corporate Sciences Po. In this way producing graduates who are both diverse or who have been exposed to diversity (as realized through the CEP program), allows Sciences Po graduates to better compete on an international scale as well as to satisfy corporate needs. Ultimately this framing situates CEP within the general direction of Sciences Po rather than something detrimental or contrary to what is good for the entire Sciences Po community. As Richard Descoing stated in the opening quote of this chapter, "Diversity is an objective that permeates all our (Sciences Po's) strategic decisions."

III. Conclusion: Additional questions and considerations

This chapter has provided a general overview of CEP from the point of view of program administrators based on the analysis of a presentation on CEP and other official sources. The presentation provides a good understanding of where administrators stand on a number of aspects of the program.

¹⁶³ ———, "Students, research, faculty and programmes: key facts and figures," <http://www.sciencespo.fr/en/content/11/facts-figures>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Though the presentation provided a good overview of the program, it still left quite a few questions regarding the administrator's stance unanswered. How does Sciences Po help incoming students adapt to the social and academic climate at Sciences Po, particularly during the first year? Should the admission process be changed or improved? Is the recent initiative suggested by President Sarkozy, which challenges the grandes écoles system to reach for 30% of scholarship students by 2012, feasible? What are Sciences Po's thoughts on the impact of the CEP program within the greater context of France's difficulties with discrimination, assimilation, and diversity? And crucially, is Sciences Po making any efforts to revamp (reduce as much social bias as possible) the traditional admission process to be more accessible to all students? These questions and many more remain unanswered, speaking to the extensive efforts Sciences Po makes to guard information on CEP.

For now it is important to focus on the questions that the presentation does answer. In general the tone of the presentation, and by extension that of the administrators, implies total success. The presentation begins with outlining the four main obstacles facing students that the program seeks to address and then details how CEP has neutralized these obstacles, ending with other achievements of the program. Among the main successes, it states that the program has diversified the student population at Sciences Po, that these students are doing well both academically and socially, that these students have gone on to become employed at Elite companies, and even that the program has been successful in inspiring ZEP students through the emulation effect. Given the survey responses from the previous chapter, we know that on some level, this is all true.

However, we also know that this presentation does not quite reflect the reality of the program. The biggest difference between administrator and student accounts of the program is that students are not well integrated socially and that this actually creates problems for them academically. More efforts need to be made to integrate the school socially on both sides.

In addition, though efforts are being made to raise awareness of CEP among students from ZEP areas, in order to be the most effective, awareness efforts should begin as early as possible. Additionally, the burden should be placed primarily on high school teachers and administrators and on Sciences Po, not on current CEP students who have their own concerns to focus on.

Through this presentation we have also been able to detect the recurring theme of efforts to legitimize the program such as drawing a link between the role of the teacher in the CEP process and the Third Republic and also the overall internationalization and corporatization of Sciences Po. Additionally, there is no mention of the special tutoring that CEP offers or of any other services extended specifically to CEP students. As stated elsewhere, this is most likely due to the intended audience of the presentation that will include both proponents and opponents of the program.

Finally, though the four obstacles have somewhat been bypassed with the creation of the CEP program for some students, it is still small and does not solve a larger, continuing problem- that of the social bias inherent in the Sciences Po entrance exam. Even as the presentation admits that this is an issue, there appears to be no indication that additional reforms will be made to remove social bias on a larger scale at

Sciences Po. It seems that, at Sciences Po, the CEP is not just *a* solution but *the* solution for fixing the “lack of social and cultural diversity.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 1.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

"The grandes écoles are not reserved for a few insiders, or the children of the old bourgeoisie...these schools are for everyone, as long as you work, as long as you have talent."

- Nicolas Sarkozy, French President¹⁶⁶

I. Introduction

This thesis has sought to explore the efficacy of the positive discrimination program in place at Sciences Po known as Conventions Education Prioritaire (CEP) and specifically to answer the question: has the program been successful in diversifying the French Elite? Throughout this investigation the concept of habitus has been discussed as a main obstacle to this goal. This investigation has also led us to explore both the extent of the problem (the overwhelming lack of diversity in the Elite) as well as the historical and societal forces that both create and perpetuate habitus. Then, in analyzing the CEP program, we have heard from both current CEP students as well as program administrators.

This last chapter marks the conclusion of this thesis and offers a summary of the chief argument and principal findings, policy recommendations, and the broader implications of this project. It will then conclude with a discussion on the question: how far can France go in the democratization of the grandes écoles? This discussion will also be helpful to better situate the CEP program for the reader. For this last question, our discussion will primarily focus on the recent initiative begun by President Nicolas Sarkozy to increase the number of scholarship students at the

¹⁶⁶Expatica, "Sarkozy Gets Tough with Elite Schools,"(2010),
http://www.expatica.com/be/news/belgian-news/Sarkozy-gets-tough-with-elite-schools_59112.html

grandes écoles to 30% in the next two years as well as a general discussion on change and the Republican model.

II. Argument Summary and Principal Findings

As stated in the first chapter of this thesis, the CEP program has already been successful in achieving one important outcome, that of diversifying Sciences Po. Statistics published by Sciences Po have from the beginning declared that the CEP program's alternative admission process has allowed a socioeconomically diverse group to enter the school each year since 2001. Any piece of literature published on the program proudly states that, "every year, some 50-70% of CEP students admitted are the children of the unemployed, manual laborers or salaried employees, $\frac{3}{4}$ of whom are awarded scholarships."¹⁶⁷ We also know from Sciences Po literature on CEP that, "2/3 of those admitted have at least one parent born outside France."¹⁶⁸ Due to the constraints of the French Republican framework of color-blindness, the program cannot confirm racial diversity, however these statistics suggest that the program is also diversifying the school racially. Indeed, six out of the seven respondents to this thesis' survey were the children of parents born in Africa.

The fact that Sciences Po's admission statistics are more racially and socio-economically diverse is a great achievement for the program. Yet, this fact alone was not sufficient in addressing the question of whether the program has been effective in diversifying the French Elite. That is to say that providing statistics on which students are being admitted says very little about how ZEP students discovered and entered

¹⁶⁷ Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements," 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Sciences Po, the quality of their experience once there, and what their post-Sciences Po experiences may be like.

Along these lines, this thesis has argued that in order to diversify the Elite it is not only necessary to create a reliable path of entry into Sciences Po and other grandes écoles (such as the CEP program) for underrepresented groups. It is also imperative to break forms of habitus that often unfold before, during, and after a student's time at these schools which may prevent them from ultimately diversifying the Elite. Therefore, this thesis focused on whether Sciences Po was helping to break or neutralize habitus, a phenomenon that must be overturned in several areas to ultimately pave the way for the diversification of the Elite.

Is Sciences Po ultimately breaking or neutralizing habitus? This investigation, which sought to answer this question on three key levels- before, during, and after a student's time at Sciences Po- led to the previously stated answer of "oui, mais" or "yes, but." In other words, the program has shown that it is breaking some forms of habitus but not all.

In the realm of a student's time before Sciences Po, the university reports that efforts are being made to alert ZEP students to the program during their first year of high school and to involve successful CEP students and teachers in this process. This is an important step given that early exposure is key to making sure that one big aspect of habitus is foiled, that of self-censorship or self-selection in students. In reality, a majority of the students surveyed reported that they had not heard of the program until late in their high school career, an issue that needs to be more fervently addressed. In addition, more weight should be placed on Sciences Po and teachers to

advertise the program rather than heavily relying on CEP students. However, it is clear that the CEP admission process is working very well with students describing it as either “good” or “excellent” in its ability to challenge and engage them.

Once at Sciences Po, in the academic realm, habitus was also found to be present yet short-lived. Students reported that they struggled mostly during their first year until they learned what their professors expected of them. It is troubling that students are losing time during their first year while they learn how to adapt academically. Even more so, some students fail their first year or opt to leave the school entirely. Socially, students generally reported that they have friends outside of the CEP program and feel welcomed by the majority of the student body. However, during the first year students reported that adjusting to the social environment proved difficult and may have had an effect on their academic experience. In general there does not appear to be full social integration as Sciences Po has indicated in official materials.

Regarding a student’s experience right before entry into the Elite, the effects of habitus are limited. It appears that students are choosing to enter a wide range of professional fields typically occupied by the Elite, setting the stage to diversify the Elite. In addition, respondents did not report any information suggesting that they or other CEP students have been discriminated against in the job market.

That students are not being discriminated against in the job market is a big achievement for the program and suggests that it is helping some students overcome the effects of screening. With the ultimate goal of ensuring the diversification of the Elite in mind, this is significant and proof that the program has been successful in this area.

However, it is clear that along the lines of habitus and the CEP program, the building of social capital (as acquired through true social integration) still needs some work. With regards to symbolic capital we have seen that students feel comfortable with the value of their diploma in the job market, despite Sabbagh's fear that employers will discriminate against CEP graduates. As far as economic capital is concerned, this cannot really be obtained through efforts at Sciences Po, but through symbolic capital as expressed in a Sciences Po degree. Ultimately, the program is breaking or neutralizing some forms of habitus, and some changes need to be made to reach other forms. Still, there is very little that this program, and arguably any program, can do to reach other forms. The next section will include several policy recommendations for the CEP program.

For now, we will turn to the question: is the CEP program diversifying the Elite? This investigation suggests that the answer is in fact yes, the program is making strides towards diversifying the Elite. With regards to Sabbagh's fear, given that students will in the end have the same diploma or symbolic capital as non-CEP students, employers will most likely not make distinctions between Sciences Po grads. As was stated by Sciences Po and one survey respondent, CEP students may even have a greater advantage over non-CEP students as employers are beginning to seek diversity for their staffs in order to be more globally competitive. In addition, the fact that CEP students are choosing a wide range of professional areas to enter is encouraging and suggests that socioeconomic and racial diversity, at least in small amounts, will begin to appear in future generations of the Elite. All things considered, CEP is a good to excellent program. However, as survey respondents indicated, the

program is still too small to make a large impact on the face of the Elite, though it is making some important strides.

III. Policy Recommendations

Although this program is a good one, during the course of this research project several areas of the program have continually surfaced as needing special attention. As a result, the following policy recommendations have been compiled with the intention of improving the program for future students. These policy recommendations will focus on changes to be made before and during a student's time at Sciences Po.

Although the CEP program is doing some work in high schools, these policy recommendations suggest that more can and should be done. In thinking of a student's time before the university level, one of the biggest forms of habitus is that of self-censorship, self-selection, or the idea that a grande école education is out of one's reach. One way that Sciences Po has sought to combat this is to reach out to students during their first year of high school. Yet we have seen that even CEP students themselves admit that in some cases they did not hear about Sciences Po, much less the CEP program, until their last year of high school. Even if Sciences Po reaches students in their first year of high school, this is still too late to avoid the buildup of self-censorship. To remedy this, I propose reaching out to students as early as the first year of middle school.

As in high school, this initiative should primarily fall on the shoulders of the teacher. As teachers begin to encourage students from this early age that they can one day attend Sciences Po and other grandes écoles, the phenomenon of self-censorship

will not be allowed to develop. Although we have discussed that the CEP program is too small to accommodate all qualified ZEP students, this early combat of self-censorship may help some students to succeed in the traditional admission process, despite the recognized social bias. Specifically, students will have more time to begin tailoring their own academic experiences toward becoming a competitive applicant and can begin honing certain skills with which this group typically struggles, namely the English language and the history portion of the exam. By focusing on younger ZEP students as well, big strides can be made in the fight against self-censorship.

In addition, efforts can be made at the pre-university level to minimize the effects of the first year learning curve. As has been observed from survey respondents, for many CEP students the first year is academically difficult. Although students usually come to understand what is expected of them in this area by their second and third year, it appears that quite a bit of time is dedicated to academic adjustment during this time, potentially distracting students from social adjustment as well.

To flatten this first year learning curve, I propose that the CEP program include a summer institute for admitted CEP students. In this type of initiative, CEP students would spend part of their summer on the Sciences Po campus and attend workshops taught by Sciences Po professors and administrators on such topics as time management, note taking, giving and creating presentations and exposés, introducing academic resources, and even take some academic classes. The hope is that once school starts, CEP students will not waste time or suffer academically while they try to figure out what is expected of them at this selective university. They can spend time getting to know their fellow students and excelling academically from the very

beginning. In other words, an initiative such as this could help break a big form of habitus- that which keeps students from non-Elite backgrounds behind.

Though this program would clearly be beneficial to CEP students, it is unlikely to be put in place. Why? In thinking back on the presentation analyzed in chapter four that greatly emphasized legitimizing the program (with mentions of the role of the teacher as outlined in the Third Republic, involvement of corporate partners in CEP, etc.) to opponents who say that CEP is against Republican values, such an initiative, if made public, could be harmful to the program. It would force Sciences Po to make a formal distinction between its CEP and non-CEP students as well as exposing the school and CEP students to the criticism that if CEP students need extra help they should not be there. This reasoning ignores the fact that the purpose of the CEP program is largely to compensate for a system that excludes worthy students due to social bias and other forms of habitus. Even so, the program cannot afford a fresh round of opposition and lawsuits.

A way to establish a summer initiative to help CEP students while circumventing this criticism is to open the program to non-CEP students as well. In fact, allowing both CEP and non-CEP students to participate in a summer initiative would also allow for more social interaction between these groups, creating friendships that would transfer to the school year and throughout a student's time at Sciences Po. One example of this strategy in practice is found at the University of California at Berkeley. This university has implemented a program called the "Freshman Edge," in which any incoming freshman may participate. On its website, UC Berkeley advertises the program as a way for students to take popular classes, get a head start

on their college career, save money, get to know the campus, meet their fellow freshman, and get used to campus life.¹⁶⁹ Other selective American universities have implemented similar programs for their incoming freshmen.

Despite the difficulties that Sciences Po may face were it to establish such a program, it is clear that a summer institute would be very beneficial indeed in helping to flatten the first year learning curve. Such an initiative may also help to retain students given that, as mentioned by the interviewee, some students end up either repeating their first year or dropping out for good. As is, at 9 out of 10, the retention rates for CEP students are good. But if students are dropping out because of social discomfort or academic difficulties, with more academic and social support these retention rates can be even better.

Focus on defeating early forms of self-censorship and establishing summer institutes to prepare CEP students for Sciences Po are just two policy recommendations geared towards helping students before matriculation. The next set of policy recommendations are geared specifically towards improving the program for students once at Sciences Po.

From survey responses we saw that in addition to some academic difficulties during the first year, perhaps an even bigger issue were social difficulties, which in turn affected academic experiences. CEP students reported that although the vast majority of the student body was welcoming, it was difficult to find their way socially. In light of this information, this thesis recommends that more efforts be made on the part of Sciences Po to make social integration a top priority. I know

¹⁶⁹University of California Berkeley, "Berkeley Summer Sessions," <http://summer.berkeley.edu/freshman/description>.

firsthand that this sort of initiative is possible. As an international student at Sciences Po last year, there were quite a few events organized to introduce international students to each other as well as to Sciences Po students. This initiative can be copied to help encourage CEP and non-CEP students to form social bonds. Throughout this thesis we have discussed how social mixing can benefit both CEP and non-CEP students alike. CEP students will benefit from the transference of social capital, specifically certain mannerisms and skills typified by the Elite. This is important because these traditional Elite characteristics are not yet obsolete; CEP students need to develop these skills in order to break into the Elite. Likewise, non-CEP students can benefit from the exposure to CEP students, not just in classrooms but also as their friends. The benefits of social integration work both ways.

Additionally, with regards to social adjustment, survey respondents generally reported that the tutoring program was either not very helpful or also used for social support. Therefore another policy recommendation is to revamp the tutoring program to include an actual social component. Rather than the emphasis being placed solely on tutors helping with academic issues, a mentor program can also be established involving pairings of either two CEP students or mixed pairings of CEP and non-CEP students. During my time at Sciences Po a similar initiative was used by a student group to encourage mixing between international and French students. The fact that this idea has been used previously establishes the fact that conscience social mixing is not an unfamiliar concept to Sciences Po students.

The final policy recommendation may in fact be the most important, as it speaks to why the CEP program exists in the first place, which is due to the social bias of the

traditional admission process. Therefore this thesis calls for Sciences Po to reconsider its overall admission process. In chapter four in particular, it was noted that Sciences Po named the “social bias linked to the very nature of the selection tests” as a reason for CEP’s existence. Even so, there have been no reported efforts on the part of Sciences Po to change its exam. A change in this exam could potentially put students on a more level playing field. If some students have specialized information changing the exam could force everyone to start at square one. However, changing the exam is a complicated matter. Any change must take into account that some students will still have almost limitless financial resources to dedicate toward preparing for such an exam. In addition, one must consider that once more the Republican model plays a role, this time the idea of meritocracy. Changing an exam, which in the eyes of many is already seen as ensuring meritocracy, to be more meritocratic could trigger an uproar. Finally, given that Sciences Po is a selective institution, administrators would need to ensure that a new exam selects those who are worthy of entrance.

There is also the question of reducing the importance of the exam or doing away with an exam altogether and forming a committee to select students much in the same way that entrance into American universities, even selective ones, are decided. This approach obviously has its own limits, given that it allows universities much more leeway and an air of mystery as to who is admitted and who is not, which can prove to be problematic. All this is to say that while revamping the entrance exam and traditional admission process may be a good idea, it is also a complicated one.

Whether Sciences Po decides to design a new overall admission process or maintains its current process while running the CEP program concurrently, the

aforementioned policy recommendations may be helpful in ensuring that Sciences Po's efforts to diversify the Elite are more effective.

IV. Broader Implications: Why is this thesis important?

The two main contributions of this thesis are that it has provided a rare glimpse behind the curtain of the Conventions Education Prioritaire (CEP) program and has helped discern whether CEP has been successful in diversifying the Elite.

As has been noted throughout this investigation, specifically throughout chapters three and four, that Sciences Po carefully guards information on this program. Although this could be for a variety of reasons, the most likely reason is that the program is still highly contested by some who insist that the program goes against Republican values and is damaging the image of the Elite by lowering standards for admission. Because of this opposition, and for the reason that it is illegal to collect statistics on race in France, Sciences Po cannot and will not go in detail about certain aspects of CEP. Thus, this thesis has filled in some of this valuable information on the program. We now know more about the students in the program, what is working in the program, areas that can be improved, as well as to what extent the program is breaking habitus, setting the stage for the diversification of the Elite.

While the program is relatively small in its impact, it has caught the attention of President Sarkozy. This has inspired efforts to diversify the French Elite on a larger scale, a point that will be discussed in more detail in the following section. This is to say that the CEP program is still a very current affair in France and as the program continues to expand, more information will surface on the realities of the program, adding to the work of this thesis.

V. How far can France go in the democratization of the grandes écoles?

The CEP program is in fact one part of the ongoing debate in educational literature and indeed in French society of just how far can France go in the democratization of selective higher education, specifically at the grandes écoles. The final section of this thesis will situate the CEP program within this larger debate and within a larger trend throughout French society, that of change working both against and with the Republican model.

For his part, the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, thinks that France can go much farther in democratizing the French Elite. Inspired in part by the CEP program, in the summer of 2010 Sarkozy prodded the Conference of Grandes Ecoles, some 200 Elite institutions, to commit to increasing their number of scholarship students to 30% by 2012 or risk losing some federal funding. Several reasons have surfaced regarding why Sarkozy decided to implement such a reform. One significant issue involves the international competitiveness of the French higher education system.¹⁷⁰ Sarkozy has maintained against critics that the system of selecting Elites is not helping France to win on an international level and thus needs to be reformed. In this way efforts to alter the intake of the grandes écoles also fall into line with other initiatives that Sarkozy has implemented to make France known for its educational innovation. As we saw in chapter four, making France internationally competitive has also been very much on the mind of Richard Descoings as well.

¹⁷⁰Jane Marshall, "How Sarkozy is Forcing Reform on a Reluctant Establishment," *The Independent*(2010), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/schools/how-sarkozy-is-forcing-reform-on-a-reluctant-establishment-2014821.html>.

Other reasons behind the reform include efforts to break down social barriers,¹⁷¹ efforts to better integrate second and third generation immigrants, and right down to the idea that Sarkozy simply hates grandes écoles having himself been rejected from Sciences Po.¹⁷² In a statement attributed to Sarkozy, he justified the need for the reform saying that, “a nation training its elite from only the top 10 per cent of the population is depriving itself of the talents of 90 per cent of its young people.”¹⁷³ This suggests that the diversification of the Elite was also taken into account during his decision making process.

Unsurprisingly Sciences Po has jumped on board with this initiative with President Richard Descoings leading the fight. Yet, as we have seen throughout this thesis, it is not enough that Sciences Po is making strides towards diversifying the Elite, it needs help to penetrate areas of the Elite that it does not train graduates to enter, specifically math, engineering, and the sciences. Unfortunately, the vast majority of grandes écoles have not been quick to follow in Sciences Po’s footsteps. Backlash against Sarkozy’s initiative began soon after it was proposed. The Conference of Grandes Ecoles (CGE) has butted heads with the Ministry of Education and Sarkozy on this initiative calling it a quota system and arguing that it would “lead inevitably to a lowering of standards.”¹⁷⁴ To this particular criticism the

¹⁷¹Henry Samuel, "Nicolas Sarkozy faces revolt from elite French colleges," *The Telegraph*(2010), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/6941075/Nicolas-Sarkozy-faces-revolt-from-elite-French-colleges.html>.

¹⁷²Charles Bremner, "France’s elite colleges rise up in revolt against Nicolas Sarkozy," *The Times and the Sunday Times*(2010), <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6976985.ece>.

¹⁷³ Marshall, "How Sarkozy is Forcing Reform on a Reluctant Establishment".

¹⁷⁴ Samuel, "Nicolas Sarkozy faces revolt from elite French colleges".

Minister of Education Luc Chatel has said, “To suggest that standards would be lowered by admitting students from poorer backgrounds is profoundly shocking.”¹⁷⁵

Another point of contention is the reality that the grandes écoles, an entity that traditionally has been in charge of their own decision making and not under the jurisdiction of the State, is also an entity which receives federal funding. Until now, this has not been an issue. The grandes écoles have accepted state funding and the state has stayed out of internal decision making, with the exception of schools with a specific state function like Ecole Polytechnique’s ties to the French military. The issue now is that the State is using its power as a funder for the grandes écoles to direct policies. Many grandes écoles have been reluctant to allow the government such power over their schools.¹⁷⁶ These grandes écoles have gone even further, evoking an argument that sounds very similar to that of Sabbagh’s fear that: “The move [30% initiative] would inevitably cast doubt in the minds of potential employers on the validity of a college's final diploma. The colleges must remain the preserve of a "veritable Republican elite".”¹⁷⁷ This statement shows that many associate the democratization and diversification of the French Elite with the lowering of standards and endangerment of the “veritable Republican elite.”

Individual heads of grandes écoles have also publically come out against the initiative. The head of Polytechnique, a grande école for engineering established under Napoleon and still associated with the French military, seemed uneasy about the initiative saying, “We don’t want to bring students into school who risk failing,”

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Marshall, "How Sarkozy is Forcing Reform on a Reluctant Establishment".

¹⁷⁷ Samuel, "Nicolas Sarkozy faces revolt from elite French colleges".

he said. "You can get lost very quickly."¹⁷⁸ Polytechnique currently has only 10 percent of students on scholarships.¹⁷⁹ Another example comes from the head of the business school ESSEC who is also the chairman of the CGE, Pierre Tapie. He came out against the initiative saying, "We cannot be the scapegoat of any demagogic decision because we are the finest and most famous part of the whole system."¹⁸⁰ This may be seen as an odd response given that ESSEC has already made efforts towards inspiring ZEP students with the creation several years ago of a high school mentoring program titled, "Why Not Me?" referring to the tendency toward self-censorship. However rather than seeing this as an odd response, it is more likely that some grandes écoles would like to make smaller changes on their own terms rather than take part in large scale initiatives. Whatever their stance may be, it appears that some of the main opponents to the diversification of the Elite may be the heads of the grandes écoles themselves.

Throughout this debate Richard Descoings has emerged as a committed proponent of the initiative. In one statement he accused the other grandes écoles of wanting to protect the privileges of the current Elite saying, "This is an antisocial reaction par excellence. So, intelligence, intellectual curiosity, a capacity for work are supposed to be attributes only of the rich?"¹⁸¹ For this defense Descoings has been personally attacked with one television and radio commentator referring to him as a "closet Trotskyite who wanted to demolish French excellence and republican traditions."¹⁸² This entire debate, which has unfolded in the news during the past year, shows very

¹⁷⁸Erlanger, "Top French Schools, Asked to Diversify, Fear for Standards."

¹⁷⁹Bremner, "France's elite colleges rise up in revolt against Nicolas Sarkozy".

¹⁸⁰Erlanger, "Top French Schools, Asked to Diversify, Fear for Standards."

¹⁸¹Samuel, "Nicolas Sarkozy faces revolt from elite French colleges".

¹⁸²Bremner, "France's elite colleges rise up in revolt against Nicolas Sarkozy".

clearly that the attempt to reform the grandes écoles has not been easy and has of course involved discussion of the Republican model. Despite their misgivings, the Council of Grandes Ecoles eventually signed the Charter of Equal Opportunity committing them to increasing their number of scholarship students to 30%. However it is important to note that this commitment came only after the government renamed the 30% mark a goal rather than a quota.¹⁸³ Now in place, it is still unclear how the grandes écoles will go on to achieve this goal. Will there be more programs that will look like CEP? Will individual schools make changes to their competitive entrance exams? The next year will be a crucial determinant in deciding just how far France can actually go in democratizing its selective university system.

The Republican Model: friend or foe?

Overall, the democratization of the Elite is tied to much more than a goal or a quota. In looking at the larger French society, it is evident that social inequalities exist in France, disproportionately impacting some groups more than others. This thesis has talked about how the CEP program helps immigrants and ethnic minorities as well as students from lower-socioeconomic status enter the Elite, as if these racial and economic groups do not overlap. In reality, however, racial discrimination in France often causes these categories to overlap, perpetuating poverty disproportionately for ethnic minorities, immigrants and their descendants. Some employers discriminate against individuals based on their names and appearance, some landlords deny ethnic minorities decent housing, and people of color are sometimes treated with hostility in France.

¹⁸³ Samuel, "Nicolas Sarkozy faces revolt from elite French colleges".

These forms of racial discrimination are not unique to France. The difference, however, between France and other Western societies, such as the United States and Great Britain, is the capacity to deal with racism and discrimination. Throughout this thesis, the Republican model and its frameworks have constantly appeared as obstacles. Once more this thesis highlights the Republican model, and particularly its framework of color-blindness, as blameworthy for France's difficulties in dealing with racism. In an earlier chapter we saw that color-blindness is referred to in Article 1 of the French Constitution, which says that France "ensures equality before the law of all citizens, without distinction of origin, race, or religion."¹⁸⁴ One scholar interprets this to mean that, "the French model of citizenship and nationhood purports to be blind, deaf, and dumb to any sub national forms of identities."¹⁸⁵

The French way of dealing with difference is therefore to not officially acknowledge it. This has caused problems when some sects of the French society are treated poorly because of their group membership (race, class, gender, ability). As one scholar on race in France, Erik Bleich, questioned, how can a society that refuses to recognize race address racism?

Hence, we have seen that, upon closer observation, it is less the Republican model as a whole that is the main obstacle to overcome, but more specifically the obstacles created by this model, the biggest one being blindness to an individual's group membership. Though this may seem bleak, in recent years policy developments in France have suggested at least two positive developments: one, that creativity can be

¹⁸⁴ Gwénaële Calvès, "Color-Blindness at a Crossroads in Contemporary France," in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, ed. Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 219.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

used to find a way around Republican constraints to fight discrimination and two, that color-blindness is becoming more and more challenged as a concept.

With regards to the first policy development, that of employing creativity, one example can be found in the literature on gender quotas hailing France as a model in addressing the underrepresentation of women in politics. In 1999 and 2000, France made a constitutional reform and subsequently passed a gender parity law (a law that would help “ensure that all elected assemblies would be constituted of 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women,”) making France the first country in Europe to enact such an extensive reform.¹⁸⁶ Given what we know about the Republican model, one may wonder how can a nation that prides itself on refusing to make distinctions among individuals based on group membership (including gender membership) enact a measure that clearly makes a distinction between male and female citizens. The answer: it was essentially a matter of wording. The French chose to institute a parity model rather than a gender quota. Though a parity model is in fact a form of gender quota, the idea of a quota more openly goes against the Republican model, and such ideals as universalism and equality among all citizens, than a gender parity law.¹⁸⁷ The justification used to get around this constraint was that: “The principle of parity intends to remain within universalist perspective but built into this perspective [is] the fact that individuals are not abstract and degendered entities, but gendered men and women.”¹⁸⁸ This is to say that a parity law does not mean recognizing other forms of group membership such as racial and social categories but instead only acknowledges

¹⁸⁶ Jane Freedman, "Increasing Women's Political Representation: the Limits of Constitutional Reform," *West European Politics* 27, no. 1 (2004): 2.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

that there are two types of French citizens, males and females, who should both be represented equally. Even with the proper wording, it was still necessary to slightly adjust the Constitution in order to make gender parity more compatible with the Republican model. The change amended articles 3 and 4 to say that laws should, “favour the equal access of women and of men to electoral mandates and elective functions.”¹⁸⁹ This anecdote shows that even within the Republican model, progress can be made towards addressing discrimination and also that in some cases, the Constitution can even be slightly altered.

With regards to the second policy development, literature suggests that the previously unquestionable nature of the color-blind framework has, in recent years, come under attack. In the battle of anti-racism vs. the Republic, some scholars and factions of French society have begun calling for a reconsideration of the color-blind concept. Gwénaële Calvès, a scholar on race in France, reported that this call began to grow louder in the late 1990’s following a report published in March 1999 titled “To Fight Against Discriminations.”¹⁹⁰ In this report, a French Justice famously said of the French taboo on race, “You can’t cure a disease without putting a name on it, it is conceivable to use the word ‘race’ without being racist... in this country it is a habit to create.”¹⁹¹ This suggests that even some public officials are calling for the use of the word race.

There is also evidence that it is becoming more and more common that policies put in place to fight discrimination are finding ways to work around, and even slightly bend, the Republican model. To this effect Calvès has said that, “public policies for

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁹⁰ Calvès, “Color-Blindness at a Crossroads in Contemporary France,” 222.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 223.

fighting social inequalities now take into account ethnic and racial factors more and more explicitly,” identifying a growing trend.¹⁹² Here she uses the examples of government authorities instituting some hiring practices based on an applicant’s looks, for instance hiring young people for certain positions.¹⁹³ Of France’s progress in the field of anti-discrimination policies borrowed from the U.S., Calvès says, “The country is discovering simultaneously the United States of the 1960s (outreach techniques) and that of the 1980s (diversity promotion).”¹⁹⁴ This is less to say that France will begin to adopt the American framework than that the U.S. did not always deal with race in the same way, that it takes time. Indeed, it will take time for France as well. Overall, Calvès expresses hope regarding France’s progress, saying, “A symbolic rupture has undoubtedly occurred: in the name of the fight against racism, it is becoming legitimate for public authorities to take into account a criterion that not long ago was unspoken and unspeakable- the ethnic criterion.”¹⁹⁵

These two developments, gender parity and a weakening of color-blindness, are encouraging. If France can work through the Republican model to address the issue of underrepresentation of women in politics, perhaps on the same note, racial discrimination too can be addressed. With the weakening or even decline of the color-blind framework and groups calling for the acknowledgement of race, this may create positive results for all minorities in France.

To conclude, we revisit Erik Bleich’s earlier question: how can a society that refuses to recognize race address racism? The same scholar recognizes that, even in

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 224.

light of problems caused by the Republican model and color-blind framework, there are “powerful incentives” to maintain the color-blind framework.¹⁹⁶ Bleich argues that the color-blind framework: may help citizens to become color-blind, may help to minimize backlash by not having policies favoring specific groups, and also may make it harder for the Extreme Right to challenge reforms meant to help minorities.¹⁹⁷ To elaborate on this last point, anti-racists in France have actually been able to use the color-blind framework as a powerful shield against the attacks of the Extreme Right who typically fight against any measures put in place to help disadvantaged groups by pointing out that policies cannot be designed to favor one group over another.¹⁹⁸ This has led to a rise in creative programs put in place to help ethnic minorities in particular without specifically naming them, thus staying in line with the Republican model. We have seen a very clear example of this with the Sciences Po initiative that has used Republican values to promote CEP even as it is attacked for being against the Republic.

Consequently, while recognizing the cost of color-blindness, Bleich argues that it is possible to fight racism while avoiding the formal recognition of race and that there are several good reasons to continue the use of this model. However, he also expresses the belief that if color-blindness becomes a major obstacle in the fight against racism, “the French may eventually-if reluctantly- choose to incorporate the word “race” into their ethnically plural society and their anti-racism institutions.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶Erik Bleich, "Anti-racism without Races: Politics and Policy in a "Color-Blind" State," in *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference*, ed. Herrick Chapman and Laura L. Frader (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 179.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 180.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 181.

In the final analysis, whether one agrees or disagrees with the Republican model, it is unlikely that it will disappear from French society. Yet even under the constraints of the Republic and the frameworks attributed to it, there is progress being made in French society and, in many ways, the initiative at Sciences Po is one manifestation of this progress. This program has already sent approximately 500 CEP graduates into the Elite²⁰⁰ and has inspired other efforts to diversify the French Elite. Moreover, other sects of French society have already successfully pushed for reform to correct inequalities. These are indications that France is moving in the direction of change, albeit in a way that is uniquely French.

²⁰⁰ Estimate determined from official CEP presentation. Program, "Objective: Equal opportunity The Priority Education Agreements."

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