# Race Politics and Colonial Legacies: France, Africa and the Middle East

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# Race Politics and Colonial Legacies:
## France, Africa and the Middle East

*Hisham Aidi, Marc Lynch and Zachariah Mampilly*

France has been consumed by the politics of race and difference over the last two decades, with a rising right wing intersecting with the insistent demands for citizenship and inclusion by citizens of African descent and Islamic faith. The legacies of French colonialism run deep, not only in the postcolonial states of West and North Africa but within French political discourse and state-society relations. In June 2024, the Project on Middle East Political Science, the Program on African Social Research, and the École Normale Supérieure in Paris convened a workshop bringing together scholars and activists from the United States, Europe and Africa for a focused dialogue on the contentious legacies of the French colonial experience for today's politics of race and religion. This volume of POMEPS Studies collects some of the papers presented at that workshop.

This project has roots at the very beginnings of the Program on African Social Research. In February 2020 – the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic – the Project on Middle East Political Science held a preliminary meeting at Columbia University in New York to explore the origins of the Africa-Middle East divides that treat North Africa as part of the Middle East and neglect states such as Sudan and Mauritania. Columbia was an appropriate place to begin such a dialogue. Two decades ago, when two of us (Aidi and Mampilly) were graduate students at Columbia, the Institute of African Studies was in serious crisis. The Ugandan political theorist Mahmood Mamdani arrived and launched an initiative to decolonize the study of Africa to counter Hegel's partition of Africa by transcending the Saharan and red Sea divides, and by underscoring Africa's links to Arabia, Asia and the New World. To that end, we co-organized a second conference on racial formations in Africa and the Middle East looking at race-making across these two regions comparatively, including the border zones often left out of both African and Middle Eastern

Studies: the Sudans, Amazigh-speaking areas in the Sahel, Arabic speaking areas on the Swahili coast and Zanzibar. This workshop represents the third in our series of transregional studies across the Africa-Middle East divide.

So why France and French colonial legacies? We hoped to correct the Anglo-American bias in our previous discussions of race and racialization, by bringing together Francophone scholars to talk about how French colonialism produced and exported "race" to different regions of the world – and then after colonialism decided to reject the concept of race it had done so much to produce. We hoped to bring into dialogue intellectual communities and historical experiences too often kept separate by the vagaries of language, closed academic networks, and different theoretical starting points. This approach was shaped by our intellectual partner and host at École Normale Supérieure, **Marwan Mohammed**, whose work on Islamophobia and incendiary racial politics in France – including Renaud Camus's Great Replacement Theory and the broad attack on an alleged "Islamo-leftism" threatening the French republic – gave urgency to our theoretical and comparative inquiries. Our previous work directly challenged the divide between North Africa and West Africa, arguing against the idea that the Sahara somehow posed an ontological divide between societies which had always been economically and culturally linked. In this collection, scholars like **Madina Thiam** similarly challenge the divides between British Eastern Africa (specifically the Sudan) and French Western Africa, showing how those regions too had long historical economic connections. How would our previous work on race and racialization in Africa and the Middle East be changed if better informed by French sociological theory that showed that the concept of racial formations actually grew out of French and British sociology departments in the 1970s?

Regarding colonial legacies: We know that the regime of racial and ethnic differentiation introduced by France in 1830s Algeria profoundly shaped conceptions of difference and identity categories in Algeria, that those colonial policies would influence how race was deployed across the Sahel into French West Africa from Mauritania to Senegal, and in turn colonial Senegal would inspire educational policies applied in colonial Morocco. The French theorizing and race-making also occurred across continents. We know France sent political prisoners and nationalists from West Africa to penal colonies in the Indian Ocean, Madagascar and Vietnam. And if Arthur De Gobineau's notorious theory of the human races was shaped by his time as a scholar-diplomat in Brazil and Iran; it was also from the New World – specifically the Caribbean -- that the most trenchant critiques of French racial thought began to emerge from thinkers like Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon, often in engagement with North African politics. France of course – Paris in particular – would also become an incubator for a range of pan-African and pan-Arab ideologies, with Antillian and African American writers playing a pronounced role (**Solène Brun and Claire Cosquer,** this volume**).**

Colonial legacies alone do not explain the patterns of racial differentiation and hierarchy, however. How did French colonial policy interact with pre-existing racial hierarchies? Can the concept of "race" be used to describe difference and domination prior to colonialism? In the decades after gaining independence, some African states (e.g., Rwanda, Tanzania), in effect, banned ethnicity and race as categories, but discrimination against minorities continued. In recent years, we're seeing the term ethnicity revived again, for instance, in the Maghreb, with the rise in Amazigh activism. Political theorist Michael Hanchard recently observed that in America the concept of race fell out of favor in American political science after WWII – in comparative politics and international relations but not American politics. In the last decade, race has been making a return in the study of Latin America and Europe (with the study of migration). In our work, we engage a set of scholars bringing the concept of race back in the study of Africa and the Middle East – and their diasporas– this time as a decolonizing or equalizing tool.

One of the key, but controversial, theoretical moves in this literature has been the decoupling of race and skin color, with attention to racializing dynamics along a broader range of identity, religious, caste, ethnic and tribal markers. We're interested in examining which differences in the Francophone world get labeled as racial, ethnic or caste, and how that might differ from such demarcations in the Anglophone world. What do Francophone scholars and activists in Africa or the Caribbean mean when they say ethnicity or race - are they talking about ancestry or bodily markers? We are also interested in movements, ideas and campaigns to counter racism in all its forms. Are there new concepts or frameworks that are emerging locally in France or former French colonies to counter racism? **Ya-Han Chuang** in this collection looks at anti-Asian racism in the context of COVID-19, showing the recurrence of racialized processes and discourses along different lines than the more frequently observed racialization of Muslims and Africans.

This collection intentionally puts into dialogue a roughly even number of scholars focused on former French colonies in Africa and the Middle East and scholars focused on the politics of race and racism in France itself. To borrow a title from **Paul Silverstein**, one of the contributors to this volume, we wanted to study France in Africa and Africa in France, contesting the sharp lines traditionally drawn between colonial and postcolonial and between the metropole and the colonies. In his own essay, Silverstein uses football to show these movements, from the racial politics of sports under colonialism to the racialized response to African-origin players in contemporary World Cup play. Millions of Africans and North Africans have lived in France for generations, as have African-born or raised settlers such as Algeria's piednoirs who returned to the metropole at independence. Meanwhile, postcolonial African and Middle Eastern states continue to have their discourses and political institutions structured by the racial categories established by France during the era of colonial rule. France has long attempted to maintain diplomatic prominence within its former African colonies, as **Amy Niang** documents in this collection, in ways that ensured the ongoing political and economic connections that problematize fine lines between the colony and the postcolony.

We are especially interested in the circulation of ideas, practices and politics across national, regional and continental divides –particularly within Francophone Africa and the Middle East. As **Oumar Ba** points out in his contribution, generations of African intellectuals and political figures -- often educated in French-style institutions and engaged with French philosophical and political debates – moved seamlessly between their capitals and Paris, forming new relationships and solidarities along the way. The language of higher education played a role in racializing dynamics across French Africa. As **Baba Adou** demonstrates using the case of Mauritania, the effects of the Arabization of post-colonial North African education and state institutions continued to structure lines of political and social conflict decades after independence. A forthcoming POMEPS Studies volume on Fanon's legacy for the Middle East and Africa takes the circulation of these ideas even further.

Racialization is a continuous process, "a system of social differentiation under French colonialism was not a fixed category, but fluid, moving across time and space" (**Dahlia El Zein,** this collection) and involves issues far beyond skin phenotype. El Zein, in this collection, shows how Lebanese Syrian Shi'a migrants acquired a racial identity quite different from their subordinate racialized position within the Levant. Resistance to racism can trigger its own countermovements, as we have seen globally. In the case of Tunisia, **Houda Mzioudet** shows how the successful moves to protect African migrants and outlaw racism suffered violent reversal following Kais Saied's coup against Parliamentary democracy, as tolerance and activism gave way to demonization and pogroms inspired by Saied's explicit and implicit drawing on the French right wing politician Eric Zemmour's racist "Great Replacement" talk.

The second set of essays focus on the politics of race and racism in France, always with a keen eye on the ongoing connections with the former colonies and the political context of what Leonard Cortana calls "the ferocious witch hunt against the producers of post-colonial knowledge… amid highly mediatized urban revolutions and a couple of years after the promulgation of France's new anti-

separatism law passed in 2021." Brun and Cosquer's overture takes on directly the theoretical question with which we began: is there a distinctively French sociology of race? Pushing back against accusations that race is a political construct imported from the United States, Brun and Cosquer trace the evolution of distinctively French conceptions of race and racialization through colonialism, running from the thinkers of negritude through Frantz Fanon into a wide range of sociological and philosophical approaches which have, in turn, often informed American debates and approaches.

**Kenza Talmat** argues that "the study of racialization in France has been ironically consigned as a peripheral or imported object by the scholarly establishment" despite the long French role in developing racialized concepts and the current wave of heavily racialized political repression. **Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa** takes up that challenge in an innovative and deeply personal reflection on the epistemologies of race and Blackness during the 2020 Black Lives Matter mobilization. Liberalism is hardly an answer, argues **Hamza Esmili**, particularly with regards to French Islamophobia and the insistent racialization and securitization of its Muslim citizens and residents. While there are wider patterns of right-wing reaction, Esmili notes, "most illiberal and authoritarian measures taken by the French state target Muslims" and Islamophobia occupies its own distinctive place within the dynamics of racialization. And **Leonard Cortana** examines the divergent patterns of racialization within the French reception of African-American historical figures such as Angela Davis, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Josephine Baker.

Several essays in the collection approach the questions of race and colonial legacies through close ethnography of liminal sites within Paris. Talmat explores processes of self-identification through probing interviews about process of self-identification and ethno-racial categorization of nearly three dozen people who trace their ancestry to French African or Caribbean colonies, showing "racism as a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon that operates not only on the hierarchy between dominant and dominated racializations, but also on the maintenance

of boundaries between minorities in a competitive relationship through the policing of their identities and solidarities." **Samuel Everett** traces the evolution of Jewish-Muslim relations within a single neighborhood, showing the intersection of the local, national and global, as well as the generational: "Jewish and Muslim (specifically Maghrebi) interactions and philosophies of life, formed from centuries of faithful co-habitation, are shifting as Maghreb-born generations retire or pass away," leaving relations hostage to contemporary passions and abstractions. **Sélima Kebaïli** looks at the lived experience of racism and racialization among veiled Muslim women in France and Switzerland. **Emmanuelle Carinos Vasquez** looks at the "criminalization" of rap music which, he argues, "reveals the way that post-slavery and post-colonial countries deal with the artistic and political freedom of speech of "minority groups", tracing the adoption of attacks by right-wing politicians on Muslim rappers accused of anti-white racism.

This collection continues an ongoing transregional and multi-continental conversation about the origins and dynamics of racialization which considers both colonial legacies and local contexts in the consolidation of structures of difference and domination. That conversation, unfolding across multiple disciplines, should continue to bring together literatures and regions typically studied as discrete units. Only such a genuinely comparative, historical, and theoretically diverse approach can hope to advance knowledge on these contentious and critical issues.

# Racializing Arabic:
## Colonial Education Policies and the Linguistic Issue in Contemporary Mauritania

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Alfred Gertainy, an American researcher, observed as early as the first decade of Mauritania's independence that "everything of national importance in Mauritania is conditioned by the racial and ethnic factor." The reason, he argued, "is contained in Mauritania's geographic location and historical background as the resulting racial and ethnic constitution and traditional social structure of its society."[1] The past six decades of Mauritania's history demonstrate that Gerteiny was right about the centrality of race in Mauritania. As early as 1965, deadly clashes between "Black" and "white" Mauritanians over the mandatory teaching of Arabic in school were just the beginning of a sequence of racial tensions that are still shaping Mauritania's social and political life. The situation became even more tense in the 1980s when the military regime in power executed hundreds of military officers from the Haalpulaar, the major Afro-Mauritanian community in the country, and expelled thousands of civilians to neighboring Senegal and Mali.[2]

While power balancing and competition over the new nation's resources were the driving causes of this racial strife, language was also at the heart of the issue. Arabization, the process by which Arabic gained a considerable presence in the administration and school settings, was often blamed for reinforcing discrimination against Black Mauritanians of Haalpular, Wolof, and Soninke origins. But this raises its own question: How was Arabic, a language that was once adopted by pre-colonial Mauritanian intellectuals from all racial backgrounds, racialized in a way that contributed to racial tensions in Mauritania?

I argue that French colonial education policies in Mauritania not only restructured the social and political life of the country but also shaped the way in which el Bidhan or les Maures (Moors), the Hassaniya-speaking tribes in Mauritania, came to categorize themselves racially as a homogeneous white Arab group, juxtaposed to a Black population within the country. This was done first through the colonial conception of Arabic as an identity language and later by el Bidhan's adoption of this colonial-constructed identity. Maintaining such an identity in the post-colonial state, however, proved to be challenging. Significant components of the Hassaniya-speaking population, including the Haratin (mostly descendants of former slaves) and other traditionally marginalized groups such as blacksmiths and griots, contest the present system as a hindrance to their social mobility.[3] These social dynamics make it challenging to establish mass support for a foundation for the political rhetoric of Arabization, especially considering that these groups do not necessarily identify as "Arabs." It is possible to imagine similar resentment, or at least a lack of enthusiasm, to political Arabization on the part of Berber tribes in the absence of a colonial project that bridged the pre-colonial gap between Arab Hassan and Berber Zawaya tribal confederations that produced a much more complex relationship with the Arabic language. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a considerable minority of Berber speakers. Estimated then at 13,000 speakers in the Trarza region of southern Mauritania, the figure dropped sharply on the eve of the twenty-first century.[4] The lack of political salience of the Berber language in Mauritania—a feature of post-colonial politics in other Northern African countries—and the politicization of Arabic could not be explained away by pre-colonial history. By highlighting colonial legacies, this essay explores the hypothetical path that Arabic might have followed among the diverse ethno-racial groups in Mauritania had there been no French colonial influence in the country.

I build on works about raciolinguistics, language, and identity, which focus on the dialectical relationship between language and race as well as language and identity formation. Following scholars who understand

race as a social construct, rather than being fixed and predetermined,[5] raciolinguists argue that continuous and repeated language use (re)creates racial, ethnic, and national identities.[6] They understand language not as an intrinsic feature of the ethnic group, but as one of the resources individuals use to create ethnoracial selves.[7] In Mauritania, Arabic began to emerge as a racialized language when colonial education policies drew a dividing line between "Arab" and "African" Mauritania. The instrumentalization of language by state elites and the use of Arabic to displace Afro-Mauritanian elites from power was thus facilitated by these colonial legacies and perpetuated in problematic ways in the postcolonial era.

**Historical Background**

A useful starting point is a brief overview of the historical process through which the contemporary Hassaniya-speaking Moorish community came into existence and the place of Arabic in this process. Islam first came to what is known today as Mauritania in the eighth century, spreading through trade, especially among Berber Sanhaja tribes and the Soninke of the Ghana empire.[8] With this initial contact with Islam, Mauritanians (from both Berber and Black African origins) were exposed to Arabic as the language of the new religion. The second major phase of Islamicization came with the Almoravids in the mid-eleventh century.[9] The Sanhaja tribes maintained a strong tradition of Islamic learning, which they adapted to their Berber culture and nomadic lifestyle.[10] Starting from the sixteenth century, the advent of Arab tribes would initiate a process of Arabization that resulted in the spread of the Hassaniya dialect and the decline of the Zenaga language.[11]

While Hassaniya—the dialect spoken by the Arab tribes of Banu Hassan—maintained traces of the Berber Zenaga language and borrowed from other local dialects and languages, it became the lingua franca in the space occupied by Moorish tribes.[12] The contact between the Arabs and the local Sanhaja tribes resulted in the reconfiguration of the sociopolitical system, especially after the Shar Bubba War (1645–1675) in which the Sanhaja were defeated in southwestern Mauritania. Moorish society was then divided into Zawaya tribes of Berber origin and the Hassan warrior tribes of Arab origin.[13] The latter, specializing in warfare, reduced the Sanhaja to a status of "respectable subordination."[14] Although there were exceptions to this rule, the Zawaya "were thought of as people who specialized in religious learning and commerce, a peace-loving people who needed the special protection of those who specialized in warfare."[15]

This complex process of Arabization led some Berber tribes to change their genealogical origin to Arab ancestry. However, the adoption of language to understand the Quran and specialize in religious learning did not always correspond to such a genealogical shift.[16] In fact, the mother tongue was often present alongside Arabic in traditional schools for the purpose of explaining the meaning of the Arabic text.[17] In addition, there was limited command of classical Arabic as a language of oral communication in traditional educational settings.[18] Even the Sanhaja tribes that underwent a deep Arabization process—supported by a widespread claim that Sanhaja were Himyarite Arabs—established a definite demarcation between their Arab identity and that of the Hassan Arabs, while also embracing a shared Zawaya culture with other learned Berber tribes.[19] The variety of Arabic currently spoken in Mauritania is still referred to as *klam* Hassan, or the language of Hassan, an indication that a distinction was made between Arabic as a separate language and Hassaniya as an identity dialect. This pre-colonial division between Hassan and Zawaya therefore had important implications for the trajectory of Arabic in the country.

In the River Valley region of Mauritania, where Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof communities lived, a similar relationship connected these groups to Arabic. As was the case in the Moorish community, "the learned men [in these communities] had at their disposal a unified corpus of reference, based on the triad of Màlikism, Aš'arism, and Sufi brotherhood, and applied largely similar methods to transmit knowledge."[20] Arabic was viewed and used by Mauritanians from all racial and ethnic backgrounds as a liturgical and literary language that coexisted with local languages. With the advent of colonialism, however, the two communities, which possessed similar social stratification systems and were linked through religious

Sufi traditions, would be remodeled in a way that impacted their relationship with Arabic. [21]

**Two Colonial Education Policies**

When the French entered Mauritania, they were aware of the racial and ethnic divisions in the country, but they treated the Maure as they did any other Arab society they colonized, despite the different historical and social circumstances surrounding the formation of Moorish society. In colonial Mauritania, the French differentiated between two types of Islam: Black Islam and Moorish or "white Islam."[22] The former was understood to be recent and hence more susceptible to colonial penetration. Whether the French invented this division between Islam *noir* and Arab Islam or borrowed it from earlier Arab and North African practices and traditions,[23] it had implications for the type of policies they pursued in Mauritania. The French dedicated more resources and attention to the Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof communities, which they directly targeted with colonial education policies, while the Moorish community, understood to be homogeneously Arab, was largely spared from heavy inculturation attempts.[24] The French hoped that by exposing these indigenous people to the French language and culture, they might develop a more favorable opinion of the colonial administration. However, this policy only brought them closer to Islam in greater numbers.[25]

The French would later open schools in the areas populated by the Moorish tribes. In reaction to Moorish families' reluctance to send their children to French schools, the colonial administration adopted the *médersa* system that it had used in Algeria. The *médersa* was a bicultural educational institution that incorporated elements from both the French school system and Islamic education.[26] While three *médersa*s were open in Senegal and Mali, this system mostly targeted the Hassaniya-speaking population in Mauritania. One reason for this focus was the racist colonial view that Moorish Islam was more authentic and difficult to penetrate compared to Black Islam.[27] By the end of 1940 there were 14 French schools in Mauritania.[28] In all of these schools, except the ones in the River Valley region, the French language was

an optional subject. French would only become mandatory later when parents expressed interest in teaching French to their children after they noticed the importance of the language for employment and participation in the colonial administration.[29]

Unusually, instead of relying on teachers from France as was the case in many West African schools, the colonial *médersas* initially recruited teachers from Algeria. This choice was due to the belief that students would be more likely to connect with Arab teachers who were familiar with the same religious texts, since they were also classified as Arab by the French.[30] For similar reasons, French education administrators also preferred to hire Algerian directors over directors from other ethnic groups such as Halpulaar, Wolof, or Soninke.[31]

As colonial agents, Algerian teachers played a central role in adapting colonial education to the Mauritanian context.[32] They also contributed to the training of Mauritanian state elites. As a study of one of these schools reveals, graduates from Boutilimit *médersa* came to occupy key positions in the state after independence in 1960: 23 percent of these graduates became ministers, 18 percent ambassadors, 38 percent governors, and the rest ended up occupying high-ranking administrative and university positions.[33] Many of the Algerian teachers ended up integrating into society and marrying Moorish women,[34] playing a central role in the colonial process of racializing the Arabic language and forming an encompassing Arabo-Berber identity that transcended pre-colonial divisions.

It is true, as some historians of Mauritania have observed, that the impact of colonial education was very modest in terms of its reach since it only produced a small and mostly weak elite.[35] However, this elite not only ended up taking over the post-colonial state, but it also shaped the political discourse on the state and the place of language in the state-building project.

The *médersa* system was abolished in the 1940s, but the French continued to distinguish between Mauritanians based on racial categorization by accommodating the Hassaniya-speaking population under the new system.

To compensate for the abolition of the *médersas*, Arabic was introduced in all schools attended by speakers of Hassaniya.[36] The other communities wanted a similar treatment.[37] Evidently, Arabic was important to these Mauritanian Muslims as the language of the Quran and an indispensable tool for attaining religious authority in their community. However, the colonial administration thwarted this possibility because the French drew a clear distinction between Arabic as an identity language and Arabic as a religious language.[38] The French accommodated the first but not the latter, since it contradicted the secular values of its republican school system,[39] which strictly limited the presence of religion in the school curriculum. This colonial treatment of Arabic as an identity language for the Arabs failed to recognize the special status it enjoyed among non-Arab communities. Arabic was not only a liturgical language for African communities in Mauritania. It also served as a medium of knowledge production for many intellectuals in Mauritania and other West African countries who produced significant religious, historical, scientific, and literary works using this language.[40]

French colonial policy around the Arabic language masked a complex social structure within pre-colonial Moorish society. Within this context, Arabic was not an identity language for all Hassaniya speakers. Arabic was adopted by Berber tribes for religious reasons but also as a tool to accrue more power in a sociopolitical context defined in Islamic terms. Voluntary Arabization on the part of some Berber tribes was perhaps a strategy for resisting Arab domination. By mastering Arabic and religious subjects and, in some cases, claiming Arab ancestry, these Berber tribes sought to establish a link with the predominant political paradigm at the time, which was shaped by Arabic and Islam. Divisions between Zawaya (mostly Berber) and Hassan (mostly Arab) tribes persisted despite Arabization.

**Conclusion**

The politicization and racialization of Arabic, a language that was widely used by pre-colonial African intellectuals and is still accorded a special liturgical status by many in Muslim West Africa, finds its roots in colonial language and educational policies. Colonial policies, I tentatively argue, may have contributed to the construction of racial identities that would only become evident in the lead-up to independence. The essay demonstrates how these policies led to the rise of an identity crisis and played a pivotal role in race-making in Mauritania during and after the colonial era.

The French—in contrast to the policies they pursued in other parts of the region—adopted two different language and education policies in Mauritania, one directed at the non-Arabic-speaking population in the south while the other at the Arab-Berber tribes in the rest of the country. The former strictly relied on the French language and educational system while the latter accommodated Arabic and made connections between Hassaniya-speaking Mauritanians (who hailed from both Arab and Berber backgrounds and were therefore linked to Arabic in different ways) and the Arab world. This colonial process involved, on one level, bringing North African teachers to these colonial-run schools or *médersas* and framing Arabic as an identity language while, on another level, denying Afro-Mauritanian students the opportunity to study Arabic.

One counterargument to the point I am making here is that colonial education itself had limited reach in Mauritania, as some historians have rightly noted. The colonial schools produced only a small elite. However, this elite assumed control of the post-colonial state and played a significant role in shaping the political discourse surrounding the state and the role of language in the state-building project. In a way, they perpetuated the colonial project by perceiving Arabic through the lens of identity and, either directly or indirectly, contributed to the emergence of a linguistic crisis in the country.

One should not understate the role of post-colonial developments in the country, including educational reforms and local demographic and migration dynamics, in setting the process of Arabization in motion. However, given the particular historical process through which the contemporary Hassaniya-speaking Moorish community came into existence, the racialization of Arabic and even the development of "Arab nationalism" in the country would have been difficult to imagine without colonial intrusion.

## Endnotes

[1] Alfred G. Gerteiny, "The Racial Factor and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania," *Race* 8, no. 3 (1967): 263.

[2] Pierre-Robert Baduel, "Mauritanie 1945–1990 Ou l'État Face à La Nation," *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Méditerranée* 54, no. 1 (1989): 11–52; Cédric Jourde, "'The President Is Coming to Visit!': Dramas and the Hijack of Democratization in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania," *Comparative Politics* (2005): 421–40.

[3] It is important to note that not all Haratin are direct descendants of former slaves. However, the association between Haratin and historical slave status is prominently evident in contemporary Mauritania. See Anne McDougal, "Hidden in Plain Sight: 'Haratine' in Nouakchott's 'Niche-Settlements,'" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies 48,* no. 2 (2015): 259–79.

[4] Catherine Taine-Cheikh, "*Le berbère zénaga de Mauritanie: un îlot (bilingue) en pleine terre,*" (2020) (forthcoming): 1.

[5] For instance, see Franz Boas, "Race, Language and Culture," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 94, no. 4 (1941): 513–14.

[6] H. Sami Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetha F. Ball, eds., *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Fiona McLaughlin, "Senegal: The Emergence of a National Lingua Franca," in *Language and National Identity in Africa*, ed. Andrew Simpson (Oxford University Press, 2008), 79–97.

[7] Elaine W. Chun and Adrienne Lo, "Language and Racialization," in *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology* (Routledge, 2015), 220–33.

[8] Catherine Taine-Cheikh, "Arabic of Mauritania," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics (EALL),* III, ed. K. Versteegh, (2008): 169–76.

[9] Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, "Espace Confrérique, Espace Étatique: Le Mouridisme, Le Confrérisme et La Frontière Mauritano-Sénégalaise," *Les Relations Transsahariennes à l'époque Contemporaine* (2003): 195.

[10] Philip D Curtin, "Jihad in West Africa: Early Phases and Inter-Relations in Mauritania and Senegal," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 1 (1971): 11–24.

[11] Taine-Cheikh, "Arabic of Mauritania."

[12] For a detailed discussion on Shurbubba and the movement of Nasser Al-Din, see Harry Thirwall Norris, "Znāga Islam during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 32, no. 3 (1969): 496–526.

[13] It is important to note here that there are exceptions. There are Arab Zawaya tribes and vice versa.

[14] Curtin, "Jihad in West Africa."

[15] Ibid. 12

[16] By this I mean the process through which tribes of Berber origin claimed an Arab lineage.

[17] Taine-Cheikh, "Arabic of Mauritania."

[18] Ibid.

[19] Harry T. Norris, "Yemenis in the Western Sahara," *The Journal of African History* 3, no. 2 (1962): 317–22.

[20] Taine-Cheikh, "Arabic of Mauritania," 2.

[21] Cheikh, "Espace Confrérique, Espace Étatique.»

[22] Erin Pettigrew, "Colonizing the Mahadra: Language, Identity, and Power in Mauritania under French Control," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 33, no. 2–3 (2007).

[23] Jean-Louis Triaud, "Giving a Name to Islam South of the Sahara: An Adventure in Taxonomy," *The Journal of African History* 55, no. 1 (2014): 3–15; Baz Lecocq, "Distant Shores: A Historiographic View on Trans-Saharan Space," *The Journal of African History* 56, no. 1 (2015): 23–36.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Charles Toupet and Jean-Robert Pitte, *La Mauritanie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977); Pettigrew, "Colonizing the Mahadra."

[26] Samuel D. Anderson, "From Algiers to Timbuktu: Multi-Local Research in Colonial History Across the Saharan Divide," *History in Africa* 49 (2022): 277–99.

[27] Anderson, "From Algiers to Timbuktu."; Pettigrew, "Colonizing the Mahadra."

[28] Sid'Ahmed Ould El Amir, "The Emergence of the Modern School in Mauritania and the Algerian Role in its Development," *Alakhbar Info* (blog), 2020.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Pettigrew, "Colonizing the Mahadra."

[31] Ibid.

[32] Anderson, "From Algiers to Timbuktu."

[33] Brahim Benmoussa, "Medersiens Algériens Directeurs de Médersas En Mauritanie, Un Transfert Transsaharien Méconnu," *Trache SM, Yanco J. (Dir)*, 2016.

[34] Ould El Amir, "The Emergence of the Modern School in Mauritania."

[35] Abdel Wedoud Ould Cheikh, "CHERCHE ÉLITE, DÉSESPÉREMENT: Évolution Du Système Éducatif et (Dé) Formation Des» Élites» Dans La Société Mauritanienne," *Nomadic Peoples*, 1998, 235–52.

[36] Taine-Cheikh, "Arabic of Mauritania."

[37] Catherine Taine-Cheikh, "Les Langues Comme Enjeux Identitaires," *Politique Africaine* 55 (1994): 57–64.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Fiona Mc Laughlin, "The Linguistic Ecology of the Sahel," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel*, ed. Leonardo Villalón (Oxford University Press, 2021), 649–65; Rüdiger Seesemann, "Islamic Intellectual Traditions in the Sahel," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel*, ed. Leonardo Villalón (Oxford University Press, 2021), 533–49.

# Lamine Senghor, Anti-Imperialism, and Racial Solidarity in the Interwar French Metropole

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The post-World War II era constitutes a privileged moment in the historiography of anti-colonialism, decolonization, Black internationalism, and Third World solidarity. Many of the initial iterations and founding moments of these movements, however, can be traced to interactions between people from the far corners of the empires who came into contact during the interwar period, especially in Europe. European capitals offered a hub for anticolonial militantism, as students, workers, conscripted soldiers, and other activists converged in the metropole, before and during the Great War. In the heart of interwar Europe, a burgeoning anti-imperial (and communist) coalition of various movements and figures was forged, shaking the imperial foundations of the world order. Using Lamine Senghor (not to be confused with Senegal's first president Léopold Senghor) as an anchor figure of this period, this article revisits the anti-imperial moment in interwar France, highlighting the transracial and transcontinental junctions and solidarity coalitions amidst France's racial anxieties and attempts to preserve the prestige of a declining empire. The article is based on primary sources located in the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence and the archives of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam.

## The Foundations of an Anti-Imperial World Order in Interwar Europe

As the League of Nations emerged at the end of the Great War, it was clear to the colonized world that the new sets of institutions were not designed for, or capable of, delivering emancipation since (Wilsonian) self-determination was never meant to be all-encompassing.[1] In such a context of disappointment regarding the League of Nations in interwar Europe, anti-colonialist movements crystallized around the formation of a new set of coalitions and institutions, including the League Against Imperialism (hereafter, LAI or the League). The League formed as a solidarity movement, a counterpoint to the League of Nations,[2] becoming therefore the first attempt to create a truly anti-imperial and anti-capitalist *global* movement.[3]

The League Against Imperialism was founded during its first congress in Brussels in February 1927, convening some 174 delegates from 34 countries and representing 134 organizations.[4] The meeting's agenda included "The building of a permanent international organization in order to link up all forces combatting international imperialism and in order to ensure their effective support for the fight of emancipation conducted by oppressed nations."[5] The goal was to achieve "Complete independence for China, India, Indochina, for the European countries, for Negro Africa, for the Latin-America and other semi-colonial countries, [and] complete right of self-determination for all oppressed nations and national minorities."[6] As the journal *La Voix des Nègres* recounted in its March 1927 issue, at the Brussels meeting, "over the course of five days and five nights, delegates of all peoples, nations, and countries, of all races and all classes … came together to denounce imperialism's harms and exactions on their respective countries and call for its demise."[7]

Yet, the League was not just anti-imperialist. It was equally anti-capitalist, and in the imperial metropoles where it took root it focused on the interconnectedness of the struggles across the far reaches of the empires. As Max Bloncourt, the Guadeloupean lawyer and member of the French Communist Party's Union Intercontinentale (UIC), stated during his speech at the Brussels conference, "For the past ten years, events have occurred around the world. It is the Russian Revolution that made the Chinese Revolution possible. Because they defeated British imperialism, that will make India achieve its national independence."[8] The League however lasted only a decade,

having disintegrated by 1936, under the weight of internal conflicts, pressure from European governments, and the rise of Nazi Germany.

**Lamine Senghor: An *Agitateur* in the Metropole**

Lamine Senghor, the Senegalese *tirailleur*, communist, and anti-imperialist militant, emerged on the European scene in the mid-1920s as "the most influential black anti-colonial activist of the period."[9] Although his time on the European anti-imperial stage was brief—barely lasting from his testimony as a witness in the Blaise Diagne–*Les Continents* trial in 1924 to his untimely death three years later—Senghor became one of the most prominent figures of the period and a headliner at the 1927 Brussels congress of the League Against Imperialism, where he was elected to the League's executive committee.

Born in Senegal in 1889, Senghor was conscripted by French colonial authorities to serve in the 68th Battalion of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais[10] from 1916 to 1919.[11] Senghor's contingent suffered a mustard gas attack in Verdun in 1917, which damaged his lungs. He would succumb to tuberculosis a decade later, at the age of 38. Following his injury during the war, the French authorities promoted him to the rank of sergeant. He was also awarded the Croix de Guerre and granted French citizenship for his service.[12] After the war, as a disillusioned and wounded war veteran—a "*mutilé de guerre,*" as he referred to himself—Senghor joined the French Communist Party (PCF), which connected anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, through the Union Intercontinentale (UIC), an outfit of the PCF's Colonial Studies Committee. These were the circles in which both the young Nguyen Ai Quoc (later known as Ho Chi Minh) and Lamine Senghor collaborated. The journal *Le Paria*, where Nguyen Ai Quoc was editor and Senghor a writer, published "the most violent denunciations of empire of the period, [as] communism was the sole metropolitan movement of the mid-1920s to call for the independence of the colonies."[13]

Yet, Senghor later realized that the French Communist Party did not offer much space for anti-colonial struggle,

as he also became increasingly aware of serving as a *faire-valoir* (a token figure) for the party.[14] This disillusionment would lead him to create his own organization, the Comité de Defense de la Race Nègre (CDRN) in March 1926. In the January 1927 issue of the CDRN's journal *La Voix des Nègres*, Senghor stated that his new organization would fight against "the unique author of universal misery: international imperialism." He then lists the objectives of the organization as, one, fighting against racial hatred (*la haine de race*); two, working towards social emancipation of the Black race; three, fighting against and dismantling the oppressive system against the Black race in the colonies and all other races; and four, networking with organizations truly fighting for the liberation of all oppressed peoples and for world revolution.[15]

**An Anti-Colonial and Transracial Coalition**

In interwar metropolitan France, the communist agenda, and especially its anti-imperialist wing, had the potential to federate a large transracial coalition drawn from across the empire. The Commission Coloniale of the PCF was especially of concern to the French state. Agent Desiré—an especially prolific informant for the intelligence services of the Ministry of Colonies (the euphemistically named Service de Contrôle et d'Assistance des Indigenes des Colonies en France, CAI)[16]—listed the group's leaders as the Algerians Mahmoud Ben Lekhal and Hadjali Abdelkader,[17] the Guadeloupean lawyer Max Bloncourt, Lamine Senghor, the Vietnamese Vo Thanh Long, and the future member of the French parliament Henri Lozeray.[18] As such, the communist anti-imperialist agenda in the metropole had the potential to facilitate an alliance between Africans, West Indians, and Indochinese, alongside French leftists. On April 14, 1926, at the headquarters of the PCF, a meeting of the Commission Coloniale brought together Nguyen The Truyen, Vo Thanh Long, Ben Lekhal, Hadjali Abdelkader, and the Guadeloupean Stephane Rosso. During the meeting, Nguyen The Truyen expressed his excitement that the comrade Lagrosillière had just returned from Guadeloupe with "interesting and fresh news" that could be published in *Le Paria*.[19] During a subsequent meeting on April 16,

1926 (attended by Bloncourt, Saint-Jacques, Ben Lekhal, Sadoun, Rosso, Nguyen The Truen, and Vo Than Long) the members decided that Bloncourt, as secretary general of the Union Intercontinentale, would take charge of *Le Paria*, assisted by Hadjali and Saint-Jacques.[20]

The communist appeal of the Union Intercontinentale did not, however, resonate among all the activists from the colonial world. Some of the members of this group, elsewhere referred to as the *indigènes bolchevisants* (the Bolshevik-aspiring natives)[21] by the intelligence services of the Ministry of Colonies, would later gradually distance themselves from the UIC and the Communist Party. In a move to maintain the coalition, Bloncourt proposed the creation of sections of the UIC for North Africans, one for West Indians, and one for the Indochinese. He believed such a move made sense especially because about 50 "North African Arabs" had agreed to join UIC.[22]

Still, the transracial and interconnected struggles are discernable. At the July 1, 1925, meeting, the idea of a fundraiser to help the "Chinese strikers" was proposed, funds were collected "for the poor Algerians living in France," and Nguyen The Truyen and Vo Thanh Long contributed each 2 francs.[23] All these examples point to a broad attempt, in the words of the CAI intelligence services, to build a coalition with "all the revolutionary organizations of the Oriental natives."[24] As the CAI's Agent Desiré notes, "through the *Annamites* [Vietnamese] Nguyen-The-Truyen and Tran-Xuan-Ho, [the UIC] is in a close relationship with the *Franco-Chinois* group of Garenne-Colombes. For some time now, they are collaborating for an active propaganda campaign with the *Comité Pro-Hindou.*"[25] Nguyen The Truyen was the founder of the Vietnamese Independence Party (Parti Annamite d'Independence, PAI) in 1926 and a former comrade of Nguyen Ai Quoc.[26] Ben Lekhal was the liaison between the Comité Pro-Hindou and the UIC, serving as the first secretary of the former and a member of the bureau of the latter.[27]

The Rif War (1921–1926) was another rallying cry for anti-colonial activism and transracial solidarity in metropolitan

France during the interwar period. Leaders and anti-imperial activists from various corners of the empire joined together in their condemnation of the war. In the UIC circles, the Comité central d'action coloniale contre la guerre du Maroc, la vie chère et les impôts Caillaux (the anti-colonial central committee against the war in Morocco, the high cost of living and the Caillaux taxes)[28] was comprised of Ben Lekhal, Ali, Hadjali, Bloncourt, and Senghor.[29] On May 16, 1925, a rally organized by the French Communist Party brought together thousands of people, among them "a thousand Arabs, about 20 Blacks including 2 Senegalese, a few Annamites [Vietnamese] including Tran Xuan Ho and Nguyen The Truyen, some Chinese, and Indians."[30] During the rally, the Algerian Ben Lekhal appealed to "French workers to protest, with utmost energy, against the war in Morocco."[31] Meanwhile, Senghor "denounced…the sending of Senegalese troops to Morocco…where [France] obligates the Senegalese to dirty their hands with the blood of their Riffian brothers." Senghor also condemned French imperialism "that makes the Muslims and Arabs believe that the Riffians are their enemies, just like in 1914 when it made French workers believe that the German workers were their enemies."[32] In an appeal for transracial solidarity, as Agent Desiré reports, "Senghor…declares that he publicly expresses to his Arab brothers and his brothers from the Metropole the brotherhood of all peoples without any racial or color distinction*.*"[33]

During his years of anticolonial activism and through his organizations, Senghor also denounced French duplicity in the treatment of the African *mutilés de guerre* compared to their French counterparts. His organization, the CDRN, pleaded for equal treatment of African, Malagasy, and Indochinese *tirailleurs* and *mutilés de guerre* and their French counterparts regarding the amount of their pensions.[34] Senghor also attended a ceremony organized by the local sections of the CDRN at the Gallieni cemetery in Fréjus[35] to pay homage to fellow Senegalese, Malagasy, and Vietnamese soldiers. At the March 1927 Brussels congress of the League Against Imperialism, Senghor referenced the connected struggles against colonial domination. "They murdered our brothers" he said, "in the

first war in Morocco, the Great War, in the Rif and Syria, in Madagascar and Indonesia."[36]

## Conclusion

In revisiting the interwar period in the imperial metropoles, we clearly see episodes of transnational and transracial coalition building and the merging of anti-imperial and anti-capitalist agendas. This was made possible in no small part by the convergence of workers, students, and conscripted soldiers from the far reaches of the empire in European capitals and by their experience of working together with communist and leftist circles. For the French colonial state, such coalitions posed a significant threat to the future of a waning empire, since governing races, honor, and prestige became central to preserving and restoring the nation's grandeur, especially after the wars.

## Endnotes

[1]  Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association, however, did attend the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, where he argued that Wilson's principles of self-determination ought to also apply to Africans. See Katy Harsant, *Selective Responsibility in the United Nations: Colonial Histories and Critical Inquiry* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 50

[2]  Harsant, *Selective Responsibility in the United Nations,* 5. See also Randolph B. Persaud, "The Racial Dynamic in International Relations: Some Thoughts on the Pan-African Antecedents of Bandung," in *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions*, eds. Quỳnh N. Phạm and Robbie Shilliam (London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

[3]  Lewis Twiby, "The League Against Imperialism: Interwar Anti-Colonial Internationalism," *Retrospect Journal* (2020).

[4]  Michele Louro, Carolien Stolte, and Sana Tannoury-Karam, "The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives," in *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives*, eds. Michele Louro, Carolien Stolte, and Sana Tannoury-Karam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 17. For a list of the organizations and delegates that attended the 1927 Brussels congress see LAI Archives ARCH 00804. 2, IISH.

[5]  LAI Archives, ARCH00804.1, IISH.

[6]  LAI, 1931.

[7]  "Condamnation de l'Impérialisme et de la colonisation," *La Voix des Nègres*, March 1927, CAOM SLOTFOM V 3. The materials from the French Archives (Archives Nationales de France and Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer) are in French and the English quotes are the author's translation.

[8]  "Discours de Bloncourt," *La Voix des Nègres*, March 1927, CAOM SLOTFOM V 3. Note that this statement was made two decades before India became independent.

[9]  David Murphy, "Defending the 'Negro Race': Lamine Senghor and Black Internationalism in Interwar France," *French Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2013): 162.

[10]  The Tirailleurs Sénégalais (Senegalese infantrymen) fought in both world wars, but also in other colonial wars in the French empire. The first battalion of Tirailleurs Sénégalais was formed by the French governor Louis Faidherbe in 1857 in Saint-Louis du Senegal.

[11]  Bakary Diallo and Lamine Senghor, *White War, Black Soldiers: Two African Accounts of World War I*, ed. George Robb (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2021), 4. On the history of the *tirailleurs*, see for instance Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[12]  Diallo and Senghor, *White War, Black Soldiers*, 4–5.

[13]  Murphy, "Defending the 'Negro Race,'" 164.

[14]  Hargreaves 1993, 261, cited in Murphy "Defending the 'Negro Race,'" 166. Note that three decades later, another figure of the anti-colonial struggle, Aimé Césaire, would also leave the French Communist Party. In addition to the PCF's refusal to reject Stalinism, Césaire found that the Party did not provide adequate room for the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle.

[15]  Senghor 1927, "Ce qu'est notre comité de défense de la race nègre", *La Voix des Nègres*, Janvier 1927, CAOM SLOTFOM V 3.

[16]  On CAI, see for instance, Vincent Bollenot, *Maintenir l'ordre impérial en métropole: le service de contrôle et d'assistance en France des indigènes des colonies (1915–1945)*. Histoire. (Université Panthéon-Sorbonne - Paris I, 2022).

[17]  Hadjali Abdelkader and Messali Hadj co-founded *l'Etoile Nord-Africaine* in 1926, a movement for the independence of Algeria.

[18]  "Note de l'Agent Desiré du 26 Septembre 1925", Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV 282.

[19]  "Note de l'Agent Desiré du 14 Avril 1926", Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV 282.

[20]  Note de l'Agent Desiré du 16 Avril 1926" Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV 282.

[21]  Note du Service de renseignements du 1er Mai 1926", CAI, Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV282.

[22]  Ibid.

[23]  "Note de l'Agent Desiré du 1er Juillet 1925", Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV282.

[24]  Note de l'Agent Desiré du 28 Avril 1925", Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV282.

[25]  Ibid.  On the Comité Pro-Hindou or pro-India Committee, see for instance Henri Barbusse, "The Roy Case: A Protest," *The Labour Monthly* 7, no. 3 (1925): 294–297. Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/barbusse/1925/05/x01.htm. On the British Indian subjects living in Paris in the interwar period and leading an anti-imperial campaign, see K. Marsh, "'The Only Safe Haven of Refuge in All the World': Paris, Indian

‘Revolutionaries’ and Imperial Rivalry, c. 1905–40,” *French Cultural Studies* 30, no. 3 (2019): 196–219.

26 Kim Khánh Huỳnh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). 192.

27 Note de l'Agent Desiré du 26 Avril 1925”, Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV282; Note de l'Agent Desiré du 28 Avril 1925”, Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV282.

28 *Les impots Caillaux* refer to income taxes that were introduced by then Minister of Finance Joseph Caillaux.

29 "Note de l'Agent Desiré du 26 Septembre 1925" Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV282.

30 "Note de l'Agent Desiré du 20 Mai 1925", Folder 110, CAOM SLOTFOM XV 282.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid

34 Whereas a French *mutilé de guerre* would receive a yearly pension of 15,390 francs, his African counterpart of the same rank would receive only 1,800 francs. *La Voix des Nègres*, Janvier 1927, CAOM SLOTFOM V 3.

35 Senghor died on November 25, 1927 in the military garrison town of Fréjus. Fréjus and Saint-Rachael were sites for African soldiers to stay over the winter during the war, and thus places that brought together West African, Malagasy, and Southeast Asian soldiers and workers. Gregory Mann, "Locating Colonial Histories: Between France and West Africa," *The American Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (2005): 425–34.

36 "Discours de Senghor," *La Voix des Nègres*, March 1927, CAOM SLOTFOM V 3.

# *Politique des races:*
## The Racialization of Lebanese Syrian Migrants in French West Africa

*Dahlia El Zein, University of Pennsylvania*

Lebanon and Syria are often excluded from discussions of French empire and race. Because they are firmly seen as belonging in the "Middle East," they invite comparisons with Turkey, Egypt, and the Gulf rather than with France's West African colonies. This has limited our understanding of racial dynamics in the Levant despite the large Lebanese diaspora in West Africa and the significant French involvement in Lebanon for over a century.

As others in this collection have argued, race as a system of social differentiation under French colonialism was not a fixed category, but fluid, moving across time and space.[1] The growing presence of Lebanese Syrian migrants (from today's Lebanon but who in the pre-independence era referred to themselves this way) in colonial French West Africa (1895–1958) during French mandate rule in the Levant (1920–1946) offers one of the clearest examples. The Levantine community in West Africa has frequently been studied for its economic prowess, as an entrepreneurial trader class that leveraged the colonial economy and familial kinship networks to gain enormous profits and upward mobility.[2] Lebanese migrants in the global *mahjar* (diaspora) have also been given significant attention in the histories of racial identity formation, especially in the United States and Latin America.[3] In West Africa, however, with a few notable exceptions the Lebanese diaspora has largely been left out of the histories of race-making under French colonialism.

The Lebanese diaspora experience has had enduring legacies not only in West Africa, but also in Lebanon.[4] While there is a growing body of research exploring the impact of colonialism on gender and sectarianism in the region, studies on race during the colonial period in the Levant remain limited.[5] The Kafala system, introduced to Lebanon from the Gulf in the 1970s, is rightly associated with the harsh treatment of African and Asian migrant workers. It is often linked to the historical antecedents of slavery in the region, leading to a perceived linear progression from medieval slavery in the Arab-Islamic world to the present day. This view conceals how the colonial context shaped modern ideas of race that emerged in Lebanon.

In my research on the historical Lebanese Syrian diasporic community in West Africa, I trace the genealogies of racial hierarchies under French colonialism, which I argue created the foundation for the racial hierarchies that exist in Lebanon today. The Lebanese community in West Africa, in conjunction with the expansion of the global Lebanese *mahjar*, is the linchpin in the racial equation. This becomes especially salient if we compare the racial positionality of Lebanese Shi'is and Maronites in French West Africa and Lebanon, tracing how their status and position transformed from Lebanon to West Africa under a framework of traveling race and empire, anchored in a French colonial *politique des races*.

In Lebanon, Maronite Christians generally received economic and political preference under the French colonial order while Lebanese Shi'is were marginalized and excluded from educational opportunities, economic growth, and social services.[6] In Africa, Lebanese Shi'is could overcome these barriers that hindered their upward mobility at home and transcend sectarian difference to achieve equal footing with other Lebanese Syrian migrants, at least in terms of access to the colonial economy. Lebanese Shi'is were able to equally access services otherwise deemed exclusionary in their homeland. Through the *Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale*, which oversaw most of the trade in French West Africa, Lebanese Syrians gained access to loans from European banks over their West African counterparts, providing them with seed capital and enabling them to offer loans to local Africans at high interest rates.[7] The "whiteness" of Lebanese migrants eclipsed religious identity and

became the singular marker of their existence alongside West Africans, shifting Shi'is from colonized to colonizer while erasing the "special" privileges and status Christians enjoyed in Lebanon under French colonial rule.[8] West Africa became the great equalizer and solidified Lebanese self-perception of themselves as "white" vis-à-vis the global *mahjar*, feeding that loop back to Lebanon.

**Migration to West Africa**

For Lebanese Syrian migrants the technologies of steam and print, which became more affordable in the first decades of the twentieth century, allowed for new economic opportunities and the circulation of people and ideas. Migration increased among people living under unjust rule and dire economic circumstances such as Lebanese Syrians under Ottoman and then French rule. With the conclusion of World War I and the subsequent fall of the Ottoman Empire, France gained new mandatory territories in the Arab world through a secret negotiation with Britain, the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916). Greater Syria, including Mount Lebanon, became French mandates while British rule extended to Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine.[9] The famine and subsequent widespread disease that affected the Greater Syria region in World War I was especially dire in Lebanon.[10] French colonial rule also facilitated travel within and between imperial polities with the right to free movement within metropolitan France and its empire enshrined under the mandate.[11] With the opportunities provided by the mandate, and on the heels of the famine, thousands of Lebanese Syrians migrated to *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) (1895–1958) in the 1920s and 1930s. While overall migration to other parts of the diaspora such as the United States and Latin America from Greater Syria declined in the interwar years because of the Great Depression and impact of the war, it was during this time that migration peaked in French West Africa. Many of these migrants became merchants, traders, and shopkeepers moving between the towns and cities of AOF, some in colonial capitals like Dakar and Conakry, others in interior trading hubs like Kaolack and Kankan.[12]

Many migrants had come to believe immigration to America was the epitome of success and progress, while Africa was an "unwanted stepchild."[13] In a 1932 edition of the Shi'i monthly periodical *Al-'Irfan,* Ali Abdallah Murouwwa warns readers, "Beware getting on that rough ship and throwing yourselves away to the dark continent" (*al-qara al-sawdaa*), and further warns, "Africa is the land of stubbornness and misery. Your country is the comfortable one."[14] "The dark continent" denotes a long colonial history popularized by Welsh travel writer Henry Morton Stanley as a derogatory term to refer to an "untamed" Africa.[15] *Al-'Irfan* and several other Arabic periodicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century translated several articles by Europeans and Americans about their "adventures" in Africa and observations of African cultures, an indication that European racial ideas of Africa had filtered into Arab literary circles.[16] While slavery in the Middle East prior to the eighteenth century was not racialized in the same way as in the Atlantic world and included Circassians and Christians from European and Balkan Ottoman lands, it became increasingly more racialized during the nineteenth century as the bulk of the slave trade shifted to the Nile Valley. By the late nineteenth century, the relationship between anti-Blackness and slavery solidified in the Mediterranean in a way it had not previously.[17]

To counter the "undesirability" of Africa as a migration destination, Lebanese Syrians popularized a myth about the accidental nature of their arrival in West Africa to justify their presence. It goes something like this: These migrants were headed to the United States or Latin America but ended up in West Africa after failing health exams or running out of money. Many ships would also make a stop in Dakar or St. Louis before continuing the transatlantic journey and some early migrants even believed they had arrived to America.[18] The myth of accidental arrival became supplanted with another story of ceremonious arrival: "Then the news arrived to Marseille that the Lebanese migrants were showered with gold upon their arrival and that's why they stayed in Africa and didn't continue to the United States."[19]

Whether a "land of riches," or "the dark continent," Lebanese Syrian migration to West Africa steadily increased. In 1892 there were only a few Lebanese Syrian migrants in AOF, in 1897 about 30 and by 1900 their numbers reached 400.[20] The second wave of migrants in the 1910s and through the interwar years were overwhelmingly Lebanese Shi'is from Jabal 'Amil, estimates claim about 75 to 95 percent.[21] By 1938, the number had grown to over 10,000, with 2,800 in Senegal and 1,600 in Dakar and by 1960, there were 19,277 Lebanese migrants in French West Africa.[22]

### Politique des races

The infamous French "*politique des races*" of the late nineteenth century spelled out a detailed, inconsistent, contextually specific, and geographically contingent racial taxonomy in all its colonies, which was intended to divide and conquer native populations. (See Solène Brun's essay in this collection for a French sociology of race that counters critiques that race is an American import.) The French mandate of Lebanon was no exception. Shi'is were racialized as a racial class of their own, as were Maronites. Maronites became Phoenicians, indigenous to Lebanon, while Muslims, including Druze, were assigned a narrative as outsiders, "Arab invaders." Shi'is were singled out as different, darker, and foreign to the land.

Inspired by their experience in Morocco in separating the Tamazight population from the Arabs, the French colonial government applied the same principal to separating the Christian population of Lebanon from the Muslims, aiming to highlight Lebanon's inherent Christianity.[23] In Mauritania, French colonial authorities pursued the opposite policy to its approach in the Maghreb countries, privileging the Arab population over Black Mauritanians, which Baba Adou writes about in this collection.

The invention of a "Phoenician race" was used by the French "to justify dividing 'Greater Lebanon' from the rest of the Syrian mandate" and giving preference to Maronite Christians.[24] Elise Burton's study of genetics and race science in the Middle East in the early twentieth century illuminates how European Orientalists "anointed Egyptian

Copts and Lebanese Maronites as living representatives of Pharaonic Egyptians and Phoenicians offering a racial justification for the special prestige these Christians enjoyed under British and French imperial influence."[25] As Lebanese Christians leaned into this Phoenician identity, becoming Phoenician meant distancing Lebanon from the Arab-Islamic narrative of its neighbor Syria, and positioning it firmly within Western Civilization. Under the French mandate, when negotiations over the national identity of a new Lebanon began to emerge, the Maronite "prototype" of Phoenician ancestry fashioned with "European sensibilities" became the baseline for other minority groups in Lebanon to emulate.[26] In the early twentieth century, the Maronite and Lebanese Christian population had already undergone a mass migration to the Americas and become financially successful as traders, entrepreneurs, and businessmen. Thus, the mythology of the Lebanese migrant who was a natural trader like their Phoenician ancestors, a seafaring trade people, was doubly reinforced.

Lebanese Shi'is (and Kurds) in contrast were excluded from this Phoenician ancestry and claims to indigeneity. In Lebanon, Shi'is were (and remain) referred to by other Lebanese with the degrading term *metwali.* French physician and Egyptologist, Louis Lortet wrote of the "ethnological traits" of the Shi'a, proclaiming that the "Métoualis are very different" from the Druze and the Maronites, and are a race "closer to the Mongols." He goes on to affirm that "the color of the skin is a rather dark brown, much more accentuated than among the neighboring populations, whose color is often as pale as that of the French of the south." Lortet makes clear that the Shi'is were foreign outsiders to Lebanon, proclaiming, "I believe that one can boldly affirm that the Métoualis probably arrived in the thirteenth century."[27]

It can be difficult to communicate how offensive the term *metwali* is to the Lebanese Shi'i community because the direct meaning of the word is not necessarily offensive. Deriving from the word *mawali,* meaning followers of the *wali* (leader or ruler), the term historically referred to non-Arab converts to Islam under the Ummayads especially, who were considered second class citizens to Arab

Muslims. This further evolved to *matawala* as in *met-waly-an-li-ali* (مت ولياً لعلي) meaning those who follow Ali (Imam Ali bin Abi Talib) to refer to Shi'is. *Metwali* then became a wholesale term to refer to Lebanese Shi'is and carries derogatory connotations of backwardness, filth, misery, and chaos.[28] Even the historiographical narrative about Shi'is in Lebanon often assumed their disinterest, portraying them as politically passive until they were awakened by figures like Musa Sadr in the 1960s and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Although recent scholarship by Max Weiss and Tamara Chalabi challenges this narrative, it still prevails in many circles.[29]

In Lebanon, Shi'is would always be marked by difference from other Lebanese. However, in West Africa, among a flattened perception of Black Africans, Shi'is could become "Phoenician" and "white." Furthermore, the sectarian treatment that French colonial racial policy upheld in Lebanon became irrelevant in West Africa as Lebanese traders became the preferred colonial middlemen, *traitants* (Muslim or Christian), lauded for their adaptability to the African diet and lifestyle (unlike the French who were "unfit" for such harshness).[30]

**West Africa as Racial Equalizer**

The inconsistency of treatment towards Lebanese Syrian migrants in West Africa by French colons precluded sect. They were en masse either deemed as a threat or as a disease, and en masse deemed more worthy of European loans over their African counterparts. While Maronites could be considered white in Lebanon, in West Africa, along with other Lebanese migrants, they were not quite *blanches*. Even though official French colonial documents classified Lebanese Syrians as belonging to "*les races blanches*" (the white races), they remained a colonized class.[31] Between 1910 and 1960, French authorities intermittently attempted to restrict Lebanese Syrian migration to AOF, including both Muslims and Christians.[32]

The self-racialization of Eastern Mediterranean migrants as white is well-documented by scholars. In this period, Lebanese Syrian migrants in the United States, Australia,

and South Africa were all involved in court cases claiming whiteness.[33] Many of the cases brought forth were by Maronite Christians arguing that as Christians they were more European than Arab. Claiming whiteness was not unique to Maronites but was also performed by Muslim Arabs, Shi'is, and Sunnis. Because Lebanese Shi'is were (and remain) the majority migrant population in West Africa, unlike the diaspora in the Americas, which had a majority Christian population, West Africa became a racial equalizer for Lebanese Syrian migrants, allowing Shi'is otherwise deemed a fifth column in their homeland to be considered as white as any other Lebanese Syrian migrants in the global *mahjar*.

Scholars have long studied the racial anxieties of Europeans around their colonies. The theoretical ground is well-trodden when it comes to who was considered worthy to incorporate into the colonies according to invented European standards of respectability, domesticity, and civility. We are on less established ground when considering how these ideas of respectability mapped onto divisions between colonized peoples. For example, Lebanese travel books and periodicals from this period frequently used the degrading term *abeed* to refer to Black African men, women, and children.[34] *Abeed* is a hurtful slur meaning "enslaved." A growing scholarly literature has been dissecting the usage of this deeply loaded insult in the Arabic-speaking world.[35]

The use of this derogatory word by Lebanese Syrians of various classes and sects reflects how a colonial economy that depended on African labor saw African men and women primarily as bodies to be exploited and verbally inscribed their subservience as a class of people. This brazen racializing of Africans depicted as bodies of labor to serve Lebanese Syrian households highlights the community's own racial insecurities. Primarily because in Lebanon, prior to the civil war and the introduction of the Kafala system, domestic work was usually taken up by young Shi'i or Kurdish girls.[36] By tracing the genealogies of Lebanese racialization in West Africa, we can begin to understand the origins of the harsh racialization of migrant domestic labor in Lebanon today.

As Hilary Jones aptly explains, rather than understanding Lebanese racialization of Africans as "moments of racism" or calling out "racist people," "instead we must consider the postcolonial geographies of racialization and racial power."[37] The throughline of this collection is to uncover the contextual, unreliable, incoherent, historically contingent framework of traveling notions of race and empire that existed under French colonial rule and its lasting legacies. Only by tracing these specificities of the genealogies of racialization as it moved under French colonial rule can we even begin to imagine undoing them.

## Conclusion

The history of the Lebanese diaspora in West Africa is a history of racialization under empire. Lebanese Shi'is in West Africa, in stark relief to a fixed, frozen racialization of Black Africans, could be considered white by French colonial authorities. Conversely, Lebanese Christians lost the special status they were granted in Lebanon under French *politique des races.*

Today, the Lebanese of West Africa are fifth and sixth generation, and although they only number around 25,000–30,000 residents in Senegal, they are a highly visible minority whose business establishments are very

prominent in the Dakar Plateau area.[38] The ones I spoke to in Dakar, refer to themselves as Sénégalo-libanais. They scoff at the idea of sect so present in their original homeland, they speak Wolof and French fluently, and many have never been to Lebanon. Many Senegalese I spoke to, however, still see this group as "aloof and separate," the exact words used by Emmanuel Akyeampong to describe the Lebanese of Ghana.[39]

During the decolonization period on the African continent that led to the birth of newly independent post-colonial African nation-states, the Lebanese were heavily targeted for their involvement in the colonial economy, for their successes on the backs of locals, and for their indifference to Africans themselves. The contentious position that Lebanese occupied in West Africa as colonial "middlemen" was akin to South Asians in East Africa. Unlike their South Asian counterparts, the Lebanese were never officially expelled from Africa.[40] Some Lebanese left voluntarily post-independence, but in the era of mass expulsions on the African continent (see Adou's piece here about the expulsion of Haalpulaars from Mauritania to Senegal and Mali), the Lebanese, perhaps surprisingly, remained unscathed—a promising question for future research.

## Endnotes

1   My understanding of race as a system of social differentiation is informed by the works of Stuart Hall who draws on the work of W. E. B. Du Bois. Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

2   See for example: Julien Charnay, "Les Syro-Libanais en A.O.F. des années 1880-à 1939," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, no. 142 (2017); Boutros Labaki, "L'émigration libanaise en Afrique occidentale sub-saharienne," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales* 9, no. 2 (1993); Rita Cruise-Brian, "Lebanese Entrepreneurs in Senegal: Economic Integration and the Politics of Protection," *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 15, no. 57 (1975): 95–115; and R. Bayly Winder, "The Lebanese in West Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 3 (1962): 296–333.

3   See for example: Sarah Gualtieri, M. A., *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); John Tofik Karam, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); José D. Najar, *Transimperial Anxieties: The Making and Unmaking of Arab Ottomans in São Paulo, Brazil, 1850–1940* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2023); and Camila Pastor, *The Mexican Mahjar: Transnational Maronites, Jews, and Arabs under the French Mandate* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

4   Notable exceptions include, Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Mara Leichtman, *Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese Migration and Religious Conversion in Senegal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

5   Elizabeth Thompson is an exception to this, her book: *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) talks about race as well as gender. For recent work on gender and sect in the Levant, see Maya Mikdashi, *Sectarianism: Sovereignty, Secularism, and the State in Lebanon* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).

6   See for example: Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Tamara Chalabi,

*The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon: Community and Nation Sate, 1918–1943* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shiite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Linda Sayed, "Sectarian Homes: The Making of Shi'i Families and Citizens Under the French Mandate, 1918–1943," PhD Diss (Columbia University, 2013).

[7]   See Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire*, 129, Cruise-Brian, "Lebanese Entrepreneurs in Senegal," 100, and Winder, "The Lebanese in West Africa," 303.

[8]   For more on this, see my forthcoming article, Dahlia El Zein, "From Shi'a to White: Race and Colonialism in Kamel Murouwwa's *Nahnu Fi Ifriqiya*," *Mashriq & Mahjar: The Journal for Middle Eastern and North African Migration* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2025).

[9]   For more on the French Mandate, see Yusuf Al-Hakim, *Suriya wa al-intidab al-faransi* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1983); Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Idir Ouahes, *Syria and Lebanon Under the French Mandate: Cultural Imperialism and the Workings of Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[10]   Linda. S Schilcher, "The Famine of 1915– 1918 in Greater Syria," in John Spagnolo, ed., *Problems of the Middle East in Historical Perspective* (Oxford, 1992).

[11]   Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire*, 101.

[12]   Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire*, 5–6 and 41–42; Charnay, "Les Syro-Libanais en A.O.F. des années 1880-à 1939"; and Labaki, "L'émigration libanaise en Afrique occidentale sub-saharienne."

[13]   Sarah Gualtieri, *Arab Routes: Pathways to Syrian California* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

[14]   'Ali 'Abdallah Murouwwa, "Kalimat muhajir 'an Ifriqiyya," *Al-'Irfan* (1931): 530–31.

[15]   Henry M. Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent* (London: Sampson Low, 1890).

[16]   For example, Martin Johnson, translated by Adeeb Farhat, "Bayna akalat luhum al-bashar," *Al-'Irfan* (1922–23): 361. For more on the influence of European colonial and racial ideas, see Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013) and Omina Elshakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[17]   There are many excellent studies about the experience of African enslavement in the Middle East. See for example Ahmed Alawad Sikainga, *Slaves into Workers: Emancipation and Labor in Colonial Sudan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Ehud Toledano, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Terrance Walz and Kenneth M Cuno (eds). *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Cairo & New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2010).

[18]   Charles Issawi, "The Historical Background of Lebanese Emigration, 1800–1914," in Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (eds), *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris, 1992): 30.

[19]   Kamel Murouwwa, *Nahnu fi Ifriqiya: al-Hijra al-Lubnaniyya al-Suriyya ila Ifriqiya al-Gharbiyya, Madiha, Hadiriha, Mustaqbaliha.* ("We are in Africa: The Lebanese Syrian Migration to West Africa, its Past, Present, and Future") (Beirut: Al-Makshuf, 1938): 192.

[20]   Labaki, "L'émigration libanaise en Afrique occidentale sub-saharienne," 91.

[21]   Alhadji Bouba Nouhou, "Les Libano-Syriens au Sénégal. Trajectoires, accommodations et confessionnalisme," *Confluences Méditerranée*, no. 83 (2012): 135–151. Arsan and Leichtman mention this as well.

[22]   "Libanais emigres a l'etranger" 10T 827 Service historique de la Défense de l'armée de terre Vincennes, March 9, 1960.

[23]   Chalabi, *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon*, 102. Asher S. Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: In Search of Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

[24]   Elise Burton, *Genetic Crossroads: The Middle East and the Science of Human Heredity* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021): 39–40.

[25]   Burton, *Genetic Crossroads*, 38.

[26]   Chalabi, *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon*, 155, and Ghenwa Hayek, "'Carrying Africa,' Becoming Lebanese: Diasporic Mildness in Lebanese Fiction," in *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race' 2: Diaspora, Memory and Intimacy* [online], edited by Sarah Barbour, Thomas Lacroix, David Howard, and Judith Misrahi-Barak (Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2015). Available on the Internet: http://books.openedition.org/pulm/9228.

[27]   Lois Lortet, *La Syrie D'adjourd'hui: Voyages Dans La Phénicie, Le Liban, Et La Judée, 1875–1880* (Paris: Hachette et cie, 1884): 116. First found in Max Weiss, "Institutionalizing Sectarianism: Law, Religious Culture, and the Remaking of Shi'i Lebanon, 1920–1947" (PhD Diss., Stanford University, 2007): 57.

[28]   For an Arabic explainer of the term see: https://www.almodon.com/politics/2022/3/17/بين-دولار-الشيعة-وليرة-المتداولة

[29]   See Chalabi, *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil* and Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism*.

[30]   Laurence Marfaing and Mariam Sow, *Les Operateurs Economiques au Senegal: Entre le Formel et l'Informel (1930–1996)* (Paris: Karthala, 1999).

[31]   "Note on Lebanese in Dakar," DE 2009 PA 35 50 Service historique de la Défense de l'armée de terre Vincennes. No date but other documents in the box from 1939–1945.

[32]   Murouwwa, *Nahnu fi Ifriqiya*, 236–237.

[33]   For the US context see Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*; for Australian context see Ghassan Hage, "Maronite White Self-Racialisation as Identity fetishism: Capitalism and the Experience of Colonial Whiteness," in Karim Murji and John Solomos (eds), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and for South African context, see Cecile Yazbek, "Albinos in the Laager* – Being Lebanese in South Africa," Moise A. Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies NC State University, June 21, 2016.

[34]   Details on this in my forthcoming article referenced above, El Zein, "From Shi'a to White."

[35]   Eve Troutt Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Empire* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013): 1–6.

[36]   Sumayya Kassamali, "Understanding Race and Migrant Domestic Labor in Lebanon," *Middle East Report Online*, July 13, 2021, and "The Kafala System as Racialized Servitude," *POMEPS Studies 44, Racial Formations in Africa and the Middle East: A Transregional Approach* (September 2021).

[37]   Hilary Jones and Caroline Faria, "A Darling of the Beauty Trade: Race, Care, and the Lebanese Styling of Synthetic Hair," *Cultural Geographies* 27, no. 1 (2020): 92.

[38]   Estimates according to the Lebanese embassy in Dakar.

[39]   Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, "Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa: The Case of the Lebanese in Ghana," *Africa* 76, no. 3 (2006): 297–323.

[40]   Meghan Garrity, "Introducing the Government-Sponsored Mass Expulsion Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 59, no. 5 (2022): 767–776.

# Black Racial Politics and the Racialist Populist Backlash during Tunisia's Democratic Transition

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In December 2018, the Ivorian community in Tunisia was rocked by the brutal murder of Falikou Coulibaly, the president of the Association of Ivorians in Tunisia (AIT), in the northern Tunis suburb of Raoued. What was later described as a racially motivated murder happened two months after Tunisia's Assembly of the Representatives of People unanimously passed Law 50-2018 that criminalizes racial discrimination based on skin color. Violent attacks on the different Sub-Saharan African communities became frequent after the 2010–2011 revolution and have escalated since a brutal wave of attacks on Congolese students in downtown Tunis in December 2016 by a Tunisian man. While that attack was not deemed racially motivated, the pressure from mainly Black Tunisian civil society activists forced the government of then-prime minister Youssef Chahed to take an official stance and declare a day for the fight against racial discrimination. This act was considered a small success for Black Tunisian activists in getting their repressed voices heard and highlighting the urgency of addressing rampant and endemic anti-Black racism and state-sanctioned discrimination against Black Tunisians, who make up some 10–15 percent of the population.

Despite Chahed's concession, anti-Black racism escalated after the election of populist President Kais Saied in 2019. On February 21, 2023, Saied made a racially charged accusation that Black Africans have a malevolent and secret plan to replace the Tunisian population with a Black African one, thus tampering with its demographic structure and its Arabic-Islamic identity and wreaking havoc with violence and criminality (Akrimi, 2023; Geisser, 2023). Migrants thus became the "usual suspects" who threaten the Tunisian nation-state (Akrimi, 2023). Saied needed a constant scapegoat (Speakman-Cordall, 2023) to cover for his failure in addressing the economic crisis and found Black Africans to be a soft target. His supporters used his statement to double down on anti-migrant

rhetoric that stoked violence against Black Africans, including calls for murder. This was compounded with xenophobia about the perils of a Black invasion and a paranoid conspiracy theory that compared the presence of Black Africans in Tunisia to Jewish colonists and Zionist occupation in Palestine by pointing to Afro-Zionism (Geisser, 2023; Marks, 2023). In the face of these supposed existential threats, the president's staunch supporters called for the cleansing of Tunisia in the same way Saied waged a campaign to cleanse the country of his opponents. Some even called for the internment and massive deportation of Black Africans (Marks, 2023).

This paper argues that Tunisia's turbulent democratic transition precipitated an unexpected rise in xenophobic, anti-Black racism that has mainly targeted Sub-Saharan Africans, be they irregular and transitory migrants or legal residents among the student community. This has been exacerbated by Saied's conspiratorial persona, his populism, and his autocratic regime that after July 2021 purged political dissidents. Sub-Saharan African migrants constitute the perfect scapegoat for a populist leader like Saied, whose politics consists of fighting the enemy within, the "Other" as it were, while giving it a xenophobic character that specifically targets Black African migrants as a threat to Tunisia's Arab-Islamic identity.

**Post-Revolution Black Tunisian Activism**

The 2010–2011 Tunisian uprising was a watershed historical moment for Black Tunisians. Expressing anti-racist sentiments at the individual and collective levels had been unthinkable in the long decades of post-independence dictatorial regimes under presidents Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Abdelhamid, 2018 a and b; Mrad-Dali, 2015; Mzioudet, 2018 and 2022; Scaglioni, 2020). The revolution of freedom and dignity

emboldened Black Tunisian activists to break the taboo of "silent racism" they had endured since the abolition of slavery in 1846 (Mzioudet, 2018).

Denouncing racism became a hallmark of Tunisian cosmopolitanism during the revolution. For example, in the early days of the Tunisian revolution, Facebook groups that focused on the issue of anti-Black racism gathered people from different backgrounds including students, photographers, and journalists to shed light on inequality in citizenship rights for Black Tunisians. They argued for the need to review the definition of citizenship more broadly (Pouessel, 2013). In 2012, ADAM, the first Black Tunisian organization, was created. The local political mobilization of grassroots Black organizations led to the establishment of the group M'nemty in 2014 after the disbanding of ADAM in 2013. It provided momentum to the Black Tunisian movement to develop and make bold demands such as the inclusion of race in the 2014 Tunisian constitution, according to Maha Abdelhamid who was politically active in lobbying for the right of Black Tunisians to be free from any race-based discrimination. Through such organizations, Black Tunisians were able to move from the margins of civil society to the center during the revolution in order to build representation for themselves and negotiate their spatial presence (Arbi, 2023). The collective mobilization of Black Tunisian activists saw its apex during the period of the debate over the Tunisian constitution among different civil society activists on rights and freedoms in post-revolution Tunisia.

Tunisia's democratic transition thus opened up opportunities for Black Tunisians to reclaim the public space that had been long denied to them and to publicize their cause for racial justice and equality with their light-skinned compatriots. The passing of Law 50 that criminalizes racial discrimination was the successful outcome of the coordinating efforts of Black Tunisian activists and some MPs (including the late Jamila Ksiksi, the first and only Black Tunisian MP) as well as non-Black civil society organizations working on migrants, minorities, and human rights (Mzioudet, 2022). When the law was passed, people believed that it would usher in a

new era in racial politics in Tunisia and across the MENA region, viewing it as avant-garde legislation crowning years of indefatigable advocacy work by anti-racism activists. But even as there was a Black Tunisian awakening of active mobilization, a racist backlash emerged quickly in response to these advances. It is important to note that Tunisia's historic public policy abolishing slavery did not change the general population's mentality (Arbi, 2023). And it is also notable that the law frames "racism as an individual problem for which the State is arbitrator" (Akrimi, 2023).

**From Tunisian Exceptionalism to Tunisian Paradox: The (Re-)Invention of the Tunisian Nation**

Post-independence Tunisian identity was built around the omnipotence of an Arab-Islamic identity centered around a Mediterranean racial phenotype. Despite their long existence within Tunisian society, Black Tunisians' image has been made invisible by the narrative of Tunisian exceptionalism. The imagined national community crafted by Tunisia's first president and father of modern Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, adopted the official narrative of a homogenous nation. This became a benchmark for national identity, public policies, and social change in Tunisian society. It focused on a common heritage that shunned anything and anyone that was different and where forms of discrimination existed under the surface and would reappear with each crisis (Arbi, 2023). In other words, underneath the homogeneous and sectarian conflict-ridden Tunisian society, lurk unsaid discriminatory practices, whose intersection created animosity, be it at the regional, ethnic, or racial level. They resurfaced after 2011, within the framework of post-dictatorship Tunisia, when questions of Tunisian identity, particularly the secular-Islamist divide, pitted Tunisians of different ideological and political hues against each other. The crisis even led to violent confrontations during the Ennahdha-led Troika government between 2011 and 2014, when hardline Islamists, mainly Salafists, confronted moderate Islamists of the Ennahdha party. These latter were also confronted by secularists, who expressed grievances about Ennahdha's attempts to Islamicize Tunisian society. Manifestations of anti-Black racism occurred in the first months after the

revolution in 2011 with instances of verbal attacks on some Black African students, which were exacerbated in 2015 with physical attacks and other hate crimes.

Bourguibism centered around an assimilative project that homogenized the Tunisian nation by taking its cue from President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's efforts at Turkification. It crafted a model where Tunisian identity superseded social, cultural, and racial differences. It adopted a color-blind policy that "emphasized Black Tunisians' difference," thus relegating them to a status of servitude. The paradox of this racial politics lies in the duality of a rigid color-blind policy of full citizenship, while at the same time ignoring the memory of slavery that stigmatized Black Tunisians. Bourguibism therefore failed to give Black Tunisians the same status as their non-Black Tunisian compatriots (Ltifi, 2020: 69).

It can be argued that there is a connection between post-independence Tunisian public policy and the narcissistic character of the persona of Bourguiba and his authoritarian personality. Bourguiba believed in his superiority, yet professed to care about educating the people, the Tunisian nation (the *umma*). He considered himself the personification of morality and distinction and thought he was endowed with an historical mission to be the father of the national community (*al majmua al wataniyya*) and the people. He strove to write Tunisia's history by himself. This history was instrumentalized by those in authority and aided in internalizing racism in the population (Arbi, 2013). The narcissistic personality of a leader such as Bourguiba affects the national community and inspires the development of collective narcissism where the in-group is idealized by its unrealistic belief in its greatness through external recognition and great appreciation by others (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009 cited in Eker et al. 2022). Collective narcissism, also referred to as national narcissism, encourages patriotism and glorification of the homeland. It seeks to protect the nation's image and has a tendency for aggrandizement. The legacy of Bourguibism helps to explain the racist policies adopted by President Saeid after 2019.

The Tunisian paradox also lies in the democratic paradox that saw a rise in racist and xenophobic attacks when authoritarianism's grip was loosened on civil society, thus allowing public mobilization against racial discrimination as well as the trivialization of racism (Geisser, 2023), as is the case of the Tunisian Nationalist Party (TNP).[1] This party was established in December 2018, shortly after the adoption of the law criminalizing racial discrimination, Law 50-2018. Its founder Soufiene Ben Sghaier was briefly active within the ranks of Congrès Pour la République (CPR) political party, headed by former president Moncef Marzouki. Ben Sghaier was joined by two other members, and they were able to mobilize disaffected Tunisians with the Islamist-led government during the turbulent transition and fragile security situation. The surge in the number of Sub-Saharan African migrants escaping the Libyan conflict into Tunisia provided the TNP with its main battleground to attack the post-2011 uprising governments. TNP accused them of adopting an open-door policy of allowing in "illegal migrants" who, in their view, would constitute a security and existential threat to Tunisia.

Anti-Black racism predates the Tunisian revolution, however, and the idea that racism is linked to the country's colonial heritage is a form of denialism discourse that attempts to make Tunisia seem free of racism (Geisser, 2023). Moreover, the instrumentalization of the country's abolition of slavery serves to hide latent racism by eclipsing the memory of slavery. Anti-Black racism remains Tunisia's biggest taboo still denied by the general population. This can be seen in the government's refusal to admit that the president's fiery speech about Sub-Saharan African migrants is racist, even after the African Union's condemnation. This crisis opened the debate about this taboo, as well as the place of Black Tunisians in society, who were made invisible in public space and marginalized since the abolition of slavery in 1846. Through a combination of instrumentalizing an Arab-Islamic identity discourse while flirting with the clash of civilizations theory of Samuel Huntington, Tunisia's symbolic Africanness emphasized Black people's imperfect Islam or their status as second-class Muslims (Geisser, 2023).

Their so-called imperfection as Muslims is what justifies their stigmatization by a section of "light-skinned" Tunisian society.

Thus, one aspect of the Tunisian Nationalist Party's xenophobic and anti-Black rhetoric lies in its historical revisionism that justifies its enmity towards Black Africans by virtue of their supposed inferiority. In a Tik Tok video made in 2022, the TNP produced an alternative historical narrative that rests on the conflation of Black African migrants with slaves who were brought from West Africa to Tunisia in the eighteenth century and later during the reign of the Ottoman ruler, Hamuda Pasha, in the early nineteenth century. TNP hailed Hamuda Pasha as a national hero of Tunisian independence from foreign interference for banishing freed West African slaves for their alleged corrupted morals in 1800. According to the TNP's narrative, the Black community in Tunisia settled during the rule of Ali Bey (1735–1756) who brought them from the historical region of the Bilad Al Sudan (corresponding to the empires of Kanem-Bornu and Mali) to work as his special guards and gave them permission to set up their own clubs and associations. But, the video claims, with time they began plotting to "pervert" the Tunisian state through social clubs with administration and special courts. The video suggests that they later proved to be corrupt, spreading vice and lewdness in Muslim Tunisian society.[2] In 1800, Hamuda Pasha decided to banish them from their residences in Tunis and they became homeless across the country. The video purports that these Black people of West African descent are doomed to be marginalized for their inability to integrate into Tunisian Muslim society and therefore are like the "new colonizers" of Tunisia today, the Black African migrants. (Tunisian Nationalist Party's Tik-Tok video, 2022).

Another aspect of the paradoxical character of Tunisian exceptionalism is the "Bilal Syndrome" that often connects anti-Black racism with Bilal, the Black Islamic figure and companion of the Prophet Mohamed. However, there is a danger of Orientalizing anti-Black racism in Tunisia as religious (Islam) and cultural (Arab) byproducts (Geisser, 2023).

The post-independence Tunisian state has thus been complicit with racism in cementing an imagined national community. Anti-Black racism "reproduces local forms of whiteness, privilege and alterity dear to nation-states," which extends to a global white supremacy (Akrimi, 2023). In the rhetoric of the TNP, Black African "colonialism" is seen in the threatening presence of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Tunisia who are accused of attempting to "rewrite history" and to "make North Africa Black" (Akrimi, 2023). From this vantage point, anti-racism becomes dangerous for national unity and is stigmatized as a form of foreign interference in the healthy Tunisian body (Geisser, 2023).

Saied denied that his statements were racist and minimized the violence visited upon Black African migrants as marginal incidents (Arbi, 2023). He went on to accuse his opponents of distorting his rhetoric for malevolent reasons, which amounted to a denial of the reality of racism in favor of the purity of the people. This reveals his obsession with purifying Tunisian identity and promoting an imaginary Tunisianness that is Arab and Islamic in character and based on the values of traditional family, excessive patriotism, and people's submission to the state's interests.

Collective narcissism can be a predictor for populist parties or leaders and their grandiose narratives, like former American president Donald Trump's *Make America Great Again* or Saied's praise for the greatness of the Tunisian nation and its pretensions to lead the world. Additionally, national narcissism is seen in its aggrandizement and its division of society between the loyal "us" and disloyal "them" (Arbi, 2023). The conspiracy theory at the center of Saied's February 2023 speech serves to build a separation wall between honest Tunisians who align with "his own political fiction" from Tunisian traitors who represent a national security threat (Akrimi, 2023).

Saied has also accused foreign parties and groups that stand in solidarity with migrants of having received money to destabilize the Tunisian state (Geisser, 2023). This prompted the Tunisian ministry of interior to criminalize

anyone who aided evicted Black African migrants shortly after Saied's speech, using law 2004-6 modifying law number 75-40 of May 14, 1975, which is related to passports and travel documents (FTDES, 2023). Invoking national security to justify the crackdown on Black African migrants became the Tunisian state's *raison d'être* and is an example of where human rights take the backbench in the state's national priorities and security concerns. A campaign to hunt for any person who looked "Sub-Saharan African"—whether or not they had legal or illegal status in the country—was mobilized with lynching campaigns and carried out by citizens and security forces. Security forces also warned that anyone caught sheltering Black Africans could be sued (Geisser, 2023). This campaign did not spare Black Tunisians who were the collateral damage of this ugly campaign.

## The Emergence of Racial Backlash and Identitarian Politics: The Case of the Tunisian Nationalist Party

Throughout the democratic transition after the 2010–2011 revolution, populism reared its head in Tunisia with populist and nativist parties taking cues from the French far right Great Replacement Theory of Renaud Camus, anti-immigration discourse, and conspiracy theories that blew back into France's former colonies. Indeed, Saied has reinvented Camus' theory in a Tunisian version in which Black African migrants are seen as planning a cultural invasion of Tunisia encouraged by Afrocentrism (Geisser, 2023).

Democratization in Tunisia therefore has paradoxically produced a backlash to the discussion about race with the emergence of populism and its politics (pioneered by Saied) of supporting these conspiracy theories. The Tunisian Nationalist Party, for example, has been using nationalist, xenophobic, and extremist discourse to call for the abrogation of Law 50-2018. Its members act like vigilantes as they tour working-class neighborhoods of Tunis with high concentrations of Sub-Saharan African immigrants calling for boycotts of their businesses, refusing to rent houses to them, and even expelling some from Tunis and Sfax.

The TNP juxtaposes Tunisia's situation in the nineteenth century following the death of Hamuda Pasha in 1814 and subsequent French colonization in 1881 with the role of foreign embassies in the 2011 Tunisian Revolution. In both cases it sees the end of one glorious era in Tunisia (pre-1814 and pre-2011) being followed by the emergence of a new one characterized by foreign occupation: in the current period by Black African "colonists" who are supposedly being aided by the European Union.[3] The role of embassies in building networks with Tunisian parties after 2011 is also seen by the TNP as mobilizing, recruiting, and infiltrating Tunisian society and as hubs for secret agents, and as similar to the situation after 1814.[4]

Alternatively, the party leadership organizes meetings at the local and regional levels where they have their own representatives and discuss the organization of their activities, including collaborating with police forces in reporting the whereabouts of irregular Sub-Saharan African migrants. After Saied's speech, around 300 Sub-Saharan migrants were arbitrarily arrested by police (Akrimi, 2023).

## Conclusion

The watershed moment of President Saeid's February 21, 2023, speech created a moral shock for anti-racist Tunisians who had mobilized during the previous decade against anti-Black racism. One of the slogans the anti-racism protests advanced is the notion of national identity and the extent to which Tunisian identity is rooted in its Africanness. Saeid's discourse left them with a feeling of shame (Geisser, 2023). The Tunisian state's forced amnesia of the country's history of racism is tantamount to the dictatorship tools of collective amnesia about decades of systemic human rights violations, torture, and abuse of dissenting voices. Saied is using the same techniques to erase not only a decade of democratic small gains, albeit meagre, but is also discarding the "Black Decade" as fake democracy. In distorting historical facts, resorting to conspiracy theory and Orwellian newspeak, Tunisia has become dystopian. Under his autocratic rule lies anti-Black racism and his espousal of the Great Replacement

theory. Authoritarian restoration signals the demise of the Tunisian democratic experience.

Digging into Tunisia's racial taboo can encourage citizens to re-think the legacy of slavery in Tunisia. Saied's speech represented a moment of racial reckoning, compelling Tunisians to look into the mirror and reconsider their complex identity and reconcile their Arab and Islamic identity with their alienated African identity.

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### Endnotes

1    Its co-founder, Sofiene Ben Sghaier calls the party the "New Tunisian Nationalist Party," purporting to be reviving a party that was founded in 1937, along with a newspaper titled *Al Kawmiyya Attounissiyya* (Tunisian Nationalism).  "*Al Fikr, Al Qalb, Al Rouh wal Qawmiyya Attunisiyya*" ("The Thinking, the Heart, the Spirit and Tunisian Nationalism"), Tunisian Nationalist Party Facebook page, August 18, 2023: https://fb.watch/myggOc3rD3/.

2    Tunisian Nationalist Party, "Tunisian nationalism, eradicating the corruption of Black Africans by Hamuda Pasha in 1800," December 9, 2022. https://www.tiktok.com/@9awmya.tn/video/7175191924901498117

3    Tunisian Nationalist Party Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100090437133218

4    "Tunisian Nationalist Party statement: Europe! Get your Hands Off Tunisia," March 17, 2023.
     https://www.tnp.tn/ بيان-الحزب-القومي-التونسي-أوروبا-ارفع /

# Franco-African Postcolonial Diplomatic Relations:
## A Very Odd Arrangement

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The post-1945 global order ushered in a new era of decolonization, providing scholars with an opportunity to observe and analyze the trajectories of countries gradually emerging from colonial domination and to study their new existence alongside that of other sovereign countries. The transition of former colonial territories to independent entities, however, did not consistently result in full sovereignty. In fact, some of these former colonies, particularly in former French West Africa, found themselves ensnared in an enduring period of transition and unrealized sovereign statehood. More specifically, Franco-African relations are stuck in a framework that subverts the conventional understanding of diplomacy and diplomatic practice in a postcolonial context.

The Franco-African postcolonial pact is a form of collective security arrangement (*un régime de garantie*) that is supposed to provide economic and financial stability, while enabling a seamless integration of former colonies into multilateral structures of governance. The intricate entanglements of colonial and postcolonial relations in the economic, political, military, and cultural spheres are extensive and cannot be fully examined within the constraints of this limited space. Instead, this paper analyzes the lingering effects of the community project of 1946-1958 within the dynamics of interdependence and subjugation in contemporary Franco-African relations. The latter operate in a framework of relations that is underpinned by a dual contradiction. On one hand, there is an attempt to maintain "normal" diplomatic interactions among formally sovereign entities still entrenched in a hierarchical power structure. Conversely, the structure of the relationship plays a significant role in the historicizing and indexing of African sovereignty in global politics. As an emanation of the Berlin convention, colonial governmentality distributed sovereign effects across contexts characterized by illegitimacy and legal arbitrariness, essentially a form of governance without legitimacy. It concurrently contributed to the process of standardizing a universal concept of sovereignty, a norm also employed as an instrument of political and ideological differentiation. In the post-World War II deliberations over the future of French West Africa, sovereignty emerged as a malleable and multifaceted norm, capable of embodying qualities such as right, rationality, capacity, morality, and metaphor. These possibilities disappeared as multilateral governance structures assumed the responsibility of further integrating former colonies into a global liberal governance framework, along with its associated limits.

## France and Francophone Africa

France's relations with Francophone Africa are framed by a logic of imperial ambition first articulated by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, the Controller-General of Finances under Louis XIV in the seventeenth century. While Colbertism may not represent a comprehensive economic ideology, it served as both a political and economic doctrine emphasizing wealth generation and interventionism as crucial elements of French influence. Colbert's version of offensive mercantilism posited that for France to maintain a "favorable balance of trade," it needed to secure resource reserves in its colonies. For Colbert, France could not aspire to global power status if it could not commit substantial investments in scientific and technical capital. To achieve this goal, the first step was to establish an academy of science that would lay the groundwork for disciplines that produced the "savants" and techniques of empire. Colbertism was carried forth under the Third Republic by the Solidarists who initiated the "civilizing mission" through extensive educational programs. The legacy of this effort can be seen today in institutions like CAMES (Conseil africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur), whose organizational structures, knowledge

production orientation, and intellectual legitimation processes echo earlier endeavors aimed at integrating Africa as a target of imperial aspirations.

Despite the end of formal colonial rule, the structure of Franco-African relations in the post-World War II era does not neatly conform to any of the established normative orders within the Westphalian system, whether the traditional notion of sovereign statehood or the classical alliance formation. While it is an expression of residual imperial practice, the French position in Africa nonetheless presents a challenge to a straightforward interpretation as strictly imperial or neo-imperial. In essence, French Africa diplomacy was always an instrument to bolster French grandeur, while African countries were set to play a similar role, each substitutable for the other regardless of differences. To speak of diplomacy in fact seems like a misnomer for a "reserved domain" of policy and intervention steered from the Elysée, the seat of the French presidency, a tradition that dates back to the time of Charles De Gaulle. For all these reasons, decolonization was not the world-shattering event it was meant to be. It failed to be the "program of complete disorder" that would shake the very foundation of the Western colonial system, as Frantz Fanon had predicted.[1]

The aftermath of the dissolution of the French Empire exhibited a far greater degree of continuity compared with the British and Portuguese Empires. The inception of the Fifth Republic in 1958 was initially envisioned as a process of transforming colonial institutions into federated entities that would unite the former metropole and its former colonies. The reality, however, turned out to be quite different. The Constitution of the Fifth Republic turned colonies into outgrowths and appendages of the metropole, essentially instituting a state-empire. Consequently, it failed to resolve the fundamental contradiction between a professed commitment to an abstract universalism and the reality of cultural pluralism within the French Empire. Furthermore, it did not provide sufficient space for institutional opening after 1958.

At the 1944 Brazzaville conference, French elites appealed to the good faith (*bonne volonté*) of Africans to aid in

the reconstruction of France. Africans were asked to delay demands for immediate independence and assent to French demands for access to African resources and markets (to support the Marshall Plan) in exchange for a French commitment to African development at a later stage. The pledge for reform quickly soured due to brutal wars in Vietnam, Madagascar, and Algeria, principally. By 1949, with a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and an admission into the newly formed NATO, it became clear that France aspired to remain a world power within the strictures of imperial geopolitics.

Jules Ferry, the architect of French imperialism, could have designed postwar France's Brazzaville Conference in 1944. The latter effectively established Africa as a special province of concern, suited not for normal diplomacy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but for management by the Ministry of Cooperation, notably located in the very same building that once housed the Ministry of Colonies. France's neocolonial attitude was bolstered by the United States and supported by NATO, an organization whose Cold War raison d'etre carried over the functions of empire for reasons owing in part to a newly expanded notion of the Western alliance.

### The Franco-African Community: Reforming Empire from Within

In 1944, at the Brazzaville conference, the project of a union constitution envisaged a political experiment that defied the binary of colonizer and colonized and sought to transcend the chasm that created two distinct political, racial, economic, and ethical communities. In 1946, the constitution of the French Union inaugurated a short-lived moment of experimentation that has no parallel in colonial history. It created a historic window—for reform and redemption—that could have potentially led the way in devising a model of global democracy and post-imperial humanism.

The French-African Union, which evolved into the Franco-Africa Community in 1958, was a project of multinational sovereignty that was negotiated under colonial material conditions.[2] It aimed to redefine the relationship between

France and its former colonies and protectorates based on a framework of assimilation and federation. Assimilation was viewed as an ideal solution that would, in theory, erase the unequal dynamics between metropole and colony while simultaneously expanding the colonial domain. The formation of a union comprised of assimilated entities resonated with a long-standing aspiration held by French leaders to create a Greater France.[3] The federative model aimed to mitigate the drawbacks of assimilation by granting some degree of autonomy in diversity, a manner to preserve unity without imposing an artificial fusion. The two models were notably championed by Senegal's Leopold Sedar Senghor and Ivory Coast's Houphouet-Boigny respectively.

De Gaulle for his part viewed the Franco-Africa Community as "a patchwork of overlapping and parceled sovereignties ... and a general absence of a clear distinction between 'international' and 'domestic' realms."[4] He envisioned the coming postcolonies would have an ambiguous status, endowed with an limited autonomy, leaving considerable room for France to arbitrate domestic politics and policy. In this scheme, postcolonial African states would no longer be considered imperial dependencies, but they would not achieve full independence either. Conceptually, these states would resemble the protectorates that Morocco and Tunisia once were, reflecting a unique and nuanced relationship with France.

De Gaulle's position was also driven by his response to external tensions. He believed that the French Empire needed to maintain its strength, particularly in light of two major sources of concern: Algeria and Indochina. Ultimately, the Community remained under the influence and in the bosom of France as a geopolitical tool for advancing France's global standing. This was enabled by a "centered, organic construction" that intentionally restrained the realization of a true federation. In De Gaulle's perspective, a federation involving France and its former colonies was neither a literal nor a legally defined concept.[5]

Over time, the Community arrangement gave rise to a flawed system of institutions and governmental

frameworks that diverged from the standards of nationhood defined by exclusive sovereign borders. In essence, this relationship exceeded both domestic and international norms but did not neatly fall into the classifications of transnational or global. This peculiarity posed significant challenges for reform endeavors. While some African and French stakeholders advocated for a complete rupture due to their fundamental rejection of neocolonialism, others expressed empathy for the maintenance of societies, networks, and institutions that had evolved beyond their initial neocolonial objectives.

Contrary to De Gaulle's views, a cohort of post-World War II French and African intellectuals and politicians were genuinely animated by ideals of solidarity, brotherhood, and universalism and became invested in the crafting of institutions that could replace the colonial empire. The turbulent aftermath of the war appeared to open up limitless political avenues for reshaping the imperial system. At the very least, it united colonized Africans and some French individuals in a shared aspiration for freedom.

The commitment of African *évolués* (literally the "evolved" ones or "civilized")[6] to the post-imperial union was more than merely a postwar contingency. It was to a qualitative shift from the dehumanizing politics of subjugation to a politics of "situated humanism" in the words of Gary Wilder. Their challenge was to think of a possible humanism within and after empire, "to turn therefore colonialism from an impersonal, dehumanizing, mode of othering into an intimate, humane, common emancipative project."[7] It is not enough to point to the strong intellectual affinities in which the likes of Gabriel d'Arboussier, Boubou Hama, and Leopold Senghor were socialized. Their political imaginaries drew from a plurality of references. If Senghor and Boigny could be faulted for being *compromised*, one could also point out the bad faith of the French.

The interwar period witnessed the establishment of transcultural, transracial, anti-imperialist alliances from all corners of empire. For instance, within the French context, the Colonial Commission of the French Communist

Party (PCF) featured leaders hailing from diverse regions, including Max Bloncourt from the Antilles, Lamine Senghor from Senegal, Vo Thanh Long from Vietnam, Hadjali Abdelkader and Mahmoud Ben Lekhal from Algeria, alongside left-leaning French politicians like Henri Lozeray.[8] Similarly, the transnational League against Imperialism (LAI) also embraced transracial solidarity, even in the face of state surveillance and repression. This era witnessed the forging of alliances that transcended cultural and racial boundaries, through shared opposition to imperialism.

The political experiment that brought together former colonizer and formerly colonized into a single institutional apparatus placed francophone Africa as a distinct region in a divided global landscape. Three legislative structures were to facilitate co-deliberation on mutual areas of concern between metropole and colonies, as well as develop suitable mechanisms of postcolonial governance. The Franco-Africa Community was a geographically mobile entity devoid of sociological homogeneity. Its ambition was to effectively abolish the distinction between the national and the international.[9] The French envisioned a reformed empire that embodied a form of sovereignty, where the Community would function as a global imperial state. While this vision entailed granting fragments of sovereignty to colonial territories, it was firmly established that France would be its central axis.

Megan Brown underscores a significant ambiguity in the rhetoric of fraternity towards African subjects, a rhetoric tarnished by racism ("fraternity-in-racism"). Already in the aftermath of WWI, France invited workers and soldiers from its colonies, who had fought alongside them, to return to their homelands. As Oumar Ba illustrates in his essay in this collection, once their services were no longer required, African *tirailleurs* and workers were unwelcome. Their presence in the metropole was not considered a right but rather a privilege extended under exceptional circumstances.[10]

Colonial racism and the formation of racial hierarchies were starkly evident in the sphere of education. Prior

to 1940, colonial policies deliberately restricted African students' access to secondary education. The colonial government enforced a dual educational system, maintaining separate schools for the children of colonial administrators and establishing distinct institutions (*école indigène*) for the offspring of colonial subjects. This segregation was designed to deter the development of critical thinking among colonial subjects. Ultimately, the core objective of colonial subjugation was to deny Africans equal recognition as fellow human beings.

While references to race and racial orders were overt and explicit in the context of colonial rule, after independence these references morphed into a language centered around "transition" and "development" for newly formed states. The "dynamics of difference" analyzed by Antony Anghie underpin the racialization of the international order in the form of the application of different standards to "uncivilized" societies, effectively transforming legal distinctions of status into racial distinctions.[11]

**The Postcolonial Compact: A Dual Foreign Policy Regime**

Franco-African relations are a political and diplomatic oddity in the configuration of the post-1945 global order. They continue to be marked by indirect political and economic governance and the mediation of African sovereignty in global structures of governance. Starting from post-reconstruction efforts under the Marshall Plan and extending through the unsuccessful Franco-African Union (later known as the Franco-Africa Community) and towards national independence, France forged a dynamic with Francophone Africa wherein the latter served as a captive market for French manufactured goods, agricultural produce, and services. Simultaneously, African countries supplied indispensable natural resources for French industries, notably nuclear energy.

The "restoration of French greatness" movement that arose at the conclusion of World War II used French influence in Africa as an argument to push for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. Various French proposals for

decolonization were designed to uphold France's global influence, which was primarily centered on its former colonial provinces of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Ocean. In return, France pledged its support to its allies among the African ruling classes and advocated for their interests within the United Nations and other international fora. The tradeoff was set: "*la grandeur française*" depended on the status of its former colonies in Africa, in other words its "*pré carré*" (sphere of influence) required African compliance with France's designs, from the CFA currency regime to economic arrangements (such as the Lomé Accords), to security and defense compacts.

Throughout the Fifth Republic, France has maintained two templates for its foreign policy: one for its *pré carré* and another for the rest of the world. The Ministry of the Colonies became the Ministry of Cooperation and colonial governance structures were absorbed into a new institutional *dispositif* manned by a portion of the thousands of former colonial functionaries who found themselves suddenly out of jobs at the end of colonial rule. As an example of colonial continuity, Francois Mitterrand was once Minister of Colonies before later becoming French president. The other, formal regime is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, colloquially called the Quai d'Orsay, which is the seat of French diplomatic action in the rest of the world.[12] It is no coincidence that under the government of Emmanuel Macron, the Minister of Interior is also the Minister of Overseas Territories. In fact, there is much to be learned from the relationship between France and its overseas departments and territories in thinking about its peculiar diplomatic architecture.

France's conception of the postcolonial pact can be seen in the geopolitical doctrine according to which geographical proximity with Africa as a region mandates its involvement in African affairs.[13] Hence, for instance, the more than 138 agreements of "cooperation" between France and its former colonies pertaining to France's military presence, military pacts, and the establishment of military bases; its access to African strategic resources and markets; and its leadership in the Francophone world as a unified cultural sphere. In return, France has played a central role in the political and economic stability of its African allies through financial as well as symbolic resources, including but not limited to support for networks of sympathetic African elites and the marginalization and suppression of dissident figures. France provides intelligence and institutions to these ends, including a special counsel for African affairs to the French president who serves as relay to African heads of states: a "Monsieur Afrique," a post initially held by Jacques Foccart.

The blurred boundary between the national and the international has produced since independence a conjoined geopolitical space of relationships that defy the norms of ordinary diplomacy between nominally equal sovereign entities. Recognizing the subordinate nature of African postcolonial states does not, however, imply a denial of agency or responsibility on the part of Africans themselves.

From the perspective of the postcolonial compact, therefore, Francophone states are lacking a distinct sovereign existence; their state structure is designed to align with a broader agenda of post-WWII independence, devoid of substantive sovereignty. At the least, one would need to speak of an ambiguous African sovereignty to account for the highly fluid, personalized, unofficial character of early attempts to give a formal structure to the postcolonial transition. Such ambiguity marked specifically the status of French, then independent, Algeria.

As Megan Brown's work demonstrates, for the first few years of the European Economic Community, there were no clear diplomatic borders between Algeria and France. The former's participation in the Community was arguably heavily mediated by France, but its importance was undeniable in the greater scheme of Eurafrica.[14] France requested a form of association then called "Pays et territoires d'Outre-Mer" (PTOM) to the European common market. Article 6 of the NATO Charter in fact recognizes this much.[15] As an extension of the French body politic, Algeria was de facto formally part of the European Economic Community (EEC). However, Algerians neither enjoyed equal wages (let alone equal levels of social

security benefits) as other member citizens nor were they allowed to move freely within the EEC countries. The civic, social, and economic discrimination of Algerians was a racial(ist) bias that negated their formal status as French citizens:

> […] even though Algeria, as a consequence of "being France" was politically an integral part of the EEC, Algerian-French citizens were discriminated against socially and economically on the basis of race. As such, the European project can be seen to have been *a racialised project* [my emphasis] from the very outset and mobility was once again delimited by race.[16]

A further constraint on African sovereignty underpins the policy of representation at the United Nations and other multilateral institutions. France has persistently acted as an intermediary, overseeing the political involvement of Francophone nations in what resembles a trustee-ward dynamic. The much-lamented inaudibility of the African voice in international affairs can in part be attributed to this distinctive arrangement. It is a Franco-African peculiarity that may indeed substantiate the claim of certain scholars that African states merely have a formal, juridical sovereignty and not a substantive one.

The penholding system, which has existed under various guises since the entry of former colonial territories in the multilateral system of governance, stands as a notable example. On March 1, 2023, Mali formally requested that France be removed as penholder on all matters pertaining to its affairs in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Mali accused France of engaging in "acts of aggression, violation of […] airspace, subversion and destabilization."[17] The penholder system was structured in 2003; it designated a single UNSC member state to lead negotiations on a specific issue. The penholder assumes responsibility for drafting resolutions and other documents, and it coordinates the efforts of other UNSC members. Its purpose is to expedite the UNSC's response to critical matters efficiently. The penholder can shape resolutions and outcomes and take the lead in council actions related to a particular issue. France has held the

role of penholder on all Mali-related matters since 2012, despite also being the key external military intervener in Mali between 2012–2022. Mali's argument is that France leverages its political heft and veto position to further its own interests at the expense of Mali's.

Critics highlight several shortcomings of the penholder system, including its inflexibility, the disproportionate influence it confers to larger states over smaller ones, and the significant monopoly held by countries like France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. For instance, it is worth noting that nearly all UNSC resolutions related to Africa are introduced by France. Beyond the internal dynamics of the UNSC, the multilateral system often resembles George Orwell's metaphorical *Animal Farm*, where some nations are more equal than others, affording them greater authority and power over their fellow members. This disparity in influence raises concerns about fairness and equity within the international arena.

The justification for the disguised form of trusteeship will not be found in international covenants or in the multilateral treaties designed to facilitate the integration of the formerly colonized into a system of economic and political governance. This outlook is mediated instead by intangible determinations that have to do with culture, race, and geography—all of which tend to underscore principles of differentiation. Equally, diplomatic, political, and economic interactions between former First World and former Third World nations are funneled through the architecture of multilateral institutions.

**Economic Cooperation**

The diplomatic oddity of France's relations with Africa is starkest in the area of economic cooperation. Following the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions, the implementation of the CFA Franc currency arrangement was conceived as a strategic move to mobilize economic and monetary resources within the French Empire, ultimately fortifying France's monetary position and power. Consequently, the pooled reserves of France, which included those from its colonial holdings, granted France

substantial monetary leverage. This perhaps help explain in part why, for a significant portion of the institution's history, International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing directors have predominantly been of French nationality, accounting for nearly 45 years of leadership at the helm of the organization. The functions ascribed to the CFA Franc arrangement extend beyond commonly examined aspects, such as its regulatory role within the economies of former French colonies.

The CFA Franc regime is the most enduring relic of colonial subjugation, effectively exerting control over the economies of member countries while offering unattractive investment prospects, except for French companies. This is primarily due to the fixed parity system—one of the principles of the CFA Franc currency arrangement—which ensures that French companies can repatriate their profits without being affected by currency fluctuations. The related high levels of rent collection, commissions, and transaction taxes within the system have a detrimental impact on the African economy, given that a significant portion of intra-African trade within the CFA region occurs through French financial structures. This illustrates how the legacy of colonial extraction persists within the realm of financial capitalism. The CFA regime thus limits the flexibility and agency of African governments to develop policies that would encourage investment. The result is a form of collusive capitalism, exemplified by companies like ELF, Bolore (which owns Canal+ and Multichoice), and Eiffage. The CFA Franc regime thus promotes an economy heavily dependent on concessions, strongly extraverted, and ultimately prone to divestment.

Created in 1939 and officially launched in1945, the CFA Franc regime is a unique system in the postcolonial world. Originally, the franc of the French African Colony, the CFA, became the franc of the Franco-African Community in 1958. In the 1960s, it became the currency of the African Financial Community (and simultaneously the franc of Financial Cooperation for the Central Africa region) all the while keeping the same acronym under different iterations. The origins of the CFA franc are not only colonial but are also linked to slavery and its abolition. The funds that

served to compensate former slave owners allowed them to create the Bank of Senegal that became the Bank of Western Africa (BAO) in 1901, which issued the currency of the colonies. In this currency regime, African states are under the tutelage of the French Ministry of Finance while the French Treasury determines the CFA Franc-Euro parity. The parity regime requires that the Central Banks of the 14 African member states keep 50 percent of their foreign currency reserves in the French treasury. This ratio is the outcome of many reforms that reduced the requirement from 100 percent of foreign currency. The currency notes themselves are printed in Chamalière, the village of former French president Giscard D'Estaing.

In the past, France did not shy away from resorting to drastic measures to preserve the CFA Franc regime. There is famously the case of Sylvanus Olympio, the former Togolese president. Olympio was by no means a socialist or communist thinker. But even his liberal posture did not shield him from persecution and ultimately assassination in 1962, barely a month after the adoption of Law 62-20 of 12/12/1962 which established the Central Bank of Togo and introduced a new currency. Similarly, France's Operation Persil aimed to destabilize both Guinea and Mali by injecting counterfeit currency into the market, leading to currency depreciation and economic instability, with the ultimate goal of toppling the governments of Sekou Toure and Modibo Keita. In response to such pressures, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauretania, and Madagascar opted to leave the currency regime a few years later.

**Conclusion**

The analysis above does not intend to overlook the fact that there were differing perspectives among African constituents and their representatives within metropolitan and imperial legislative bodies.[18] It also does not seek to downplay African agency and the significant role of African actors. In fact, the very notion of Françafrique hinges on a collaboration between predatory, often authoritarian African elites and metropolitan elites. Françafrique describes the complex historical relationship

between France and its former colonies mainly in West and Central Africa. This relationship produces a conjoined geopolitical space that challenges the norms of ordinary diplomacy between nominally equal sovereign entities. It is also seen as the ultimate symbol of a perverted postcolonial African sovereignty.

Due to the lack of concrete changes at the institutional level, African civil society is increasingly advocating for a form of disengagement, leading to what many perceive as growing anti-French positions. However, protests against the structure of Franco-African relations are often framed as a binary opposition, where young Africans are seen as expressing "anti-French (re)sentiment," implying a position against a presumed sustained rationality on the other side. The crucial question here is whether and how observers can discuss the nature of this standoff beyond references to emotions and irrationality. The rising protests against Franco-African relations primarily represent demands for domestic political reforms. They also encompass calls for a reassessment and reform of the rational aspects, configurations, and mechanisms of this relationship. In essence, these protests are about reevaluating and reshaping the foundational aspects of a partnership that has remained fundamentally colonial.

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## Endnotes

1  Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968 [1963]). 36.

2  Amy Niang, "Rehistoricizing the Sovereignty Principle with Reference to Africa: Stature, Decline, and Anxieties of a Foundational Norm," in *Recentering Africa in International Relations. Beyond Lack, Peripherality, and Failure,* eds. Zubairu Wai and Martha Iniguez De Heredia (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2018). 123.

3  R. De Lacharriere, "L'Evolution de la Communauté Franco-Africaine," *Annuaire français de droit international* 6, no. 1 (1960): 9–10.

4  Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). 90.

5  Fréderic Turpin, "La Communauté Franco-africaine: un projet de puissance notre héritage de la Ive République et conceptions gaulliennes," *Outre-mers* 95, no. 358–359, (2008): 55–6.

6  Refers to Africans educated in French schools and assimilated to French cultural values.

7  Niang, "Rehistoricizing the Sovereignty Principle with Reference to Africa," 133.

8  See Oumar Ba in this collection.

9  Niang, "Rehistoricizing the Sovereignty Principle with Reference to Africa," 123; Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation*, 90.

10  Oumar Ba in this collection.

11  Antony Anghie, "Finding the Peripheries: Sovereignty and Colonialism in Nineteenth Century International Law," *Harvard International Law Journal* 4, no. 1 (1999): 25. See also Nathaniel Powell, « France's African Wars, 1974-1981 », PhD dissertation, (Genève, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2013).

12  See Julien Meimon, "L'invention de l'aide française au développement. Discours, instruments et pratiques d'une dynamique hégémonique," *Questions de Recherche* 21 (2007): 15.

13  Abdoulaye Bathily, "Au-delà de la crise au Sahel, enjeux et perspectives pour l'Afrique," interview by Amy Niang. *CODESRIA Bulletin, Special Issue: The Crisis in Mali and in the Sahel Region* 5 & 6 (2020): 38–47.

14  Megan Brown. *The Seventh Member State. Algeria, France and the European Community* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2022). On related treatment of post-imperial French Africa relations, see work by Matthew Connelly and Todd Sheppard.

15  NATO Charter, Article 6. For the purpose of Article 6, an armed attack on one or more of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack "on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France, on the territory of Turkey or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of [there are some words missing here]."

16  Gurminder K. Bhambra, "The Current Crisis of Europe: Refugees, Colonialism, and the Limits of Cosmopolitanism," *European Law Journal* 23, no. 5 (2017): 395–405. See also P. Hansen and S. Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). 54.

17  S/2023/161 Letter dated 1 March 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Mali to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4006785?ln=en.

18  See debates at the Union Assembly, Archives nationales d'Outre-mer, ANOM, Aix-en-Provence, BiB/50243/1946–1952.

# On Postcolonial Alliances:
## The Case of the Parisian *Noirabie* Challenged by Slavery in Libya

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The transformation of the concept of race since the post-World War II delegitimization of its biological definition has been a crucial issue for sociology, putting a double imperative in dialectical tension. On the one hand, scholars consider the specific and localized configurations of race according to historical, demographic, spatial, economic, epistemological, and political circumstances. On the other hand, they also consider the transnational processes of racialization induced by globalization—most often grasped as a modern European imperialist craft, of which the United States became the leading post-Cold War architect. Such discussions on the characterization and dynamism of racial phenomena run parallel to others on (post)positivist tools for analyzing the social world and their ability to grasp, account for, subvert, or consolidate the power relations at play (Abu-Lughod 1993; Smith 1999; Mohanty 2003; McKittrick 2021; Vaziri 2021).

Despite pioneering analyses of international significance for the field, the study of racialization in France has been ironically consigned as a peripheral or imported object by the scholarly establishment.[1] However, as in all of Europe, rich empirical and theoretical literature questions racialization processes and their articulation with other social relations at various scales, while redeeming the heuristic value of minorities' reflexivity on their experience of otherization (Sayad 1975; Essed 1991; El Tayeb 2011). Yet, investigation remains dominated by an ethnocentric methodological nationalism that limits the exploration of the majority/minority relationship and has contributed to considering the formation of racialized minorities isolated from one another.[2] Consequently, researchers in migration and interethnic studies are still struggling to provide a dynamic account of the co-presence of the various minority racializations and how they may relate to each other.

As a corollary, the hegemonic paradigm of the "reactive identity" has hindered the study of ethno-racial

identification beyond the mechanics of stigma reversal. I analyze this paradigm as a legacy of the scientific-colonial apparatus that made the symbolic-cultural dimensions of ethnicity the realm of anthropologists overseas and of Marxist orthodoxy that considers such identifications at best as symptomatic of a "compensatory identity" that is still too ill-equipped or immature to be expressed in terms of class struggle. I maintain that this take contributes both to the conceptual amalgamation of race and ethnicity—the latter often being used as a euphemism for the former in the French context—and to the downplaying of the identificatory and material significance of ethnicity. Thus pathologized—by the "anthropophagous national model" as an "irreducible identity" (Sayad 1975) deemed contrary to the advent of the modern man and his French persona—ethnicity, and its (post)colonial and diasporic iterations, remains an underdeveloped field in France, to say the least.

I argue that those dominant framings overlook the way in which racial and ethnic boundaries and hierarchies can be discussed, negotiated, enhanced, and troubled from below, at the inter-minority level. Furthermore, it prevents scholars from grasping racism as a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon that operates not only on the hierarchy between dominant and dominated racializations, but also on the maintenance of boundaries between minorities in a competitive relationship through the policing of their identities and solidarities.

In this article I highlight the contribution that the minority mirror can make to the study of racism, race, and ethnicity with an examination of the process of ethno-racial subjectification. I analyze how anti-racist activists were racialized as "Black" and "Maghrebian" in the Paris region by a controversy born in the decolonial milieu after the mediatization of slavery practices in Libya by the US media channel CNN in November 2017.[3] In France, the report by CNN sparked heated debate

on anti-Blackness in the so-called "Arab world" and the Maghrebian diaspora. It acted as a platform to air several grievances regarding the decolonial anti-racist milieu, adding to an ongoing politicization of the issue, for which Afro-feminists were the first spokespersons. With social media as its main arena, the debate revolved around the political responsibility of non-Black North Africans to denounce anti-Black racism in Arab countries, despite their socialization on French soil.

My analysis relies on participant observations carried out since September 2016 and on 32 in-depth interviews as part of my master's thesis between November 2017 and July 2018. The interviewees backgrounds differed in terms of gender, age (19–47), generation (joining the anti-racist movement between 1990 and 2016), ethnicity (although among those from the Maghreb more self-identified as Amazigh), religious affiliation (although fewer grew up Jewish), sexual orientation, administrative status, length of residence in France, educational level, and residential socialization. Except for one activist of Sudanese origin, all trace their ancestry to French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. In addition, all but two came from middle-class or working-class backgrounds, although they had different socio-economic and educational statuses at the time of interview. This article will unfold in two sections. The first will review interviewees' ethno-racial subjectification processes according to their reflexive take on their experiences of racialization. Next, these identifications will be dynamically put into perspective and discussed in light of respondents' reception of the activist controversy over the CNN report on slavery in Libya.

**Becoming Arab and Black: The Complex Lived Experiences of Islamophobia and Anti-Blackness in France**

*Becoming Arab*

Empirical research on Islamophobia in Europe entered the academic landscape in the 1990s (Allen 2010). Starting from British faculties, and despite facing harsh conservative backlash especially in France, research

on racism against Muslims is today a flourishing interdisciplinary field all over Europe. While numerous studies have acknowledged the prevalence of anti-Muslim racism in all European countries, notably in "post-attack" contexts, its modus operandi in practice and "the burden of visibility as a Muslim" (Quisay 2023) appears to vary based on national racial formations (Leveau and Mohsen-Fina 2013). Regarding the process of group stigmatization, questions remain in relation to the (dis)connection of the attribution of religious stigma to specific ethno-racial or phenotypic backgrounds. Scholars debate whether contemporary anti-Muslim racism can be considered a process of "ethnicization of Islam" or "Islamization of the ethnic," depending on national contexts (Rajina 2022). In France, Islamophobia has often been conceptualized as a substitute for, or even a mutation of, anti-Maghrebian racism (Hajjat and Mohammed, 2013). Research has identified a substantial correlation between being perceived as Arab/Maghrebian and being presumed Muslim. This articulation has also been made very clear in interviewees' accounts, as in this excerpt from an interview with Leila, 20, a light-skinned, wavy-haired Moroccan student who arrived in France in 2015 to pursue a political science degree:

> When I say that I am Moroccan, usually people think that I grew up here [in France], so I have to specify that I *come* from Morocco, I arrived here two years ago. When I say that they're like "oh but you speak French very well!" [...] They have so many questions. [...] All the Orientalist stereotypes you can find… *What I hate is that they* [White French] *try to use me against my own people.* I mean, the Maghrebians who were born in France. They tell me "yeah, but you are different because you attended university. You came here because you are cultured. Not like the *others*." The others, the *banlieue,* those who like to make troubles, who are aggressi…violent. Those who are extremists, those who are fundamentalists. *That's why I avoid telling them I am not Muslim.* If I don't know the person, if that person is a White French, there are really few chances that I… That she might know. Except if I have trust in that person. And if she has the

ability to step back to understand things. [...] *I just say, "I am Muslim."* I am not Muslim, but otherwise they will come and ask me "but why? Is it because Islam oppresses women? So, you realized it too. Ah! Welcome to France! You came to France to be saved. By the French society, by Voltaire." I don't know [she laughs]. So, I avoid giving them what they're looking for... But it is tiring because I always feel like I'm in a constant political battleship. I always have to explain everything, to justify everything, to represent all the Maghrebian, migrant, racialized communities... It is so exhausting.

As for all non-Muslims of Maghrebian origin in our sample, in 2018, Leila's reactive and pragmatic identification with the Muslim label was a way to ward off attempts at tokenization that would seek to turn her against her own people, born in France or in North Africa, for racist purposes. Beyond genuine beliefs, identifying oneself as Muslim was therefore practiced as a day-to-day strategy to throw Orientalist stereotypes off balance, while also displaying one's solidarity with the anti-racist movement against Islamophobia in France.

While less documented in the existing literature, feeling compelled to translate one's identity when navigating the French Islamophobic racial economy is also common when it comes to the domain of ethnicity. Threatened with ethnocide on the African continent by the forced Arabization policies of post-independent states, Indigenous Amazigh identity is also systematically obliterated or folklorized in France. More often than not it is racialized as "Arab" outside their communities. Yet, all my Amazigh interviewees shared that assuming the Arab label (when identified as such by the "White gaze") was a responsibility they took on in mainland France because they did not want to reinforce anti-Arab sentiments by being seen as engaging in an "ethnic flight" to "avoid problems" (to quote one of them).

Nevertheless, this reactive identification remained mostly limited to the elaboration of discourse and political actions strictly geared to the French state *in* the French political

context, although this kind of move has sometimes also been used on an organizational basis (like in the earlier Arab Workers Movement of the 1970s), or ideologically to strategically promote pan-Arabism. In the same vein, one self-identifying 26-year-old decolonial feminist of Tunisian Arab origin who grew up in Paris in a diverse working-class area, also explicitly distanced herself from pan-Arabism in solidarity with her non-Arab Maghrebian peers glocally. Among the respondents who self-identified ethnically as Arab, only 20-year-old Younes, who grew up in Lyon's countryside with a father of Algerian Chaoui origin (an Amazigh ethno-linguistic group from the Aures region) and a White French mother, encouraged the systematic reactive endorsement of the labels assigned by the "White gaze," regardless of locality, to oppose European imperialism. These two cases, projecting different ways of embracing Arabness, call for a closer examination of the influence of residential socialization (especially with regards to inter-minorities contacts and relations) on the formation of ethno-racial identifications and how they can be invested and projected politically. Nevertheless, in 2018 and beyond, on the organizational level, the embodiment of the racial category Arab seemed to be increasingly challenged among the younger generations of people with Maghrebian origins. Regardless of their ethnic identification, and even more so in feminist and queer spheres, they favored the term North African—already widely used from one shore of the Mediterranean to another by Indigenous communities outside this militant milieu—as well as the increasingly popular Pan-African projections.

Arab and Black racial identities being mutually exclusive in the French racial economy, the processes of subjectification of dark-skinned Amazigh and Arab individuals take a different path. This is best exemplified by the journeys of Zanouba, who is Sudanese Arab, and Safia, who is of Amazigh Moroccan origin.

*Becoming Black*

Born in France to Sudanese parents, Zanouba, 34, spent her childhood between Sudan and a neighboring North

African country. In Sudan, she was a member of the Arab dominant social group. However, since she has settled in France, outside her homeland community, she is exclusively read as Black, and often reduced to being a "Black woman who speaks Arabic" among North Africans. These conflicting translations in France and Africa led Zanouba to reorient her activism on her Blackness in France, and to describe her militant stance as that of an "African woman organizing against French colonial power." While she may not claim her Arabness at the organizational level in France, Zanouba takes the recognition of her Arab ethnicity at the intra-community level as a responsibility to ensure no depoliticization of her positionality in Sudan. At the same time, she sees claiming her Blackness on both sides of the Mediterranean as a way to subvert power relations in her home country.

Drawing on similar experiences of translation and her specific marginalization within the Maghrebian community as a Black Amazigh, 23-year-old Safia, born and socialized in the Paris region, also chose to organize primarily with the Black diaspora in France. However, in our sample, at the time of the interviews, individuals born of so-called "mixed unions" did not emphasize the primacy of their Black identity in the way they politically organize in the French context.

Both Camélia, 25, of Chaoui Algerian and Afro-Guyanese descent, and Ezra, 29, of Afro-Guyanese and Sephardic Tunisian descent—who on a daily basis is either racialized as Arab, Antillais, or even Indian—claimed the labels Black and Caribbean as much as North African, or Arab in the case of Camélia and Maghrebian in Ezra's.[4] In their accounts, it is both their phenotypic ambiguity and experiences of Arabophobia/Islamophobia that seem to have led them to assert this dual belonging. Conversely, in Zanouba's account, it is because of her experience of anti-Blackness and a phenotype where "Africanness is more visible," as she puts it, that she can claim to be "Afro"-feminist in militant transactions in France, despite the slave-owning past and racial supremacy exercised by her social group of origin in Sudan, unlike light-skinned North Africans. In the economy of French minority identifications, the particle "Afro" seemed in 2018 to

be intended on this scene as the strict equivalent of the substantive *noir*, as derived from the racialist theories developed by European scientific positivism, in order to unite paths marked by the experience of anti-Blackness.

Thus, at the height of the controversy around the CNN report on slavery in Libya, although many Black activists expressed their desire for activists of North African origin to assert their African identity, none of the activists went so far as to add the particle "Afro" to non-Black North Africans. Although they come from very different ethnic, cultural, and socio-demographic backgrounds, all the respondents whose lives have been affected by the experience of anti-Blackness identified themselves as Black. They also all embrace pan-African ideologies. However, the way in which these identifications translate into community political allegiance in France remains a matter that differs by subjectivity.

In 2018, all interviewees viewed Black and (Muslim) Maghrebian experiences as sharing in France the most similar postcolonial racializations, institutional stigmatization, political spaces, and social histories. Especially in contrast to Asian, Jewish, and Roma experiences, which have been less strongly represented in this militant milieu. In the range of shared Black and Arab experiences, often strictly delineated in the context of working-class neighborhoods by my interlocutors (regardless of residential socialization), police brutality emerged as the determining factor in the thick minority federation and the most mobilizing cause transversally. So much so, in fact, that the majority have come to regard the *noirabie* (the political concept crafted by Black and Maghrebian activists to talk about their community of "Les Noirs et les Arabes") of the French *banlieue* as their political community of belonging. All the more so when they have been socialized in working-class neighborhoods with a militant dedication focusing on the local level or on the issue of police brutality.

If, prior to the CNN report, only one Afro-feminist interviewee (of Senegalese Muslim origin) out of 32, perceived alliances with Arabs more selectively and saw her community of political allegiance as "exclusively Black,"

the controversy has led several other Black activists to shift their alliances in this direction.

**The Activist Controversy after the CNN Report**

On November 13, 2017, CNN released a report shot at the end of October exposing "slave markets" in Libya, where Black migrants are sold by locals after being captured on their way to Europe. Despite a process of institutional denunciation of the mistreatment suffered by migrants that had begun that spring, public reaction was unprecedented.[5] Within hours, the French media went from indifference to outrage. Several rallies were organized across France. In Paris, on November 18, more than a thousand people responded to a call from the Collectif Contre l'Esclavage et les Camps de Concentration en Libye (CECCL) (Collective Against Slavery and Concentration Camps in Libya) in front of the Libyan embassy.

In light of these events, the social debates around anti-Blackness in the so-called "Arab world" and in France's Maghrebian communities have been renewed. With social media as its main arena, the controversy that reverberated in the decolonial antiracist milieu revolved around the political responsibility of non-Black North Africans in France to denounce anti-Black racism in Arab countries. This controversy had two main implications for our anti-racist field. On the one hand, it raised questions about the practical means of taking action to demonstrate anti-racist solidarity in a diasporic context, following events that involved violence in the South covered by Western media. And on the other, it raised the issue of how organizations should address Islamophobia, anti-Arabness, and anti-Blackness in France. The debate centered around whether non-Black Maghrebians had a specific political responsibility to denounce anti-Blackness in the countries of the so-called "Arab world," despite their socialization in France.

*"We've got Arab Tears"*

The first stance by activists was to argue that anti-racist activists had a duty to politically condemn events in Libya, notably through collective and organizational means. They put forward two arguments. The first was *ethno-racial*, due to an enduring "communitarian" Maghrebian anti-Blackness on both sides of the Mediterranean. The second was *ideological*, invoking the coherence of anti-racist beliefs and the *noirabie* alliance in the fight against racism in France and imperialism on the African continent. In this case, the appeal to so-called "Arab" communities was seen as a means of initiating a process of recognizing and addressing "Arab" anti-Blackness at a *glocal* level, while building a sustainable alliance between communities across all territorialities. Despite the publication on social media of the statement "Nord AfricainEs contre la Négrophobie et l'Esclavage" (North Africans against Anti-Blackness and Slavery[6]), initiated by two dozen anonymous non-Black Maghrebian activists involved in intersectional feminist movements, the absence of a comparable initiative from an established anti-racist collective composed mainly of people of Maghrebian origin was perceived at the time as a communitarian-level empathetic disregard for Black subjectivities, revealing the Arab-centrism underpinning their political agenda.

This controversy led most Black activists involved in feminist circles (who had an Afrocentric identification and who at the time of the controversy were part of a Black gender-minority-only collective) to view the *noirabie* alliance as superficial. They shifted to favoring a rapprochement with other Afrocentric movements outside the decolonial milieu. In our sample, 5 out of 8 women who claimed to be Afro-feminists were concerned about this issue, including Safia and Zanouba. These grievances were not, however, a reason for breaking the "thick" minority alliance for activists evolving within racially mixed collectives or who were not (solely) organizationally attached to the feminist movement at the time of the controversy.

This position was shared by the vast majority of women in our sample who were racialized as Arabs in France, most of whom were involved in feminist movements, which echoed trends observed on social networks. It was also embraced by the majority of men in our sample, most of whom were sensitive to intersectional/ decolonial feminist perspectives. Three of them also declared their support

for the Pan-African continental project. However, those who were born or socialized in France at a very young age expressed strong concerns about their concrete means of action and their legitimacy to "call out" their so-called "counterparts" on the continent, due to their Western status and the feeding of potential imperialist ambitions. Although their concrete actions did not go beyond participating in protests and writing op-eds, this second group fostered empathetic receptivity to Black grievances, as well as political condemnation of anti-Blackness at the microsociological level.

*"Not in My Name"*

By contrast, other activists saw calling out the Maghrebian communities to condemn racism in North Africa, despite their socialization on French soil, as an unfair blame game. Again, two rationales have been put forward. The first was the disapproval of an essentialist and decontextualized rhetoric similar to that in use by the dominant social group for Islamophobic purposes. In our sample, this position was embodied on the North African side by Younes and Nabil, both 32-years-old and of Kabyle Algerian origin who arrived in France at the age of 6 during the *décennie noire*, the Algerian civil war.[7] Younes was involved in a collective that aimed to support the interests of all descendants of colonized people, and Nabil was involved in an organization addressing police brutality. Two Black female activists also held this position: Awa, 30, of Senegalese Muslim origin, involved in a collective fighting against police brutality and racial profiling who grew up in Marseille, and Audrey, 21, of Afro-Guadeloupean and Senegalese Christian origin, who grew up in a Paris *banlieue*, identified as Afro-feminist and a part of a college non-White student organization. Without denying anti-Blackness within North African communities, or the need to remedy it at a communitarian and inter-minority level, these activists also disapproved of a method which, by relying on the specific public statements of North Africans as a social group, would ultimately lead to their stigmatization in the French context.

The second line of reasoning viewed this interpellation as a false moral quarrel, ill-suited to effectively ending the issue, which for some would have required pressuring the embassies of each African Union country member and European Union institutions that are directly tied to the externalization of European borders that was set in motion by Frontex and the Khartoum process in 2014. Here, the ability to act and, de facto, the potential blame for inaction, were considered to be shared regardless of one's positionality on the *noirabie* spectrum, as long as one holds a French, EU, or African passport. Among interviewees, this viewpoint was represented by Adama, 26, of Senegalese Muslim origin, involved at the time in social justice campaigns related to student communities and his working-class neighborhood of origin, and to a lesser extent by Mamadou, 38, of Malian Muslim origin, involved in collectives related to working-class *banlieue* communities and police brutality, who advocated a more humanistic "de-ethnicization" of the debates.[8] Moreover, while the Black activists seeing the interpellation as illegitimate also considered some anti-racist organizations, mainly composed of North Africans, as Arab-centric, none of them felt that way in their own collective, whether related to the student world, local working-class *banlieue* communities, or police brutality.

**Conclusion**

In exposing some of the contemporary interplay between Islamophobia and anti-Blackness in the battle for the display of solidarity, the oblique *noirabie* gaze helped further reflect on the conditions surrounding the (im)possibility of subverting race from below within a contentious and contested glocal emancipatory framework. The Parisian crossroads provides valuable insights to better understand ethno-racial projections seeking globalization. Far from being left behind, ethnicity is also struggling, operating both within and outside the frameworks imposed on it, while once divisive projections, such as North Africa, are also revisited, this time as a deliberate, if delicate, line of connection.

My examination highlights the polemical character and instability of these borderings, along with the very lively nature of their inhabitants. It encourages scholars to take seriously the *oblique vision* and the embedding of

epistemological dialogue with "the South." While revealing that interracial boundaries were problematized as thicker among Afro-feminists involved in a Black gender-minority-only collective (which calls for further investigation) the controversy dynamically highlighted the tensions, overlaps, and aporias between post-slavery and post-colonial regimes of subjectification. The increasing iterations of this epistemic tension establishes it as one of the major issues of our time and a key challenge for the future of anti-racist alliances with anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ambitions.

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## Endnotes

1   See Solène Brun's and Claire Consquer's contribution in this collection for a pioneering example.

2   In the French context, see for example the influential work of Colette Guillaumin.

3   Maghrebian in the French context came to encompass all people of Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian origins, i.e., former North African colonial French possessions, regardless of their ethnicity. For a history of the discourse surrounding this category in the French context see for example the work of Abdelmajid Hannoum.

4   Following the evolution of the decolonial milieu after the CNN controversy and the collapse of his collective, which aimed at supporting the interests of all postcolonial subjectivities, Ezra has however embraced more Afrocentric views.

5   In April 2017, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) called attention to these markets. In June, the IOM reported to the United Nations cases of torture of sequestered migrants in order to collect money from the victims' families. Five months later, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported on the "deplorable conditions" in which migrants were detained, citing cases of forced labor and sexual exploitation. Numerous NGOs have also denounced the European Union's complicity in "human rights violations committed against migrants and refugees in Libya," pointing to the "outsourcing of European border management" notably through the implementation of the "Khartoum process" which, since November 2014, contracts out the management of migrants heading for Europe.

6   Published in *Quartiers Libres*, November 27, 2017.  https://quartierslibres.wordpress.com/2017/11/27/nord-africaines-contre-la-negrophobie-et-lesclavage/

7   Kabyle is an Amazigh ethno-linguistic group originated in the Djurdjura and Soummam régions.

8   Following the controversy, Adama decided to leave the decolonial and student militant milieu to redirect all his energy to his local community.

# Connecting the Two Sudans:
## Mobile Histories of Faith, Cotton, and Colonialism

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*Le Temps* and *La Politique Coloniale* report that, according to a report on Northern Nigeria written by High Commissioner Sir W. Wallace and published by the Colonial Office, thousands of Fulani from the Middle Niger might be migrating from the French territory and heading towards the Nile valley. I would be grateful for any further information you might provide me with on this topic.[1]

This note from the French colonial archives, "*a.s. d'une prétendue migration des Peuhls*" (regarding an alleged Fulani migration), reveals French and British anxieties in the early decades of their rule in Africa about their inability to grasp a population movement that trumped the logic of colonial borders.[2] The eastward travels of West African Muslims towards the Nile valley long predated the arrival of European empires in the region. The phenomenon was rooted in the old tradition of West African Muslims undertaking the pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, which started during the era of medieval West African states, first the Mali Empire, and then its successor, the Songhai Empire. These pilgrims would reach the Hejaz by traveling along the ʿarīq al-Sūdān (Sudan Road), a West-East trans-Sahelian axis starting in today's Mali and extending all the way to the Red Sea.

From the 1880s onwards, and intensifying towards the turn of the twentieth century, the flow of pilgrims traveling eastwards on this route grew to include people fleeing European colonization, in accordance with Islamic doctrines of *hijrah* (migration) and eschatological prophecies announcing the rise of a *mahdī* (redeemer) in the east.[3] Pilgrims and migrants from the Western Sahel continued to migrate east on the Sudan Road well into the twentieth century. Many of them knew that labor opportunities in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan would allow them to sustain themselves should they run out of financial resources while performing the hajj. For example, the Gezira Scheme, the largest irrigation project in the world, initiated in 1925 in Sudan under British rule, attracted labor from West Africans migrating and settling along the Sudan Road. The Gezira's success reverberated back westwards across the Sahel, inspiring the creation of a similar project, the Office du Niger, in the French Soudan (the French colony that became today's Republic of Mali, located on lands that were part of the historic Mali Empire). In sum, what started as West African Muslim pilgrimage and religious travel in the fourteenth century, increasingly turned into refugee and labor migration by the twentieth century colonial era.

This paper explores some of the connected histories of migration, colonialism, and cotton that link today's Mali and Sudan—the colonial French Soudan and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. First, shifting away from a focus on post-colonial Francophone Africa and imperial French Africa as units of study, the paper draws on literature highlighting the deeper histories of African connections that have been fragmented by colonialism and its legacies.[4] Second, it connects cotton production during the French colonization in Mali to broader dynamics in the Atlantic world and the British empire.

### A Pilgrimage Route across the Sahara

People, ideas, and words have traveled between the banks of the Niger and Nile rivers since the medieval era. One of the earliest accounts of such travels is that of the pilgrimage to Mecca of Mansa Musa, emperor of Mali, in 1324–26. He stopped in several cities along the way, including Cairo, where his delegation carried so much gold that the metal's value dropped in Egypt for several years.[5]

Mansa Musa's pilgrimage is a well-known episode of West African history that marked the Mali empire's pinnacle and signaled to the world the aspirations and capabilities of a powerful West African state. A lesser-known episode within that story, however, illustrates the fact that Mansa Musa's journey occurred through what was already a well-traveled road.

The historian Al-Umari, who visited Cairo shortly after Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, recounts that Mansa Musa was upset by the appellation "Malik Takrūr," King of Takrūr, which people in Egypt used to designate him. Mansa Musa stressed that Takrūr was only one of many provinces he ruled over, rendering the label reductive. As it happened, the name "Takrūr" had reached Cairo long before Mansa Musa had, most likely spread by earlier pilgrims from West Africa.[6] Pilgrimage routes had already cemented active connections between West and Northeast Africa, facilitating the circulation of words, ideas, and people. Over the following centuries, pilgrimage and West-East trans-Saharan trade activities continued to flourish.

The 1591 Moroccan conquest of the Songhai empire, the Mali empire's successor state, triggered instability in West Africa, and resulted in a gradual re-routing of pilgrimage itineraries.[7] Previously, West Africans had mainly traveled via a route going northwards from Timbuktu towards the North African coast, then eastwards towards Cairo. After the Moroccan conquest, an increasing number of West African pilgrims traveled through the hinterland via the trans-Sahelian Sudan Road, which historian Chanfi Ahmed describes as such:

> This route started in Mali (and present-day Mauritania) then led to Hausaland, Chad, and Darfur. From there, pilgrims continued either along the *darb al-arbaʿīn* (the "forty-day path," well-known in the oriental slave trade) to Cairo, or continued eastward to Jinayna, al-Obaid, Omdurman, and then Sawākīn, Port Sudan, or Masāwa. From there they took a ship or a dhow to Jedda and Yanbu.[8]

**Hijrah and Mahdi: Seeking Refuge from the French Colonial Invasion**

The European colonial invasion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coupled with popular ideas about the Islamic concept of *hijrah,* prompted an increasing number of West African Muslims to migrate eastwards along the Sudan Road. The term *hijrah,* "mentioned several times in the Qurʾān with the meaning of to 'reject' (23:69), to 'avoid' (74:5), to 'leave' (19:46), and to 'ban' (4:34)," broadly refers to the notion that Muslims, should they find themselves in an environment hostile to their faith, should leave.[9]

As David Robinson noted, scholars have largely classified African responses to colonization as falling under one of three broad categories: resistance, collaboration, or accommodation. Few have discussed a fourth type of response, which is emigration.[10] Yet, in the context of nineteenth century West Africa, *hijrah* became one form of response to colonial invasion, prompting some Muslims to migrate to escape the rule of Christian, European nations. This *hijrah* often happened eastwards, along the same trans-Sahelian route that pilgrims used. Two famous instances of colonization-triggered *hijrah* took place around the turn of the twentieth century, when the leaders of two major West African Muslim polities, Fuutanke leader Shehu Aḥmadu (Mali) and Sokoto leader Muḥammadu Attāhiru (northern Nigeria) undertook *hijrah* in the face of French and British colonization.[11]

A 1906 note from a French colonial official in Fort-Lamy (present-day N'Djaména, Chad), recounted events that happened after the early 1890s French conquest of Segu, Jenne, and Bandiagara, three previously Fuutanke-ruled cities in the Soudan:

> Aḥmadu's Fuutanke [followers]—the last remnants of these hardliners who never accepted to submit to our domination—the former Sultan of Sokoto's supporters, and the malcontents from Northern Nigeria, are going away towards the East, with no hope of ever returning … It will be up to the Anglo-Egyptian

authorities to watch these newcomers, should they settle on the White Nile.[12]

Prophecies about the appearance of a *mahdī*, known both in West Africa and in the Middle East, further fueled late nineteenth century West African migrations to Sudan. According to one strand of early Islamic eschatology, the end of the world would arrive in the thirteenth century of the Islamic calendar, 1786–1883, and be heralded by the appearance of a *mahdī*. The 1881 uprising of Muḥammad Aḥmad in Sudan against Turco-Egyptian and British rule, his self-proclamation as the *mahdī,* and the subsequent rise of the Sudanese Mahdiyya (1881–1898), thus further fueled West African *hijrah* doctrines and eastward migrations along the Sudan Road.[13]

According to ʿUmar al-Naqar, "when the *mahdī* did appear and the world was to draw to a close, it was better for Muslims either to meet him, or to await his appearance in the East."[14] The Sudanese Mahdiyya did succeed in attracting some West Africans to its ranks. As Mark R. Duffield argues, West African migrants largely sustained the Mahdiyya and its aftermath.[15] In fact, one of the *mahdī*'s most trusted lieutenants, Muḥammad al-Dadārī, who played a crucial role in organizing the *mahdī*'s succession in the moments following his death, was himself a Fulani from the Sokoto Caliphate.[16] Eventually, British forces went on to defeat the Mahdiyya in 1898 and consolidated their rule over the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

**Pilgrims to Workers: The Gezira Scheme in Sudan**

Paradoxically, while the late nineteenth century European colonial penetration in Muslim West Africa catalyzed eastward flight and migrations to Sudan, the consolidation of British rule in Sudan in the first decades of the twentieth century sustained and increased these migrations. Large-scale agricultural and infrastructure projects in Sudan under British rule relied heavily on West African labor and provided an opportunity for migrants and pilgrims to earn wages as they were on their way to, or coming back from, the *hajj*. In 1925, British authorities in Sudan started operating the Gezira scheme, a massive network of man-made canals and ditches "conceived primarily as a project

to produce long-staple cotton for export through the irrigation of nearly two million acres between the White and Blue Niles."[17] The scheme still stands today as the largest irrigation project in the world.

Upon opening, the scheme provided West African pilgrims and migrants in Sudan with a reliable source of agricultural labor. As they were on their way to—or coming back from—the Hejaz, many West Africans chose to settle in Sudan, becoming, as per Christian Bawa Yamba, permanent pilgrims. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, enough West Africans had traveled and settled along the Sudan Road that "it was possible to distinguish between people who had already settled in the Sudan and pilgrims who intended to make the pilgrimage and return to their homelands."[18] To illustrate this point, ʿUmar Al-Naqar mentions the anecdote of the Sudanese village of Mai Wurnu, which was "deliberately avoided by pilgrims who intended to return westward, for fear they might never do so."[19] Conducting field research in West African areas of Sudan in the 1990s, Bawa Yamba described their villages and settlements as "liminal stations strung between home and Mecca, along a route emotionally charted with the graves of the beloved ones they have lost on their way." Bawa Yamba noted that most villagers were "third-, fourth-, even fifth-generation immigrants, who have lived all their lives in Sudan, yet still regard themselves as being in transit," further adding that "although they reside permanently in these villages, they still find it necessary, when asked, to include explanations in rational terms of why they have not yet reached Mecca."[20]

**France's Cotton Dreams: From Louisiana to the Soudan, via Sudan**

If eastwards West African migration sustained the Gezira irrigation project, the scheme's influence reverberated back westwards: colonial ideas of race, labor, cash crop production, and environmental manipulation also moved, albeit figuratively, along the Sudan Road. Unlike the British empire—which produced cotton in Egypt, Sudan, and India—France in the early twentieth century largely relied on US-grown cotton.

Cotton had been an early preoccupation in France's colonial encroachment in West Africa. It is one of the key links between France's slaving and imperial past in the Caribbean and its colonization of West Africa. Indeed, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, following the 1803 sale of the Louisiana territory, the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), and costly Napoleonic wars (1803–1815), France was bankrupt and started showing interest in the potential that the Senegambia's alluvial plains, including in the Fuuta Toro, held for cash crop production. In 1817, Julien-Désiré Schmaltz, familiar with the Dutch East Indies where he had previously worked, was appointed governor of France's Senegal colony—then mainly consisting of forts and trading posts in Gorée and Saint-Louis. Schmaltz's main task was to revive gum arabic and gold exports in the region. As soon as he took office, he also started designing plans for cotton, coffee, and sugar production in the Senegal River valley, with the support of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs. The minister himself, Pierre-Victor Malouet, was a former Saint-Domingue planter. Schmaltz's plans ultimately failed, due to environmental unsuitability and political resistance from several Fuuta leaders.[21] Still, France kept intensifying its territorial expansion eastward towards the Niger river valley, through military conquest and the extension of treaties, eventually leading up to the creation of the French West Africa federation.

As the colonial system in the French Soudan was consolidated, cotton remained one of the administration's central concerns. In the early twentieth century, the French-installed king of the Sansanding estates, Mademba Sy, gained relative notoriety for his claims that he would grow long-staple American cotton in his territories. The experiment was ultimately a failure. Still, Sy's self-portrayal as a cotton innovator played a role in ensuring the administration would turn a blind eye to massive accusations of abuse and despotic rule lodged against him by the population of Sansanding.[22] By the 1930s, France's cotton ambitions had not waned. Inspired by the Gezira scheme's success, and drawing environmental parallels between the Nile and Niger river valleys, French engineer Émile Bélime successfully lobbied his government for the creation of a similar project in one of France's West

African colonies, the French Soudan.[23] Established on January 5, 1932, the Segu-headquartered Office du Niger, dedicated to rice and cotton production, would never quite yield economic profits on par with its eastern Sahelian inspiration.[24] Moreover, the project resulted in land grabs, mass displacements, forced labor, and high death rates, in particular during the building of one of its landmarks, the Sansanding/Markala dam. By 1944, Bélime himself wound up being evicted from the Office du Niger.

**Race, Cotton, and "Indigenous Colonization"**

Through *colonisation indigène* (indigenous colonization) a policy whereby the French colonial authorities relocated farmers from throughout French West Africa to areas they considered propitious for cash crop production, thousands of people were displaced and forced to work on the dam.[25] Indigenous colonization rested on racialized ideas of peasantry developed by French colonial ethnographers, whereby native African peasants were situated "on a ladder of human development next to the peasants of Europe's past."[26] As such, these peasants supposedly needed European direction and supervision in order to achieve optimal exploitation of agricultural lands.[27]

This logic mirrors colonial concerns in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. In his discussion of West Africans and the Gezira scheme, Bawa Yamba argues that the Anglo-Egyptian authorities strove to attract immigrants and facilitated their transit and settlement in Sudan, especially as years of war had ravaged Sudan's population and caused a shortage in the labor supply.[28] Citing G. Ayoub Balamoan's demographic study of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Bawa Yamba claims that the colonial authorities sought, at one stage, to "keep Sudan black," by specifically encouraging immigration from West and Equatorial Africa, while expelling from the country "Egyptians, some whites, as well as residents regarded as 'tainted' immigrants."[29] Bawa Yamba does not elaborate on the rationale for these racial policies, or the extent to which they fit within existing racial dynamics in Sudan. Regardless, it appears that in the first part of the twentieth century, on both ends of the Sudan Road connecting the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan to the

French Soudan, massive cash crop production projects, coupled with colonial ideas about race, triggered the mobilities and labor of thousands of Western Sahelians.

## Conclusion

When it comes to trans-Saharan mobilities, historical scholarship has devoted much more attention to those West Africans crossing the Sahel-Sahara area northwards towards North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe, than to those moving eastwards towards Sudan, the Red Sea, and Arabia. Yet, this imbalance in scholarship partially masks historical and contemporary migration trends. For instance, Gregory Mann noted that in a 2001 census, the Malian government counted the number of Malian migrants living in Sudan and Egypt to be 200,000, twice as many as the 100,000 Malians estimated to live in France in the same census.[30] These numbers may seem surprising, as media attention and historical scholarship alike have devoted much more attention to those West Africans crossing the Sahara northwards towards the Mediterranean and Europe, to the detriment of those doing so eastwards towards the Nile and Red Sea. Yet underneath these numbers lie a historical moment when pilgrimage traditions, the French colonial conquest, eschatological beliefs on *hijrah* and the *mahdī*, large scale colonial irrigation and cotton projects, and colonial ideas of race, all coalesced to shape West African mobilities and foster connections between both ends of the Sahel.

## Endnotes

[1]   From the Governor General of French West Africa to the Dahomey Lieutenant-Governor, February 17, 1907. Archives Nationales du Senegal (ANS) 17G:39. I thank Samuel Anderson for sharing this file. *Afrique Occidentale Française* (French West Africa, AOF) was a federation of eight colonies: Mauritania, Senegal, Soudan Français, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Haute-Volta (today's Burkina-Faso), and Dahomey (today's Benin). The Fulani are a nomadic, pastoral and largely Muslim people of West Africa and the Sahel.

[2]   A portion of this article was first published in <u>Africa Is a Country</u>. This is a reworked and expanded version.

[3]   The *hijrah* initially referred to the migration that the Prophet Mu ammad and his followers undertook in 622 A.D. from Mecca—where they were faced with a hostile environment—to Medina. The term eventually came to be used more broadly to encourage Muslims to migrate, should they find themselves in an environment hostile to their faith. In Islamic eschatology, as Chanfi Ahmed explains, "the *mahdī* is a figure who will appear at the end of the time to fill the world with justice, after it has been filled with injustice. This injustice is embodied by *al-Masīḥ al-Dajjāl*, or the false messiah, the Antichrist. The *Dajjāl* was, in the eyes of the West African migrants, embodied by European colonizers." See Chanfi Ahmed, *West African 'Ulamā' and Salafism in Mecca and Medina: Jawab al-Ifrīqī—The Response of the African* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 18.

[4]   This approach echoes calls for more integrated studies of Africa and the Middle East. See Hisham Aidi, Marc Lynch, and Zachariah Mampilly (eds.), "Racial Formations in Africa and the Middle East: A Transregional Approach," *POMEPS Studies* 44 (2021). Recent literature has highlighted the connections between Mali and Sudan (and beyond, the Hejaz), including Chanfi Ahmed, *West African 'Ulamā' and Salafism in Mecca and Medina,* and Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 93–119.

[5]   Michael Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 59–166.

[6]   Umar al-Naqar, "Takrur: The History of a Name," *Journal of African History* 10, no. 3 (1969): 370–1.

[7]   Umar al-Naqar, *The Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa: A Historical Study with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1972), 95.

[8]   Chanfi Ahmed, *West African 'Ulamā' and Salafism in Mecca and Medina,* 14.

[9]   Ibid, 16.

[10]   David Robinson, "The Umarian Emigration of the Late Nineteenth Century," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20, no. 2 (1987): 245–270.

[11]   Al-Naqar, *Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa*, 86–89.

[12]   "Note sur les Toucouleurs récemment arrivés à Fort-Lamy" from *Chef de Bataillon* Signé-Caden, Fort-Lamy, August 10, 1906, 17G, *Archives Nationales du Sénégal* (ANS), Dakar, Sénégal.

[13]   The Mahdiyya was a political and religious movement in Sudan, led by Muḥammad Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allah who in 1881 proclaimed himself *mahdī*, and successfully put an end to Ottoman and British rule in Sudan through armed rebellion, famously killing British Governor-General Charles George Gordon. In 1885, Muḥammad Aḥmad died. In 1898, the Mahdiyya was defeated, and Sudan fell under Anglo-Egyptian rule, which lasted until 1956.

[14]   Al-Naqar, *Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa*, 83.

[15]  Mark R. Duffield, "Fulani Mahdism and Revisionism in Sudan: 'Hijra' or Compromise with Colonialism?" in *The Central Bilad al-Sudan, Tradition and Adaptation: Essays on the Geography and Economic and Political History of the Sudanic Belt*, edited by Yusuf Fadl Hasan and Paul Doornbos. Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, November 8–13, 1977 (Khartoum: El Tamaddon P. Press Ltd., 1979).

[16]  John O. Hunwick, Sydney Kanya-Forstner, Paul Lovejoy, R.S. O'Fahey, and Al-Amin Abu-Manga, "Between Niger and Nile: New Light on the Fulani Mahdist Muhammad al-Dadari," *Sudanic Africa* 8 (1997): 85–108.

[17]  Bawa Yamba, *Permanent Pilgrims,* 68.

[18]  Al-Naqar, *Pilgrimage Tradition in West Africa*, 91.

[19]  Ibid.

[20]  Bawa Yamba, *Permanent Pilgrims*, 1–2.

[21]  Madina Ly-Tall, *Un islam militant en Afrique de l'Ouest au XIXe siècle: la Tijaniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyu contre les pouvoirs traditionnels et la puissance coloniale* (Paris: ACCT IFAN / Cheikh Anta Diop and L'Harmattan, 1991), 49–50.

[22]  Richard Roberts, *Conflicts of Colonialism: The Rule of Law, French Soudan, and Faama Mademba Sèye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[23]  Vittorio Morabito, "L'Office du Niger au Mali, d'hier à aujourd'hui," *Journal des africanistes* 47, no. 1 (1977): 53–82.

[24]  On the broader history of the Office du Niger, see Monica M. van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts the Office du Niger, 1920-1960* (Westport: Heinemann, 2002); Myron Echenberg and Jean Filipovich, "African Military Labour and the Building of the Office du Niger Installations, 1925–1950," *Journal of African History* 27, no. 3 (1986): 533–551; Jean Filipovich, "The Office du Niger Under Colonial Rule: Its Origin, Evolution, and Character, 1920–1960" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1985); Allen Isaacman and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Colonial Cotton: Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (London: James Currey, 1995); Richard L. Roberts, *Two Worlds of Cotton: Colonialism and the Regional Economy in the French Soudan, 1800–1946*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[25]  On the *colonisation indigène*, forced labor, and displacements, see Monica M. van Beusekom, "Colonisation Indigène: French Rural Development Ideology at the Office du Niger, 1920–1940," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30, no. 2 (1997): 299–323; Babacar Fall, *Le travail forcé en Afrique Occidentale Française*, (Paris: Karthala, 1993); Jean Filipovich, "Destined to Fail: Forced Settlement at the Office du Niger, 1926–45," *Journal of African History* 42, no. 2 (2001): 239–260.

[26]  Van Beusekom, "Colonisation Indigène," 306.

[27]  The rhetoric of *mise en valeur* of African lands, which I translate here as "optimal exploitation," very much permeated colonial discourses in French West Africa.

[28]  Bawa Yamba, *Permanent Pilgrims*, 63.

[29]  Ibid, 68. Bawa Yamba only briefly mentions this phenomenon, without further expanding upon it. In doing so, he cites G. Ayoub Balamoan, *Migration Policies in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1884 to 1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Population Studies, 1976).

[30]  Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel*, 90.

# Is There a French Sociology of Race?

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The concept of race is, in many ways, a politically and emotionally charged subject, and its articulation in words is seldom straightforward.[1] The numerous controversies that have recently erupted in the French public sphere often imply that studies on racial inequalities in France neglect the distinctions that set the French context apart from the situation in the United States. These criticisms frequently include an even more fundamental allegation: that the epistemic and theoretical framework within which these studies are situated is purportedly "imported" from the United States. In essence, this epistemic and theoretical framework is perceived as foreign to the French national tradition and as a construct propagated by the US intellectual vanguard.

 These criticisms raise several noteworthy points. First, they imply that these French studies conform to a single theoretical framework, overlooking the diverse range of theoretical approaches employed within the French scientific community. Conversely, one can also question their interpretation regarding the theoretical debates taking place across the Atlantic: Ethnic and racial studies are far from being a monolith and instead encompass competing approaches. Second, by disregarding the fact that the concepts utilized in these studies are applied to empirical investigations, these criticisms suggest that the global circulation of concepts is inherently problematic, even when grounded in fieldwork or localized data collection. Third, they often coincide with political concerns, as they reflect anxieties about the "globalization" of the anti-racist movement, which is perceived as being guided by its US vanguard, citing the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement as an example. Fourth, they are at the very least oversimplifying and lack a solid foundation. Consequently, criticism of studies on racial inequality often reveal a significant underestimation of France's historical significance concerning the concept of race—both as a divisive and hierarchizing idea in human history and as a critical tool for comprehending racism and its ramifications.

In this article, we will focus on this fourth point, elaborating on some of the reflections we presented in our book *Sociology of Race*.[2] It should first be stated that there is no doubt that the concept of race historically does *not* hold the same position in French sociology as it does in American sociology. For example, the discipline of sociology in the United States was founded on the study of racial inequalities, under the decisive influence of W. E. B. Du Bois. At the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois conducted several studies on how the social environment and material conditions of life define racial boundaries between groups. In 1896, commissioned by the dean of the University of Pennsylvania, he carried out a sociological investigation of remarkable scale and meticulousness on the Black population of Philadelphia. It was published in 1899 under the title *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* and translated into French 120 years later.[3] Combining qualitative and quantitative methods, he conducted a survey through questionnaires and door-to-door interviews with 2,500 households, which he complemented with observational work as well as the use of archives and official statistical data. Du Bois gathered an impressive body of empirical material to analyze the demographic and sociological situation of the 40,000 Black inhabitants of Philadelphia. In this regard, *The Philadelphia Negro* constitutes a seminal work in urban sociology.

French sociology indeed boasts a distinct history. French scholars established the discipline at the dawn of the twentieth century by studying suicide, criminality, or economy. The examination of racial inequalities has traditionally held a somewhat peripheral position in the French scientific sphere. Nevertheless, it would be

erroneous to deduce from this that French intellectuals have only recently come across the concept of race, let alone as a result of its importation from the United States. In the latter half of the twentieth century, several authors delved into the topic of race in the context of France: writers of Négritude (Paulette and Jeanne Nardal, René Maran, Roberte Horth, Aimé Césaire, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor) narrated and analyzed the Black condition; Albert Memmi showed that the colonial relationship is fundamentally a relationship of racial domination; and Frantz Fanon was the first to speak of "racialization."

Fanon's work is a significant illustration of what is overlooked by the argument that race theories are imported from the United States: Not only does it disregard French contributions, but more crucially, it neglects the impact these contributions had on American scholars. In 1952, Fanon published his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, shortly after attaining his doctorate in psychiatry.[4] In this work, he provides a psychological analysis of racism and colonialism, exploring the effects of white domination on Black individuals. Drawing from his personal experiences as a Black man in France, he scrutinizes the mechanisms and manifestations of racism, as well as the conditions of Black existence. In response to the question posed by Du Bois half a century earlier, Fanon delves into the profound inquiry of "what it means to be a problem." Influenced by existentialism and phenomenology, the dominant philosophical currents in France at the time, Fanon presents in *Black Skin, White Masks* a profoundly non-essentialist conception of race. From Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, he adopts the fundamental notion that human life is shaped not by an inherent essence but by existence, which encompasses the actions one undertakes in and on the world. Drawing from phenomenology, particularly his engagement with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work, Fanon underscores the significance of "lived experience"—an existence fundamentally molded by one's relationships with the world and others. For Fanon, race is not an inherent essence but an experiential construct. In other words, it emerges as a product of existence and the unique circumstances that mold it.

Fanon introduces the term "racialization" and puts forth a relational understanding of race, suggesting that race is shaped through interaction rather than preexisting it. Echoing Sartre's renowned statement that "it is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew," Fanon asserts, "it is the White who creates the Negro." This idea is particularly elaborated upon in Chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, titled "The Lived Experience of the Black Man." Fanon recounts an encounter with a child and their mother, in which the child exclaims, "Look, a Negro!" This act of interpellation represents the epitome of racial categorization. It is the first act of objectification and subjugation that, in his terms, "imprisons" him. The child's interpellation is performative: it does not merely describe what Fanon is or looks like, but effectively defines him as Black—essentially creating race. In this chapter, Fanon elucidates the very principle of racialization, wherein whites deny non-white individuals their humanity, neutrality, and universality, qualities they claim to exclusively possess. Instead, they reduce non-white individuals to their difference, otherness, and particularities. Fanon states clearly that there are no "Blacks" unless there are "Whites" designating them as such. Consequently, he concludes that "the Negro does not exist. No more than the White," thus pioneering a radically constructivist and relational perspective on race.

What is particularly intriguing is that in the same year, 1951, the UNESCO program on the "Race Question" issued its second declaration, authored by anthropologists and geneticists, titled "Race and Racial Differences." The second paragraph of this declaration states:

> Anthropologists unanimously agree that the concept of race allows for the classification of different human groups within a zoological framework that facilitates the study of evolutionary phenomena. In the anthropological sense, the term "race" should only be applied to human groups that are distinguished by clearly characterized physical traits that are primarily hereditary.

In 1951, the prevailing consensus among scholars and scientists was that different human races, biologically

rooted, existed. During this period, both in the natural and social sciences, there was consensus about the absence of scientific support for the theories of racial purity and racial hierarchy. However, the belief in the biological existence of distinct human races persisted at the time when Fanon was writing and publishing his book. While *Black Skin, White Masks* did not achieve significant commercial success upon its release and went relatively unnoticed at the time, Fanon's analyses would exert a substantial influence in subsequent years, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Although the process of racialization is expounded upon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the term itself only surfaced ten years later in *The Wretched of the Earth*.[5] Fanon did not provide an exact definition, but the concept subsequently became a pivotal theoretical tool. Its trajectory is particularly enlightening and challenges the notion that it was imported from the United States. The concept of racialization was, in fact, initially introduced by the British sociologist Michael Banton in his 1977 work, *The Idea of Race.*[6] In this book, Banton defines racialization as the social process that leads to the invention of a new mode of categorizing human populations according to their "race." He elucidates that this new mode of categorization emerged in Europe between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It is then Frank Reeves, also British, who takes up the term in his 1983 book, *British Racial Discourse.*[7] Reeves employs racialization to depict the process by which race transforms a social situation, essentially racializing a phenomenon that was previously non-racialized. This dynamic operates on two levels: In terms of discourse, racialization refers to the increasing role that race plays in worldviews. On a practical level, racialization directly refers to the "formation of racial groups."[8] Contrary to the belief that racialization was imported from the United States, it initially emerged in the work of a French author and was subsequently embraced by British authors. It was only later that American researchers adopted it: Michael Omi and Howard Winant take up the term in 1986.[9]

The thesis of importation overlooks another crucial aspect: the high degree of specificity of the concepts employed within certain segments of the French scientific community. Not only are these concepts not imported from another national space, they also pose challenges when translated into English. French scholars, for instance, frequently navigate between the terms *racialisation* (racialization) and *racisation* (racization). The latter appears in the work of the materialist sociologist and feminist Colette Guillaumin, where it means assignment to a racial minority status. In the 1970s, Guillaumin was among the pioneers in France to approach race and racism from an explicitly sociological perspective.

She published *L'idéologie raciste* in 1972, a work that originated from her doctoral thesis, defended in 1969.[10] This seminal work remained relatively unknown in France for a long time. It was initially rejected by French publishers Gallimard and Le Seuil and had limited distribution before being reissued in the early 2000s. According to Guillaumin, the terms majority and minority are not statistical or numerical criteria but are defined by power dynamics. Minorities, in her view, are defined by their "relationship to the majority, meaning oppression" and are marked by particularity.[11] The majority position aligns with generality and the norm: the majority names, categorizes, and racializes. In other words, the majority/minority relationship corresponds to another conceptual pairing: *racisant/racisé* (racizing/racized). Guillaumin presents a fully relational understanding of racism and racial inequalities and formulates a perspective on racism rooted in the act of minoritizing. For French sociologist Véronique de Rudder, the advantage of the concept of *racisation* is that it "directly links the formation of the idea of 'race' [...] to that of racism, as both an ideology and a social relation," and that it "accounts for the fact that it was racism that created the category of 'race,' rather than 'race' serving as a pretext for racism."[12]

The framework of thought and analysis developed by Guillaumin, influenced by the materialist tradition, is closely linked to the concept of the *rapport social de race*. While this concept is frequently used in contemporary French research, it lacks a direct English equivalent, as English typically employs the term social relations

for both *rapports* and *relations sociales.* In French, however, the notion of a *rapport social* is characterized by its crosscutting nature across society as a whole and its involvement with groups constructed as socially antagonistic. It is marked by three key dimensions: exploitation, which encompasses the division of labor; domination, which pertains to symbolic control; and oppression, which relates to physical violence. Since the concept of race has, to some extent, entered French social sciences through the materialist perspective, its conceptualization as a *rapport social* has gained widespread acceptance in French sociology.

While tracing the development of a critical theory of race in France, it is crucial not to embrace any form of epistemological nationalism. Conversely, the purpose of emphasizing the presence of French and francophone authors who, as early as the early twentieth century, articulated the Black experience, dissected the mechanisms of racism, and examined its impact on the lives of colonized and marginalized individuals, is to underscore the country's significant role in the global process of racialization and in the construction of race and racism. It was their shared encounter with racism and French imperialism that initially brought together the authors who would later establish the Negritude movement in Paris. In March 1926, Lamine Senghor, a Senegalese *tirailleur,*[13] communist, and anti-imperialist activist, took the initiative to establish the Comité de Defense de la Race Nègre (CDRN). As explained by Oumar Ba in this volume, Senghor's motivation stemmed not only from his belief in the paramount importance of the anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggle but also from his frustration with the lack of support and recognition he sought within the French Communist Party. His personal experience with French colonialism, imperialism, and racism compelled him to assume a central role in what Oumar Ba characterizes as a transnational and transracial coalition during the French interwar period.

In a broader context, the assertion that the concept of race has been imported from the United States into French

social sciences implies that race is fundamentally an alien concept with no relevance to French history or the experiences of colonized or formerly colonized individuals in France. Highlighting the existence of a critical race discourse originating in France also underscores the objective reasons for the emergence of such thinking. This then serves as a means of revisiting France's unique history regarding the concept of race, spanning from the scientific elaborations of this deadly concept in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries to the critical developments that played a role in establishing constructivism as the prevailing paradigm within the social sciences.

Undoubtedly, there have been exchanges with other national scientific communities, notably the United States, which have served to both enrich and sometimes challenge the analyses conducted in France. These dialogues have brought diversity to the approaches within the French scientific landscape, which is no longer confined solely to the materialist perspective. However, the notion that race theory has been imported from the United States implies a significant imbalance in these exchanges, seemingly aimed at discrediting studies in France. This pattern is reminiscent of the criticisms directed at gender studies, which, interestingly, are themselves regarded in the United States as an outgrowth of "French Theory," influenced by thinkers like Michel Foucault, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Julia Kristeva. Ultimately, both sides of the Atlantic accuse each other of imposing overly critical (and foreign) theories on their campuses.

Furthermore, one could turn the accusation back on the accusers: Substantial critiques of the supposed importation of race theory from the United States could also be considered an importation. Recent attacks on so-called "decolonial" or "intersectional" studies in French universities, which indiscriminately target any research that critically engages with the concept of race, appear to draw inspiration from developments occurring in the United States over the past few years. In the United

States, there has been a surge in attacks against critical race theory, with some states passing laws aimed at preventing schools from incorporating concepts from this body of research and restricting teachings on racism and discrimination. These laws essentially impede the understanding of racism as a system of power involving privileged or dominant groups and marginalized or subjugated groups. More broadly, these attacks explicitly target anti-racist perspectives and teachings that critically examine American history.

The reciprocal flow of ideas and influence does not always align with conventional perceptions. While in France concerns about the "Americanization" of universities and research are voiced, the United States is concurrently challenging critical work on race and gender through censorship efforts, which fortunately have not yet found an equivalent in France. Ultimately, this situation should prompt us to question whether it is the critical theory of race or the critique of that scholarship that poses the greatest threat to academic freedom and the production of knowledge.

## Endnotes

[1] This chapter is based on a paper originally published in French. See Solène Brun and Claire Cosquer, "La sociologie de la race n'est pas une importation états-unienne," *AOC*, August 2022. https://aoc.media/analyse/2022/08/29/la-sociologie-de-la-race-nest-pas-une-importation-etats-unienne/.

[2] Solène Brun and Claire Cosquer, *Sociologie de la race* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2022).

[3] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996 [1899]).

[4] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (London: Penguin Books, 2020 [1952]).

[5] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]).

[6] Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

[7] Franck Reeves, *British Racial Discourse. A Study of British Political Discourse about Race and Race-Related Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[8] Reeves, *British Racial Discourse*, 14.

[9] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London, New York: Routledge, 1986).

[10] Colette Guillaumin, *L'idéologie raciste* (La Haye: Mouton, 1972).

[11] Ibid, 119.

[12] Véronique de Rudder, "Racisation" in *Vocabulaire historique et critique des relations inter-ethniques*, *Cahier* 6-7 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000): 111.

[13] Senegalese *tirailleurs* (skirmishers) were a corps of colonial infantry formed within the French Colonial Empire in 1857.

# Fragmented Solidarity:
## Asian Anti-Racist Politics in France and the United States after the Covid-19 Pandemic

*Ya-Han Chuang, Sciences Po*

The global surge of anti-Asian bigotry since the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020 has provoked greater attention to anti-Asian racism in Western countries. The slogan "Stop AAPI Hate," originally created by Asian organizations in the United States, soon spread across the globe after the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings that caused the death of 6 Asian female beauticians.[1] In the United States, this tragedy led to the widening of consciousness about anti-Asian racism, spurring nationwide demonstrations and various community organizing actions to combat racism. In France, the Covid-19 pandemic brought up racist images of a "Yellow Peril," which provoked an online mobilization called *Je ne suis pas un virus* (I am not a virus) and a variety of other forms of protest ranging from legal actions to social media campaigns.[2]

Asians, often seen as "honorary white" (Bonilla-Silva 2004) or "model minority" (Chou and Feagin 2015), occupy an ambiguous position on the spectrum of ethnic-racial inequalities. In this paper, I will explore the complexities of Asian anti-racist movements by comparing Asian anti-racist politics in two national spaces: France and the United States. Beyond the differences of immigrant history and categorization, I am particularly interested in one dimension: How do the different "grand narratives" in France and the United States shape Asian minorities' political narratives and the way that they are positioned regarding other ethnic-racial minorities?

### Who Counts as Asian? Covid-19 and Sinophobia

"Asian" is not a monolithic category. In the United States, the term "Asian American and Pacific Islander" (AAPI) refers to a constructed identity category relevant only in the United States. The US Census Bureau (2021) defines Asians as people "having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam." The Bureau defines Pacific Islanders as persons "having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands." Although the experience of exclusion from civil rights shapes a common heritage for these groups, the boundaries of the group are not clear, and representation of East Asians tends to overshadow that of South Asians. Lee and Ramarkrishnan (2019) found that East Asians tend to exclude groups from South Asia, especially Pakistanis, from the categorization of Asian Americans.

In France, by contrast, there is no official definition of "Asian French" due to the lack of official statistics on ethnic or racial category. However, the term "anti-Asian" racism emerged among anti-racism activists and media after the death of Chaolin Zhang, victim of a violent murder in Aubervilliers in 2016. As the major actors of the 2016 mobilization were members of the Chinese diaspora, the term "anti-Asian racism" or "anti-Chinese racism" were used interchangeably by journalists and public actors, ignoring South Asian communities. The situation changed after 2020: South Asian communities have joined the anti-racism action, especially within the movement of pan-Asian feminism.

Covid-19's origin in Wuhan, China activated a global process of scapegoating against all East Asians due simply to their phenotype resemblance. From Europe to South America, the archaic metaphor of "Yellow Peril" was revived in the media and projected the uncivilized, inferior image of "Other" on people perceived as Chinese (Chan and Strabucchi 2020). Whereas these reactions recall other waves of anti-Asian bigotry over the last century, a new element is the fear of China's growing global power. In the United States, Donald Trump insistently used expressions

such as "Kung Fu flu" or "Chinese virus" to reinforce his anti-China foreign policy and strengthen the perception of China as a threat. In France, the distinction between "us" and "them" was centered on the contrast between democratic and authoritarian regimes. Although President Emmanuel Macron did not use the same stigmatizing language as Trump, the French media's reporting on China's restrictive pandemic management was often interpreted by Chinese descendants as a binary hierarchy between democratic and authoritarian regime, implicitly questioning their belonging to the French nation. As a result, the scientific puzzle of the pandemic's management became an interrogation of moral affiliation to which they were forced to respond (Attané et al. 2021).

In other words, the Covid-19 pandemic activated a Sinophobia mingled with an old Orientalist gaze and more recent antagonism towards China's rise. As a result, criticism of the Chinese government not only become the raw material of anti-Asian sentiments but also created tensions among Asians. In France, the scapegoating allowed the emergence of a pan-Asian identity. In January 2020, as the discovery of Covid-19 in China aroused worldwide panic and anti-Asian bigotry, Kim Gun, a French-Korean activist launched the Twitter hashtag JeNeSuisPasUnVirus (I am not a virus):

> Many people used Chinese and Asians without distinctions and put aside all the cultural and national differences. Shall we remind that Asia is a continent and not a country? … A process of racialization is happening. We all know that the virus has no nationalities! I launched this hashtag JeNeSuisPasUnVirus and address to all the antiracists activists, including those in the anti-colonial movements.[3]

Her tweet was shared by more than 2,000 people and inspired many Asian descendants to post a photo with the same slogan. In the following months, when France implemented the lockdown to limit the spread of Covid-19, numerous accounts on Instagram emerged to criticize anti-Asian racism and reflect on possible solutions. Some

of them used the tag line "Asia = 53 countries" to contest the reduction of Asians to Chinese; others highlighted the history of French colonization in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos and called for a decolonial narrative of Asian activism. Kim Gun described the tensions between activists:

> We all know the disjuncture between Asia as a geographic concept (*l'Asie géographique*) and Asian as a racial category (*l'Asie raciale*). Unfortunately, even the activists cannot avoid the confusion. As East Asians and South Asians, we don't necessarily have the same experience of racialization nor the same priority of actions.[4]

This divergence has weakened the project of pan-Asian feminism. As the anti-racism struggle focuses on resisting the designation of "Chinese," the movement also provokes uneasiness among Chinese immigrants in France. A Chinese student in France commented about her understanding of the hashtag JeNeSuisPasUnVirus: "They just wanted to say, 'Don't count me in, I'm not Asian, I'm French with an Asian face, it's different.'"[5]

Similar generational differences and sensibilities about the cause of anti-Asian hate is also observable in the United States. A China-born TV journalist in New York described the ambivalent feelings among Chinese Americans:

> Many new Chinese immigrants, especially those who arrived in the US after 1989, are anti-communists and anti-Beijing. As a result, they stay loyal to Trump's anti-Beijing position. Although Trump's words can spike anti-Asian violence, these people, including my own parents, keep voting for the Republican Party.[6]

These narratives show how Sinophobia resulting from China's geopolitical influence has blurred the distinction between "anti-Beijiing" and "anti-Asian" and complicated the identification of allies for anti-racist activists. Beyond its geopolitical origin, anti-Asian hate is also rooted in ethno-racial inequalities in terms of material conditions. This has led to a second similarity between the United

States and France: the complex relationship between Asian and African communities.

**The Triangle of Prejudice: Relationships with African Communities**

In France, like in the United States, the relationship between Asians and other non-White minorities is a contentious issue. In the United States, armed conflicts between African Americans and Koreans during the 1992 Los Angeles riots is a painful symbol of Asian-Black conflicts (Joyce 2003); similar configurations are also described in other American cities (Kim 2000). The anti-Asian hate incidents after Covid-19 rubbed salt into the wound. While some young and progressive activists support the Black Lives Matter movement and call for inter-racial coalition (Wong 2022), conservative community members tend to reproduce the racist lens on African Americans and accuse them as the main perpetrators of violence against Asian Americans (Wong, J. and Liu 2022).

Asian American anti-racist politics in the United States are divided between those who promote progressive social programs (public health care, gun control, redistributive taxes) and a considerable number of highly mobilized conservative activists (Wong and Ramakrishnan 2023). In my interviews with Asian American activists, the question of interracial coalition or contention is often brought up naturally. On the one hand, several interviewees mentioned spontaneously the success of the Black Lives Matter movement and Stop Asian Hate mobilization as examples of resistance under Trump's presidency. They emphasize the interconnected mechanisms of racial violence and highlight Asian-Black coalitions constructed during the civil rights movement in the 1960s.[7] The support of Asian-Black coalitions also nurtures the abolitionist movement among some Asian American activists (Wong 2022), illustrated by the recent mobilization against a super-jail in Manhattan's Chinatown in New York.[8] On the other hand, a small number of interviewees emphasized Asian-Black antagonism and illustrated their argument with disputes between communities at the city level.[9]

Regardless of their attitudes towards interracial coalitions, the legacy of civil rights movements allows activists to embrace the multiracial reality of American society. As a result, Asian American activists more spontaneously point to social inequality as the source of interracial tension. This is contrary to the situation in France. Since 2016, the Chinese communities living in the Paris Region have been mobilized for the cause of "anti-Asian racism." Behind the slogan *prejudges tuent*! (prejudice kills), lies a social reality similar to the urban context in Los Angeles prior to the 1992 riots. Since the late 1990s, East Asian migrants have arrived in the former *banlieue rouges*—namely the working-class and multiracial suburbs in the northeast part of the Paris Region (such as Aubervilliers, Pantin, La Courneuve, and Bagnolet)—where African communities often suffer poverty, unemployment, and discrimination. The East Asian migrants, however, benefiting from the protection of an ethnic enclave economy, are seen as "better off" and become targets of robbery. The feelings of relative deprivation are evident in this dialogue between a teenager of North African origin and the judge during a trial in 2020, reported in *Le Monde*: "I have no problem with the Asian community, in my building I open the door for them, I say hello to them," says Ilyes Z. But he says that in his city, Vitry-sur-Seine, there are "prejudices." He says, "My encounters have always made me think that the Chinese have money because of the Bar-Tabac, the Chinese New Year… These are prejudices that we have heard, and that we all know."[10]

The examples given by Ilyes show the economic basis of racializing bias. In this case, some French Asian activists called for an interracial coalition based on common decolonization perspectives while others framed the violent robbery as a hate crime.

**Hate and Punishment: How Color-Blindness Shapes the Repertoires of Action**

In the United States, numerous Asian American organizations contest the ability of law enforcement to reduce racist violence.[11] Cynthia Choi, the president of Chinese for Affirmative Action and initiator of the Stop AAPI Hate coalition states:

I think the question should be: can we actually deal with hate merely through laws? Because basically hate crime is adding more years to the sentencing. I understand the need to have accountability, and I also understand the need to analyze what was motivating that person to harm another person. For us, for the Stop AAPI Hate movement, most of the incidents that we deal with are not criminal. This is why, across the coalition, we focus more on the long-term support: how does a society deal with hate, what's the best solution around that.[12]

The Stop AAPI Hate coalition has received reports of more than 10,000 incidents of verbal or physical violence in 2020 and 2021. Given the characteristics of these hate-related incidents, the coalition puts more effort into education and community organizing (such as a hotline, legal help for undocumented immigrants and people who are not fluent in English) than enforcing hate crime laws. The Asian American Federation, a major NGO in New York, also holds a similar position. Faced with worries for public safety, Jo-Ann Yoo, its president, emphasized several times the importance of "care" during our interview, and considered the question of safety or self-defense a larger problem far beyond Asian communities. She explained:

> When Michelle Guo was pushed in the metro station and died, not only Asians are concerned, this can also happen to a white man; when Christina Lee was stabbed in her own place, it's not only Asian women who are afraid, but every woman is afraid of going home alone. I kept telling each other: it's not an Asian American issue, it's a public safety issue—how can we look after each other and make our community safe?[13]

Unlike in the United States, where the model of race consciousness results in public policies to redress racial inequality (such as affirmative action and quota systems), the lack of policy tools to effectively reduce racial inequality and discrimination in France has rendered legal action an important channel for other non-White minorities to tackle discrimination (Fassin 2002). Since 2012, members of Association des Jeunes Chinois de

France (AJCF) and their allies (mostly lawyers and the mainstream universalist anti-racism NGOs like SOS Racism, MRAP, and League de Droit de l'Homme) have formed a coalition to address hate crimes through the law. Between 2012 and 2022, six cases were recognized as hate crimes with the aggravated circumstances of racial hatred. Among these cases, three cases deal with hate speech in a media report, by a politician, and in an anonymous post on Twitter before the second lockdown in France in October 2020 (Chuang and Le Bail 2022). The three other cases all concern violent attacks on Asian people living in the suburbs of Paris. The case "Bus 183," which happened in Vitry-Sur-Seine, had more than 14 victims.

Not all Asian activists appreciate the legal initiative; the difficulty of discussing the social basis of crimes is criticized by some as reinforcing the stigmas against other non-White teenagers. However, as the conflicts between Chinese or Southeast Asian residents and African communities intensified, some French Asians considered the legal intervention as a plausible way to prevent inter-community violence. One of the activists recalled:

> There are young (Asian) people who would like to take justice into their own hands. Unfortunately, as three-quarters of the aggressors are young blacks or Arabs, they want revenge on them. I tell them, "That's completely stupid. We're not going to start attacking them personally."[14]

The legal definition of racism is extremely strict: the civil parties must prove that the infraction was based on prejudices related to race or ethnicity. In multiple trials, the question of whether the stereotype that "Chinese are rich" is a racial profiling bias, often lies at the heart of the debate. Gradually, hate crime cases have gained the judges' recognition and judgements of hate crime with aggravating circumstances have accumulated. Government actors (such as parliament, *défenseur de droit*, mainstream anti-racism organizations) are also convinced of the relevance of prosecuting anti-Asian racism (Chuang and Le Bail 2022).

The contrary models of minority management in France and the United States produce different claims and possibilities for action in Asian organizations' strategies to cope with hate incidents. In France, the lack of recognition of anti-Asian incidents and racism has motivated Asian activists to follow the paths of other racial minorities by adopting legal action. In the United States, although several fatal hate incidents have been inscribed in collective memory, major NGOs are keener to consider hate crime as a cross-community issue and law enforcement as a complementary tool.

## Conclusion

The Asian minority's position in society is an unsettled issue. While much of the literature on Asian Americans' experiences treats the group as an intermediate minority or honorary White, the approach of "racial triangulation" views Asians as closer to the Black community. The politics of Asian anti-racism is trapped between the two epistemologies and is thus unavoidably fragmented. Despite different histories of migration in France and the United States, Asian anti-racist politics confront similar issues: the dominant representation of China, the divergent attitudes towards coalition with other non-White racial minorities, and attitudes towards hate crime law enforcement. Highly heterogeneous in terms of national origins, social status, and migration trajectories, Asian anti-racist politics is necessarily intersectional.

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## Endnotes

[1] Eliott C. McLaughlin, Casey Tolan, Amanda Watts (March 17, 2021) "What we know about Robert Aaron Long, the suspect in Atlanta spa shootings". CNN.

[2] For example, one of the leading local journals in northern France, *Courrier Picard*, ran a cover story on January 26, 2020, titled "Alerte Jaune?" (Yellow Alert?), which sparked criticism.

[3] https://twitter.com/OrpheoNegra/status/1221706803836280832/photo/1

[4] Interview in May 2020, with Kim Gun, a 38-year-old high school teacher and activist. (Project ChIPRe)

[5] Interview in April 2020 with Alice, 38 years old, born in China and with French nationality.

[6] Interview November 17, 2022, in Brooklyn, New York, with Jane, a 40-year-old TV journalist born in China who arrived in the United States when she was 7 years old. She produced a documentary about Asian activists' reaction after the Atlanta shootings.

[7] Interview December 22, 2022, member of Chinese for Affirmative Action, California.

[8] Interview November 16, 2022, in New York, with an employee of the Chinatown Business Improvement project.

[9] Interview November 29, 2022, with Jack, a second-generation Chinese American NGO employee in New York. He has insisted that these statements are his own opinions and do not represent the official position of the NGO where he works.

[10] "'Ils ont du liquide:' trois jeunes hommes jugés pour des agressions visant 'les Chinois,'" Yann Bouchez, *Le Monde*, May 14, 2020.

[11] See for example: "Asian Americans Grapple with police responses to violence." https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-03-19/asian-american-groups-don-t-just-send-more-police

[12] Interview December22, 2022.

[13] Interview November 21, 2022, in New York, Asian American Federation.

[14] Interview with M.B, the founder of "Asiagora," March 2, 2022.

# Celebrating the Memory of African American Historical Figures in France:
## Politics of Respectability or Universalist Appropriation?

*Leonard Cortana, New York University*

"The sense of timing is chilling" opens the Telerama journalist Marion Rousset in her column on the decision of the Ile de France Regional Council to rename the Angela Davis High School in Saint Denis with the name of Rosa Parks—against the wishes of the establishment's board of directors and the Minister of National Education.[1] In early July 2023, Valerie Pecresse, head of the Council, put an end to a months-long debate a little over a week after the assassination of the 17-year-old Franco-Algerian Nahel Merzouk by the French police and at the height of the urban revolts that followed. She argued that although Davis is a symbol of the fight for equal rights in the United States, her commitments and "radical positions," particularly on the importance of thinking about race as a social construct, do not align with the ideals of the French Republic and could be a bad influence on the school's students. Her decision masterfully demonstrated that anyone critical of the French universalist model has nothing to do with French heritage.

In the long list of Pecresse's complaints were Angela Davis's repeated criticisms of the unlawful treatment of women wearing the headscarf in France and her signature on an op-ed in the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*—along with more than 500 other academics—condemning the limits on research freedom in France in 2021. The signatories opposed the actions of Minister of National Education Frederique Vidal, who called for an inquiry into France's national research organization, the CNRS, and universities, alarmed by the development of "*Islamo-gauchisme*" (Islamo-leftism). The op-ed stated, *"this colonial mentality is manifest in France's structures of governance, especially with regard to both citizens and immigrants of color."*[2]

It is not the decision per se that is surprising, given the ferocious witch hunt against the producers of post-colonial knowledge, but rather the significance of the moment when it occurred: amid highly mediatized urban revolutions and a couple of years after the promulgation of France's new anti-separatism law passed in 2021. The law updates the 1905 laicity law promoting secularism and includes measures to regulate homeschooling and online hate speech, as well as to provide oversight of religious practices and associations.[3]

In this context, two African American figures, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Josephine Baker, have resurfaced in political discourses and media conversations. Both figures had close relationships with France and shared their admiration for a more accepting and tolerant French society than the United States during racial segregation and the civil rights movements. Nonetheless, the references to their life stories and political commitments went beyond their American experience and were enmeshed with heated conversations about racial equality in France. Crucial episodes of their careers and their intellectual and artistic productions have often been used as a symbol of universalist ideals and a counterargument to people criticizing the colorblind approach in a moment when mass media have repeatedly brought up the risks of importing American racial politics into French discourse.

Therefore, a careful examination of the memory strategies surrounding their personas is pressing in the context of current memory wars, in which other African American figures like Angela Davis lose their social justice auratic persona and become persona non grata when criticizing the introduction of policies that worsen France's "racial problem."

**Transnational Memory vs. Transcultural Memory**

In their book *Race in Translation*, Robert Stam and Ella Shohat decipher the ironic aversion of French politicians and intellectuals to critical race and postcolonial theory. They analyze the French mockery of a "cult of repentance," directed against those who see colonial legacies in the current structures of power. As the authors put it,

> the phrase *cult of repentance* served to downplay colonialism's crimes, while shifting attention to the whites who choose to repent or not to repent as the main actors, with the "rest" as spectators on an intrawhite quarrel. (…) These arguments produce political effects by undercutting any claims by formerly colonized peoples, or by the French people of color descended from them, that anything is owed them.[4]

Like their counterparts in the United States, French anti-racist activists and scholars have been widely criticized, sometimes simply for correcting the significant absences of French and Francophone resistance figures in public space and history books. Their detractors see their positions as not only an outrage to universalism, but also as an appropriation of US identity politics, in the form of what Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant described as cultural imperialism through the circulation of concepts in transnational academic spheres.[5]

The title of my article, "Celebrating the Memory of African American Historical Figures in France: Politics of Respectability or Universalist Appropriation?" is posed as a provocative rhetorical question. I linger less on responding to accusations of copying and pasting American racial discourse into the French context and more on how French institutions use transnational memory politics to promote colorblind meritocracy instead of questioning the foundations of structural racism. Scholars Jean Beaman and Amy Petts—in their shaping of a global theory of colorblindness between France and the United States—revealed the strategy of referencing African American activists to serve a de-racialized meritocratic discourse:

> A misreading of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, in which he dreams of

people being judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin, has come to exemplify contemporary American discourse about race and colorblindness (Lipsitz, 2019). Therefore, colorblindness, the dominant racial ideology, means that individuals can claim that race is inconsequential in their interactions with others and for broader outcomes in society. Otherwise put, it is an opportunity that is colorblind.[6]

By looking at the celebration of African American figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Josephine Baker in the French context, I also respond to the call of Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno to continue identifying sites of postcolonial "realms of memory" and broadening the scope of Pierre Nora's landmark work.[7] Their project aligns with the work of scholars from the third wave in memory studies, which looks at the "more fluid" global circulation of memories through the lens of their dislocation between different places. In this new direction, the concept of agency emerges to scrutinize the motivations behind transnational memory politics. Jenny Wurstenberg insists that by focusing on agency and going beyond the methodology to identify memory carriers, scholars can look closely at how these actors use "power (either latent or exercised) to create or prevent change."[8]

I argue here that some French institutions actively appropriate African American figures of resistance to create "*lieux de mémoire*" (realms of memory), as Pierre Nora described it in his early work, as more static sites that symbolically convey a sense of shared history. However, the rhetoric around the making of these sites eschews any possibility of "repentance." It prevents any postcolonial reading or building of transnational solidarity networks between anti-racist advocates well informed by critical race theory or transnational racial studies. Doing so, French institutions respond to the request of many anti-racist organizations to make the political legacy of people of color more visible while shaping a narrative cleverly constructed to serve sacrosanct colorblind ideals.

This divide between visibility and deconstruction parallels the useful conceptualization of Barbara Tornquist-Plewa, who makes the distinction between transnational memory, which she refers to as the circulation of memories across nations and borders, and transcultural memories that blend into the cultural context with the potential to transform and create new communities of belonging.[9] In a nutshell, by trying to prevent the construction of transcultural memory, the official framing of the memory of foreign anti-racist figures appears as a continuing strategy to celebrate the values of French universalism.

**Decontextualizing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Legacy: Colorblindness in Translation**

In the United States, a large body of scholarship challenges the conservative claim that Dr. King endorsed the ideal of a colorblind society. African American law scholar Mary Frances Berry calls for a wider reading of Dr. King's intellectual production to re-frame him as a "race vindicator" to eschew conservative tactics that make him the "favorite color-blindness cudgel to use against African-Americans in the political and legal arena." She closely reads his 1964 opus "Why We Can't Wait" to retrieve his positive view on affirmative action for education and employment. She continues, "even if King never uses this word, his words make it clear that he cannot be misunderstood as having rejected the principle."[10] In another essay, Ronald Turner creates an extensive genealogy of misuses and misinterpretations of Dr. King's legacy and highlights President Ronald Reagan's landmark radio address in 1986 to celebrate the first national holiday for Dr. King, "We want a colorblind society that, in the words of Dr. King, judges people not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."[11] Turner emphasizes the role of education in raising awareness of Dr. King's legacy missuses. He argues, "in the absence of a willingness to educate ourselves and to correct the glaring as well as the subtle errors in the King-supported colorblindness argument, it becomes easier to misstate and distort King's views and to substitute iconolatry and fundamentally flawed assumptions for argument and accurate conclusions."[12]

These American arguments pushing back against the conservative appropriation of Dr. King have a counterpart in the French struggles over memory detailed in this essay. In recent years, the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) has been one of the French anti-racist organizations that have made the most significant demands on the legacy of Dr. King. Founded in 1927, LICRA intensified its relationships with French institutions and, in particular, schools and non-formal educational centers after World War II. It has kept the memory of Jewish survivors alive and fought against Holocaust denial while showing unconditional support for a universalist approach to fighting racism. In 1966, when Dr. King went to Lyon to support his solidarity networks, LICRA was one of the main hosting organizations, in part thanks to its close relations with the Anti-Defamation League in the United States.

LICRA's references to Dr. King in their online and offline outreach communication became more visible following the heated debates over France's new separatism law in 2021. The organization's use of Dr. King's quote, "We must learn to live together as brothers, or we will perish together as fools," stirred some controversy. LICRA translated it into French as "vivons ensemble comme des frères ou nous finirons comme des fous." In this approximative translation, they removed the obligation implied by "must" and they chose the word *fous* (crazy) instead of *idiots* (fools). For many observers, the quote's translation revealed a strategy to pathologize the ones who do not affiliate with their type of anti-racist advocacy.

The debate escalated on the anniversary date of Dr. King's assassination when LICRA published a statement on their Twitter account [image below], using a quote that has often caused controversy when used in the United States to simplify Dr. King's view of race relations. "Le 4 avril 1968, Martin Luther King était assassiné. Son combat pour l'égalité était universaliste. Son rêve, c'était la mixité, ce moment où les fils des anciens esclaves et les fils des anciens propriétaires d'esclaves pourront s'asseoir ensemble à la table de la fraternité." ("On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated. His fight for equality

was universalist. His dream was diversity, this moment when 'the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners can sit together at the table of fraternity.'")







Various internet observers denounced the appropriation of Dr. King's words and provided counter-memory texts to re-contextualize his legacy, as seen in the examples below:

> @yareyaredaze: "'Negroes have to acquire a share of power so that they can act in their own interests as an independent social force.' Martin Luther King Jr"

> @NelsonCarterJr: "Licra completely hijacked Martin Luther King's words to make the man correspond to the image of his association." This commentator also attached Dr. King's 1963 letter from a Birmingham jail.

> @reda_tamtam: "for the LICRA to pronounce the word white moderate deserves a complaint for separatism but they pretend that MLK was universalist in their own way. MLK would have made a speech condemning you."

Other users called for action and tagged Dr. King's daughter Bernice King.

> @oxyaxa: "I think we might use your help here. A French association is quoting Martin Luther King to silence anti-racists. I know you have stepped up in many occasions to denounce that twisted use of Martin Luther King's legacy."

> @LaylaBe4: "@BerniceKing hey Bernice. This French account is distorting Martin Luther king legacy (using his pic) by insulting Blacks defending a #racist theatrical piece!! There is no limit to Racism like using anti-racism figure to spread racism."

The day after the publication of their tribute, LICRA tweeted, "to all the '*indigenistes*' who explained this morning that MLK inspired them, it is a shame that this inspiration did not lead them to go as far as he did to fight against anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism."[13]

Licra
@_LICRA_

À tous les indigénistes qui expliquent depuis ce matin que #Martin Luther King les a inspirés, il est dommageable que cette inspiration ne les aient pas conduits à aller, comme lui, jusqu'à lutter contre l'antisémitisme et contre son cousin l'antisionisme.

Translate Tweet

youtube.com
Martin Luther King Jr: "Israel... is one of the great outpost o...
during an interview MLK reiterates Israel's right to exist and calls it "one of the great outpost of democracy in the world.

9:37 PM · Apr 4, 2021

103 **Retweets**   91 **Quotes**   323 **Likes**   1 **Bookmark**

The response accuses the people who tweeted about LICRA's use of Dr. King's quote of lacking commitment against anti-Semitism and does not examine the question of the organization's translation. Like the renaming of Angela Davis High School to Rosa Parks instead, timing is crucial here. Dr. King's legacy, memory, and writings are being used as part of an official argument in favor of France's new anti-separatism law. The ones who criticize or nuance this posture are cast as internal enemies of the association (*indigenistes* with anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist positions) and, therefore, are characterized as "communitarian groups" who divide the universalist project of the French nation.

### Re-Contextualizing Josephine Baker's Legacy: Knocking Down the Transnational Racial Optic

On November 29, 2021, Josephine Baker became the first Black woman to be inducted into France's Panthéon. President Emmanuel Macron self-congratulated France for being the adoptive country where she found refuge from American racial segregation. In the French advocacy campaigns that made Baker a national figure of resistance, her intersectional persona has been reshaped. Some parts of her identity are magnified, particularly her unconditional love for France and commitment to the French resistance, with her portrait in the French army uniform displayed on the Panthéon building. During the ceremony, the audience could also read the words she said when she accepted her mission to join the French

resistance after the solicitation of Jacques Abtey, an officer in the intelligence service. "C'est la France qui a fait de moi ce que je suis, je lui garderai une reconnaissance éternelle." ("It is France that made me what I am, I will remain eternally grateful to her.")

Other parts of her identity are sanitized to respect the comfort level of France regarding its colonial past. In the media, several scholars and journalists speculate about the status of Josephine Baker, who could perform on her own terms while other Black people from the colonial empire were exhibited in colonial zoos. Some historians even argued that she would have been approached to be the queen of the colonial zoo in the 1930s. Surprisingly, no French television channel screened one of her films to celebrate the event, as would be the tradition in French media, thus erasing the ritual historical archive used to celebrate an artist's legacy. A film like *Princesse Tam Tam* (De Greville, 1935), in which Baker transformed into an Indigenous Tunisian subject brought to Paris to fulfill ethnographic experimentation, would have undoubtedly opened avenues to other considerations regarding the relationship between Baker's career and France's colonial past and artistic imaginary.

For many postcolonial thinkers, the lack of reference to more significant contributions of other Black French women who participated in the French resistance, such as Suzanne Césaire or Paulette Nardal—who also defied unequal French treatment in the colonies—revealed a preferred narrative at the moment of memorializing Black figures of resistance. Baker, who always presented France as a nonracial heaven, appears as a shield against any criticism that could be made against the Republic in the aftermath of the promulgation of France's new anti-separatism law. Her induction sends the message that to gain *ses lettres de noblesse* in the meritocratic French ladder, a Black person should remain highly grateful and sweep under the rug the unequal treatment of other colonized subjects inside and outside the French hexagon.

For over a decade, French filmmaker and journalist Rokhaya Diallo has spoken out on the denial of racism

in the French context and reflected on the relationship between the French values of integration and the political heritage of African American leaders. In 2013, she directed the documentary *Steps to Freedom.* The film followed the trip of ten young American students to Paris and reflected on whether France also carries the dream of Dr. King in its respect for diversity and equal rights. In a column for the *Washington Post* titled "Josephine Baker enters the Panthéon. Don't let it distract from this larger story," Diallo concludes that "it will take more than Baker's elevation to show the republic has changed."[14]

Diallo's column and other similar analyses provoked a memory war in the mainstream media. In an op-ed in the newspaper *Le Figaro*, Francois Aubel regards Diallo's column as "a way of trampling, once again, on universalism," and begins his article with a list of various readers' vehement comments against Diallo.[15] Whether or not one agrees with Diallo's arguments, blaming her for reflecting on Baker through a postcolonial and transnational lens is another missed opportunity to turn a transnational memory into a transcultural memory. The impossible dialogue with people who could exercise their transnational racial optic with an inherently transnational case like Josephine Baker, highlighted the only narrative that is allowed in the politics of remembrance. Tiffany Joseph described the transnational racial optic as the "lens through which migrants observe, negotiate, and interpret race by drawing simultaneously on transnationally formed racial conceptions from the host and home societies."[16] In her understanding of the memorialization process, refusing the opportunity for journalists like Diallo, who navigates between the United States and France, is another attack on the potential of intellectual contributions of French scholars and journalists of color who not only have

expertise on both countries' racial formations and history but an ability to reflect critically on the transnational and transcultural circulation of Baker's persona in France and the United States. Instead, their detractors lower the level of the debate, accusing them again of belonging to the "cult of repentance."

In conclusion, for many scholars and activists who challenge French universalist ideals, memorializing African American figures should not be done à la carte and history can no longer be written by only honoring respectability. If Josephine Baker and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. have entered the French realms of memory, their legacies undoubtedly offer a platform to question the complex history of France. A broken-down transnational racial optic between France and the United States will only delay accepting a plurality of voices who want to apply the knowledge informed by the American tradition of critical race theory to the issues of universalism that still need to be adequately addressed.

Far from tarnishing France's image, accepting the painful but necessary work of contextualizing these historical figures into France's anti-racist struggles would honor its capacity for transformation and metamorphosis. In the meantime, it would be at least a gesture of reparation for those who hope that one day people like Suzanne Césaire, Frantz Fanon, the Mulâtresse Solitude, and the sisters Nardal, who have criticized France in order to honor it better, would enter the French Panthéon. Instead, reframing African American leaders' legacies appears to be a timely and concerted effort to delay a French color-conscious coming-of-age process while mainstreaming colorblind strategies of conservative "agents" from the other side of the Atlantic.

## Endnotes

1   Marion Rousset, "En débaptisant le lycée Angela-Davis de Saint-Denis, Pécresse jette de l'huile sur le feu," *Télérama*, July 6, 2023.

2   Collectif, "Tribune: 'Nous voulons exprimer ici notre solidarité avec les universitaires français,'" *Le Nouvel Obs*, March 17, 2021.

3   Since the law came into effect, it has given rise to numerous controversies, particularly on the grounds of stigmatizing Muslim communities in France.

4   Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Race in Translation: Culture Wars Around the Postcolonial Atlantic* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 249.

5   According to the authors, this research, often led by American scholars and scholars who trained in the United States, resulted "not from a sudden convergence of forms of ethnoracial domination in the various countries, but from the quasi universalization of the US folk-concept of 'race' as a result of the worldwide export of US scholarly categories." P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, "On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 1 (1999): 41–58.

6   J. Beaman and A. Petts, "Towards a Global Theory of Colorblindness: Comparing Colorblind Racial Ideology in France and the United States," *Sociology Compass* 14 (2020): 3.

7   Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno, eds., *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 14.

8   Jenny Wüstenberg and Aline Sierp, eds., *Agency in Transnational Memory Politics* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2020), 4.

9   B. Törnquist-Plewa, "The Transnational Dynamics of Local Remembrance: The Jewish Past in a Former Shtetl in Poland," *Memory Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 301–314.

10  Mary Frances Berry, "Vindicating Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Road to a Color-Blind Society," *The Journal of Negro History* 81, no. 1/4 (1996): 137–44.

11  Ronald Reagan, Radio Address, Jan. 18, 1986. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/radio-address-nation-martin-luther-king-jr-and-black-americans

12  Ronald Turner, "The Dangers of Misappropriation: Misusing Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Legacy to Prove the Colorblind Thesis," *Michigan Journal of Race & Law* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1996), 130

13  The word *indigénistes* widely refers to those who adhere to postcolonial theories and reflect on the consequences of slavery and colonization in the dynamics of power and oppression of peoples. It recalls the movement of the Indigenous People of the Republic (2005) which later became a political party and situated their thoughts and actions in an anti-racist and decolonial approach and which reflects racism as structural and inherent to French institutions as a heritage of its colonial past.

14  Rokhaya Diallo, "Opinion: Josephine Baker Enters the Panthéon. Don't let it Distract from this Larger Story," *Washington Post*, November 23, 2021.

15  François Aubel, "Pour Rokhaya Diallo, Joséphine Baker au Panthéon 'n'efface pas le racisme omniprésent en France,'" *Le Figaro*, November 29, 2021.

16  Tiffany D. Joseph, *Race on the Move: Brazilian Migrants and the Global Reconstruction of Race* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2015), 7.

# Who Is Still Liberal?
## Islamophobia and Anti-Racism in Authoritarian Times

*Hamza Esmili, KU Leuven*

*Such is time: everything passes, it alone remains; everything remains, it alone passes. And how swiftly and noiselessly it passes. Only yesterday you were sure of yourself, strong and cheerful, a son of the time. But now another time has come—and you don't even know it.*

- Vassili Grossman, *Life and Fate* (2006: 35)

France is sinking further into illiberal and authoritarian politics that explicitly break with liberal principles such as individual rights and legal equality. The effects of these contemporary developments are not only felt by Muslims. In Sainte-Soline, where environmental activists were disputing a mega-basin project in 2023, the French state answered with military-like violence before announcing the dissolution of one of the leading environmental organizations. Yet, most illiberal and authoritarian measures taken by the French state target Muslims. For instance, the recent ban on abayas and long dresses in schools was applied by professors and school administrations through informed guesses on the alleged religion and origin of students. A white student, not suspected of being Muslim, can wear long dresses and baggy clothes because these items cannot be linked to their religious beliefs, whereas a student of Maghrebi or West African descent can be forbidden from wearing the same outfit since they might do so for religious reasons.

After years of formation, the "Muslim problem" (Hajjat and Mohammed 2023) has fully materialized. The Muslim problem goes beyond colonial racism, in the sense that its associated representations and ideological developments can be synthesized as a contemporary counter movement to the phenomenon of religious reaffiliation among immigrants and their children. As such, the Muslim problem appears to be a total social fact, that is to say, something that "sets in motion (...) the totality of society

and its institutions" (Mauss 2007 [1925]: 234).

It is no coincidence that the most violent controversies regarding Muslims in France take place in schools and universities, where children of immigrants are more and more present and often successful. Hence, through a political reaction that ranges from discriminatory laws to the rise of far-right political movements in contemporary France, the Muslim problem is an idea connected to both the upward social mobility of Muslims—an understudied phenomenon—and the persistence of Muslim-majority poor neighborhoods, in other terms, both "entrism" and separatism.[1]

My paper draws on relational sociology, inspired by Karl Mannheim, where the variety of ideological characterizations of the Muslim problem correspond to social and moral currents that clash within global society (Mannheim 2006 [1929]: 239). By insisting on the socio-historical production of ideals, I intend to demonstrate that the successive definitions of the Muslim problem are connected to modes of knowledge and politics. These are far from being confined to Orientalist stereotypes and other racist prejudices against Muslims, as they constitute a social epistemology and are coupled with a more or less explicitly normative dimension regarding the forms of participation in global society. As such, the main polarity that structures the controversy around Islam and its followers in France is the one that opposes the proponents of the liberal motive—for example, a strictly individualistic perspective that does not consider the historical links constituted within the social group that Muslims form—to those of the conservative motive, which postulates the existence of a coordinated conspiracy of Muslims over and above the variety of positions they occupy within global society.

While Islamophobic politics are now openly illiberal and conservative, their critique still adopts a moral and political frame that is essentially liberal. This discrepancy is foundational to the impasse in which socialist, anti-racist, and emancipatory politics are now engulfed in France.

**Liberal Ambivalence in Violent Times**

The years following the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, claimed by the Islamic State group, were crucial to the ideological completion of the Muslim problem. While most of its features were already embedded in the public debate, as shown by Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed in their 2013 book, the Muslim problem started to be one of the most important –if not the main— focal point of contemporary French politics after 2015 (Esmili 2023).

The first response of the French state to a type of mass violence that claimed to be of religious inspiration took shape as the fight against "radicalization" (Bounaga and Esmili 2021). In partial continuity with public policies already experimented with elsewhere in Europe (Fadil, de Koning, Ragazzi 2019) and the United States (Kundnani 2014), the fight against radicalization was established in France both by the imperative of spotting the "weak signals" (*signaux faibles*) believed to reveal the imminence of violent outbreaks and by the explicit issuance of a norm of religious moderation.

The anti-radicalization apparatus was said to operate on the level of individuals deemed likely to become radicals, although this has hardly prevented the use of collective punishment, such as the increasingly frequent administrative closure of mosques. Academic attempts to define radicalization identified a variety of potential markers of radicalization, such as "breaking with family, old friends, distance from one's loved ones; dropping school; new behaviors in the following areas: food, clothing, language, finance; changes in identity-related behaviors: asocial remarks, rejection of authority, rejection of life in a community" (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2019). Yet, while the fight against radicalization has resulted in

more than 72,000 reports between 2014 and 2019 (most unrelated to any violent incident) it has not led to an explicit denunciation of the Muslim community in France as a whole.

The liberal paradox of a policy that is both widespread and discursively only tackling individuals is apparent. As shown by the potentially unlimited extension of its definition, radicalization can concern virtually everyone without seeming to target a whole community, which would require a kind of sociological or historical thinking that is not compatible with the liberal ethos at the core of the anti-radicalization ideology. Therefore, while highly efficient, practically speaking, the conceptual extension of the scope of radicalization contributes to the dilution of its meaning. The practical efficiency of repressive measures is achieved at the expense of the intellectual and political diagnosis of the Muslim problem.

As such, the fight against radicalization is directly linked to the famous command "*pas d'amalgame*" (no generalization) that was issued as a powerful collective mantra following the 2015 attacks in France. The *pas d'amalgame* expresses the liberal paradox of anti-radicalization at its peak, as its measures are repressive in the most Freudian sense. It is a matter of methodically denying an "undesirable guest" (Freud 2019 [1915]: 138) by suppressing it. The *pas d'amalgame* functions as a powerful reiteration of the liberal understanding of the Muslim problem—that it is not a problem of a whole community, despite the potential incrimination of all its members. The diagnosis established through the radicalization thesis hardly requires the qualification of the nature of the Muslim community, the links that bind its members, and their participation in global society. Radicalism is only thought of as "infra-political" or "supra-political" (Khosrokhavar 2014: 30), meaning non-political in both cases. Hence, the *pas d'amalgame* is a rather liberal name for the serious lack of sociological reflexivity that persists throughout the fight against radicalization (Esmili and Giry 2023). While the notion of an internal enemy is widely discussed and emphasized, for instance in the words of Prime Minister Manuel Valls, its actual nature

remains elusive, characterized by a somewhat vague and insufficiently defined teleological concept that is central to the historical narrative. Furthermore, its prevalence in repressive mechanisms, considering both historical and psychoanalytical dimensions, has led to a significant numbing of political discourse.

**Islamist Separatism, or the Conservative Shift of the Muslim Problem**

Despite its practical effectiveness, the fight against radicalization surprisingly underwent an abrupt shift at the beginning of 2020. The notion of radicalization came to be abandoned and the new concept, "Islamist separatism," replaced it as the main categorization of the Muslim problem. At odds with the notion of radicalization, the conservative notion of Islamic separatism is primarily of an intellectual nature and is purportedly based on rigorous sociological research. Upon its formulation, the notion's underlying purpose appears evident: by decisively dismantling the idea of *pas d'amalgame*, the separatism paradigm wishes to give a complete account of all Muslim life within global society.

Against the liberal paradox lying at the core of the notion of radicalization, Bernard Rougier's book *Les territoires conquis de l'islamisme* is one of the most important attempts at (pseudo-)sociologically grounding the notion of separatism. Each chapter corresponds to an "Islamist ecosystem," the reality of which corresponds in every respect to the general thesis stated by Rougier, namely that "militant networks have transformed the 'urban ghettos' of the major French conurbations into militant enclaves with an Islamist tone" (2020: 17). This thesis reverses the coordinates of the Muslim problem. The *cités* are no longer hotbeds of potential radicalization due to issues of poverty and exclusion, they are the bridgeheads of an ideological invasion coming from "south of the Mediterranean" and endorsed by "postmodern epistemology" (25). In this context, the *pas d'amalgame* is definitively dismissed. As Rougier states in the introduction to his book,

> Privileging the psychological and intra-familial

dimension to the detriment of sociological and ideological analysis, on the laudable grounds of not providing the extreme right with additional arguments in the public debate against populations of foreign origin, prevented us from observing recent developments in French society with the necessary hindsight and from making an objective and empirical diagnosis of the most worrying local situations in terms of national cohesion. (19)

The distinctiveness of the separatism thesis lies in its claim to be a comprehensive insight into all facets of the Muslim problem. Such a dramatic turn from the radicalization paradigm is achieved through the insistence on the dual nature of the Muslim presence in France. The theory posits that, first, separation takes place in a series of "conquered territories," such as the urban projects where immigrant communities and their descendants reside, and then, in what is deemed to be a coordinated conspiracy, Muslims disseminate into all social spheres. Consequently, the concept of territorial secession is underpinned by the notion of infiltration into the various social institutions, including schools, universities, hospitals, and businesses. This forms the core premise of the separatism paradigm: acknowledging both the historical condition of the Muslim community and the social upward mobility that runs through it.

The separatism thesis takes shape in numerous pseudo-reflexive unveilings, enabling the acceleration of government measures such as mosque closures and administrative dissolution of entities like BarakaCity, the Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en France, MHS school, and Nawa publishing house. Although these entities differ significantly, their commonality lies in their association with the Muslim community, which is sufficient to categorize them as participants in the same plot.

The Muslim separatism paradigm therefore counters liberal "denial" with a pseudo-sociological characterization of reality, encompassing both the comprehensive consideration of social phenomena and their presentation as political realities that transcend—and potentially

corrupt—the ordinary functioning of French society. It categorizes the link of post-colonial and working-class immigrant communities to urban projects as territorial secession, while the integration process is portrayed as entryism. The highly adaptable nature of the Islamist conspiracy, as highlighted by Rougier, who underscores its "remarkable tactical flexibility" (25), is a central focus of the conservative reaction. This conspiracy is believed to possess both social and political dimensions. On the social front, it is perceived as the advancement of Muslims within the nation, while on the political front, it is said to be aiming at seizing power.[2]

Gradually, the conservative reaction evolved towards what can be described as the Schmittian moment of the Muslim problem. This transformation manifests in two significant ways: First, it entails a stark friend-enemy distinction applied to global society as a whole, encompassing both Muslims and non-Muslims. This broad categorization enables an almost boundless expansion of efforts to identify those associated with the conspiracy, as exemplified by the government's emphasis on the concept of "Islamo-leftism." Second, it acknowledges that effective anti-separatist policies transcend mere legal norms, as shown by the ban on abayas and long dresses based on origin and alleged religion of the students who wear it.

However, beyond its pseudo-sociological veneer, the conservative perspective also encountered a critical challenge: what to do when Muslims continue to identify as Muslims despite the various constraints placed upon them? It is precisely at this weak point that a polemicist emerged as a presidential candidate, willing to resurrect a historical action unburdened by the formal constraints of the liberal state. Faced with impasse, where even the dissolution of most Muslim organizations failed to erase the community as such, this candidate extended the anti-separatist policy's inherent implications. Advocating "remigration," which entails the systematic expulsion from France of those who wish to remain Muslim, 2022 presidential candidate Éric Zemmour embodies the ultimate consequence of the problem to which others have provided its main features.

Zemmour, who has successfully amplified the contemporary zeitgeist, openly embraces all aspects of the struggle against Muslim separatism, much like his conservative supporters. Both Zemmour and the conservative reaction in power share a form of genuinely pseudo-sociological reflexivity. Their indictment extends not only to the *cités* where immigrants and their children usually live but also to the less well-known upward social mobility within the Muslim community. The latter is seen as inherently threatening due to its perceived success, ultimately attributing it to the conspiracy orchestrated by actors aiming to destabilize the essence of the nation. Regardless of its grotesque incarnation by Zemmour, it is important to note that the shift from the conservative reaction to the Schmittian moment of the Muslim issue does not signify a break. The political scope of the separatism paradigm encompasses the potential emergence of a polemicist-candidate wielding both promises and threats. Thus, even when Zemmour faces crushing electoral defeat, it does not signal the end of the Muslim problem.

**Conclusion: The Impossible Fight against Islamophobia?**

The Muslim problem intensifies the question of enduring collective experiences within modern societies. Built on epistemological individualism, the liberal perspective on the Muslim problem only sees a sum of individual deviancies, although they can virtually encompass all Muslims.

The conservative reaction firmly rejects the liberal interpretation of the Muslim problem. As it has taken over political power in France, this shift reshapes the framing of the Muslim problem by embracing a more comprehensive understanding of its collective nature. As such, the anti-separatism paradigm defines the Muslim community as coordinated and self-reliant actors, even when they are evidently distinct from one another. This conspiratorial approach underpins the paradigm of Muslim separatism, representing a rare contemporary perspective that distorts sociological analysis into a hunt for perceived threats

within the nation. The eruption of violence in the name of Islam underscores the magnitude of this perspective, offering insight into the entire historical process and its inevitable consequences.

How about Muslims themselves? As mentioned earlier, upward social mobility is effectively taking shape in the Muslim community, which entails the appearance of social and political phenomena such as individualization, politics of recognition, and claims to equal rights. It is therefore no surprise that Marwan Muhammad—who served as the spokesperson and executive director of the Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en France—entitled his 2017 book *Nous sommes (aussi) la nation.* Muhammad, himself a son of the Paris outskirts who achieved great success in his education and work, wrote plainly what is felt by many Muslims: that as French citizens, they deserve recognition and equal rights (Dazey 2023). Such a claim is rooted in political liberalism and leaves entirely open the question of how to counter Islamophobia in illiberal times. Indeed, most anti-racist claims are based on the idea of a common moral platform where the demonstration of the racist nature of representations, policies, or conduct is sufficient in itself to put a stop to them. As such, the conservative perspective offers a sharp rebuttal to such a liberal understanding of politics as it explicitly suggests that a religious minority is by itself a problem to the nation. This discrepancy between Muslims' liberalism and society's increasing conservatism is the space between two times, a dead end where political critique increasingly finds itself engulfed.

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## Endnotes

[1]  See for instance the preamble of the anti-separatist law: "An insidious but powerful communitarian entryism is slowly corroding the foundations of our society in certain territories. This entryism is primarily of Islamist inspiration. It is the manifestation of a conscious, theorized, politico-religious political project, whose ambition is to assert religious norms over the common law that we have freely given ourselves [sic]. It initiates a separatist dynamic aimed at division. This undermining work concerns multiple spheres: neighborhoods, public services, especially schools, community organizations, and religious practice structures." LOI n° 2021–1109 du 24 août 2021 confortant le respect des principes de la République. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/dossierlegislatif/JORFDOLE000042635616/?detailType=EXPOSE_MOTIFS&detailId.

[2]  See for instance Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission*, where the far-right novelist imagines France as taken over by Muslims.

[1]  Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amiti*é (Paris: Galilée, 1994).

[2]  Khelifa Messamah, "La Goutte d'Or," *Esprit Presse* (1979).

[3]  Mayanthi L. Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Nilüfer Göle, *Islam and Public Controversy in Europe* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

[4]  Catherine Rougerie and Jacques Friggit, "Prix des logements anciens," *Insee première* no. 1297 (2010).

[5]  Marie-Hélène Bacqué, "En attendant la gentrification: discours et politiques a la Goutte d'Or (1982–2000)," *Soci*ét*é*s contemporaines 63, no. 3 (2006): 63–83; Victor Albert-Blanco, "Encadrer le religieux: une politique de gentrification? Le cas de l'Institut des Cultures d'Islam de Paris," *M*étropoles 31 (2022) ; Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot, *Sociologie de Paris* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

[6]  Ben Gidley et al, "Mainstreaming in Practice: The Efficiencies and Deficiencies of Mainstreaming for Street-Level Bureaucrats," in *Mainstreaming Integration Governance,* eds. Scholten and Breugel (Palgrave, 2018).

[7]  Emily Gottreich, "Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Maghrib," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 4 (2008): 433–51.

[8]  Joseph Downing, "Influences on State-Society Relations: Analysing Voluntary Associations and Multicultural Dynamism, Co-Option and Retrenchment in Paris, Lyon and Marseille," *Ethnicities* 16, no. 3 (2015).

[9]  Samuel S. Everett, "Interfaith Dialogue and Faith-Based Social Activism in a State of Emergency: Laïcité and the Crisis of Religion in France," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 31, no. 4 (2018): 437.

[10]  James Renton and Ben Gidley, *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

[11]  Darlene Clark Dine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

[12]  Kimberly A. Arkin, *Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic: Fashioning Jewishness in France* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2014).

# Between Generations in the North African Jewish and Muslim Textiles Industry in Paris

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Relations between Jews and Muslims in Île-de-France (greater Paris) are directly impacted and overdetermined by geopolitical conflict and intercommunal ethnic differentiation. In this paper, I draw on intensive periods of participant observation from 2010 to 2012 and 2015 to 2017 at Godefroy Khiyyat's fabric and dress shop on rue de la Goutte d'Or in Barbès to highlight the dynamics of intercommunal interactions within the socially anchored institutions of faith and work in the textile industry. Faith (*la foi*), as Jacques Derrida describes in his engagement with Carl Schmitt, has to do with putting trust in a relationship, yet both trust and faith have an ecclesiastical and commercial etymology.[1] Jewish and Muslim (specifically Maghrebi) interactions and philosophies of life, formed from centuries of faithful co-habitation, are shifting as Maghreb-born generations retire or pass away. Nowhere is this more visible than in Barbès near the Gare du Nord, immediately to the northwest of downtown Paris, where many Jews and Muslims set up businesses upon arriving in France in the 1960s.

## Background

The name Goutte d'Or (golden droplet), which is both a moniker for the street in Barbès and the neighborhood as a whole, refers to the former grape vines at the foot of the nearby neighborhood of Montmartre, which overlooks Barbès.[2] In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, la Goutte d'Or became known in the  vernacular as a representative site of immigration, a paradigmatic space of diversity, but also of gentrification and a destination for gastro-tourists looking for a taste of exotic diversity. Perhaps because of this transformation, la Goutte d'Or has become a focal point of public debates about integration and multiculturalism and, more recently, the place of Islam in Europe.[3]

This paper tracks a North African intercommunal story of immigration to France that is slowly disappearing as property prices in Paris increase.[4] With the gentrification of the area, part of a larger phenomenon across the Rive Droite, previously poorer than average neighborhoods with a higher than average per capita percentage of public, or social, housing (Habitations à loyer modéré, HLM) are attracting professional people who began to purchase properties in the 1990s.[5] In Barbès this process has gone hand in hand with an institutional and administrative overhaul that started with the construction of a police station on rue de la Goutte d'Or in 1983. However, due to the social reality of the neighborhood and the premium placed on maintaining increasingly rare and desirable HLM, the urban poor have remained. Barbès is therefore mixed, inhabited by older North African Muslim and newer Sub-Saharan African populations (elderly North African Jewish populations are found nearby in Lamarck-Caulaincourt) as well as those wealthier individuals predominantly not of migrant descent who have since settled. Most of the shopkeepers in Barbès do not live in the neighborhood. Contemporary diasporic and intercommunal specificity and friendship are embedded within the lived proximities of the shopkeepers of Barbès and more specifically la Goutte d'Or. Deconstructing and analyzing instances of tension and conviviality in this neighborhood sheds light on Jewish and Muslim Maghrebi intercommunal encounters and affinities in the French capital today.

With rising contemporary tensions and the pessimism born of recent violence targeting Jews and gloomy depictions of what may come, one could be forgiven for understanding Barbès as a site of the death of contact between Maghrebi Jews and Muslims. But I identify two forms of Maghrebi intercultural exchange that have carried through the generations: first, commercially mediated

interactions that combine negative representations of the other with mundane intimacy and second, in the shift between generations, an emerging but still fragile constituency for a meaningful form of encounter partly motivated by an intergenerational and highly mediated form of nostalgia for an imagined past.

**Textiles**

Similarities and differences in Jewish and Muslim North African migratory pathways to France and the production of diaspora sentiment are physically represented by Barbès' *robes orientales* (North African dress) fabric industry and narrated through the stories of the neighborhood's Maghrebi shopkeepers, as exemplified by Casablanca-born and yeshiva-educated shopkeeper Godefroy Khiyyat. Some of these shopkeepers have been in Barbès for over 40 years, although many have recently retired. The sale of traditional garments made from the fabric traded in the more central le Sentier, Paris' historic garment district, illustrate an intercommunal North African material culture and daily artisanal practices: dresses such as *takshaytât* (wedding dresses) and other clothing and fabrics are embroidered by Jews and sold to Muslims for weddings and other life celebrations. In addition to being the predominant clientele at these shops, North African Muslims are employees and specialist creators of handmade garments and accoutrements that are integrated within the Jewish-run fabric and dress shops along rue de la Goutte d'Or—despite intergenerational shifts in these relationships. The experience of becoming French is diverse but can be accompanied by the partial rejection of a Maghrebi past. Yet from within these shops we see patterns of intercultural sociality that defy the idea of Jewish and Muslim cultures as fundamentally at odds with one another or of a straight line of assimilation.

Here in Barbès, the lingua franca is a hybrid mix of French and Darija (vernacular North African Arabic). Translanguaging—moving swiftly from one language to another—between these two is also commonplace. The narrow street called rue de la Goutte d'Or is barely noticeable from the main drag. It lies just before rue des Poisonniers, where, until recently, the local mosque was the focal point for political and public debate on the process of "assimilation" and "integration" of North African people into the fabric of French society. Next to the travel agencies promoting cheap trips to northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, telephone stores sell SIM cards, telephones, and accessories. Many of these stores were previously North African dress shops that were converted towards the end of the 1990s when Algeria began to allow the official importation of foreign, and particularly European, fabrics, putting an end to the unofficial export of comparatively cheap French fabric and textiles to the Maghreb by the North African diaspora in France. The shops from which Algerians had previously purchased their fabric (or dresses) were no longer necessary. On rue de la Goutte d'Or many of these shops—both those that currently sell fabric and clothing and those that formerly sold textiles but are now telephone shops—are run by North African Jewish families. Further along the street, there is a large café-diner called the Golden Agah that sells Maghrebi food. These backroom or off-stage, often commercially-mediated relations between tradition, affect, and mutual interest in the garment sector have arisen despite (rather than because of) the prevailing national models of integration, demonstrating an assimilatory republicanism tempered by more openness to pluralism at a local level.[6]

The neighborhood continues to demonstrate a Maghrebi syncretism of commercial transactions. The four remaining dress shops that are clustered halfway up the street are remnants of a veritable tapestry of Arab-Berber commercial society run by North African Jews and Muslims that flourished from the 1960s to the 1990s and stretched from the nineteenth arrondissement all the way to the center of Paris, then ran east towards Place de la République in a giant Maghrebi diaspora patchwork economy. All four shops are now run by Maghrebi Jews from western Algeria, southern Morocco, and Djerba in Tunisia who practiced the same trade previously in North Africa. Their skills in sewing, stitching, and fabrics, now used to make the ornate dresses and accoutrements in their Paris shops, were passed down from previous

generations. The "Arab" food market stretching from La Chapelle to Barbès on Wednesday and Saturday mornings and the *marché des voleurs* (robber's market) on rue Caplat with its young North African hawkers also strengthened the flow of customers and trade. The predominantly North African Muslim shoppers who frequent the street either do not notice that those running the shops are Jewish or make nothing of it—even though a young man delivers a Jewish community paper to each store on Thursday afternoons. Even though one of the shopkeepers, Elie Hazan, who I found celebrating the revolution of 2011 with an Egyptian friend, always wears a hat to cover his head because he is observant. Even though the youngest of them, Nora Zahra, was born in Israel and grew up there. And even though the local mosque was said to be a bastion of radical Islamism. Until 2011, the practice of Islamic prayer in an adjacent street to rue de la Goutte d'Or indirectly increased trade to the shops on Fridays. But all parties, customers and vendors alike, remain discreet about religious identification.

The shop names were all originally first or last Judeo-Arabic names. They emphasized the shops' fusion with the urban Franco-Darija spoken between shop owners and clients. One Moroccan Jewish shopkeeper, Michèle Ouizgan, told me that she ended up learning the Kabyle variant of the Berber language for the wealth of customers from that region because as a Berber-speaker from the south of Morocco (where the Shleuh variant is spoken) it had come quite naturally. Nevertheless, unlike many Muslims, among Jewish Maghrebi families the process of linguistic transmission to subsequent generations had not taken place. Second generations—the children of these shopkeepers—mostly understood, but could not speak, Darija. The relationship to the *bléd* (one's North African homeland) for which linguistic transmission is key—in addition to cultural and embodied affinities, notably culinary and craft—is thus more immediate in Maghrebi Muslim families and attenuated and even obfuscated in Maghrebi Jewish ones. This breakdown in a common affective bond to North Africa has historical roots, but the shopkeepers thought the lack of parental insistence on perpetuating the language was a conscious decision made at the family level to facilitate the process of *assimilation*.

## From Migration to Generational Difference

Running counter to this attenuation, in both craft and commerce, Barbès reinforces the two-way understanding binding together Jewish and Muslim Maghrebi migratory trajectories. Godefroy El Khiyat and I would share *msemen* (Maghrebi pancakes) with honey and drink hot, sugary *b'hlib* (milky coffee) when there was a lull in trade. During these times, Godefroy would also run errands, such as taking dresses to the seamstress or speaking with friends and family in adjacent textile and telecom shops. In the dress shops on rue de la Goutte d'Or, close working relationships ran deepest with Muslim colleagues who were able to work the days that the shopkeepers took off for Jewish holidays. Perhaps more intimate still were the long-standing relationships, vital for the smooth running of these shops, with various local Algerian Muslim seamstresses. One in particular, Madame Belkaïd, a veritable *ma'alma* (virtuoso artisan) from Constantine, eastern Algeria, worked synergetically with many of the shopkeepers, including Godefroy, providing assistance with elaborate dress adornments beyond the capacities of the Khiyyat family—relating, for example, to frills, lace, or extra intricate embroidery. Historian Emily Gottreich makes the point that the hyphenated ascriptive and self-ascriptive Arab-Jew label reflects a strong historical current of North African pluralism both ethno-religiously and in terms of heterodoxy.[7] The artistic and material culture of textiles bolsters this claim through its transnational and intergenerational transmission. Godefroy explained to me that textiles and Maghrebi dress making had been in his family for generations. These skills genealogically inhere within his Maghrebi subjectivity—they are embodied—from his forebearers in the Moroccan High Atlas mountains, to his grandparents in Marrakesh, and through to his passage with his own family from Casablanca to Paris in the late 1970s.

As the generations turn, those with personal memories of migrant journeys to the area of Barbès, who have built up intimate trust in this interdependence, have attempted to pass on their businesses to a homegrown generation with a different experience and who are more rooted

in local Parisian (often faith-based) orientations. These latter generations have been shaped by the patterns of insecurity and securitization undermining the ambivalent intimacies that spontaneously arose in the garment sectors. As the communities are increasingly seen as antagonistic, local and national level institutions steadily invest more in organized attempts to stage possibilities for positive contact. Until recently, formal interfaith initiatives were fairly rare among Jewish and Muslim populations in France.[8] Since the 2010s, though, such initiatives have increasingly been promoted as a way to break down a purportedly antagonistic Jewish-Muslim relationship.[9] However, such voluntaristic endeavours to bring about encounters have become compromised by indirect state sponsorship through the huge investment in countering "radicalization." All too often these rely on a discursively problematic narrative that reifies religious identification to give a moral leverage to some over others, for example to those who can model "moderation" and "assimilation."[10]

The reification of religious identification results in many of the descendants of the shopkeepers holding ambivalent perspectives about neighborhood differences, often articulating negative representations of the others (with whom they and their parents related daily) on the basis of their religion, rather than language or place of birth, despite their positive personal interactions. This sometimes slipped into racializing banter either about or with customers and colleagues that exceeded and upset the delicate choreography of mundane conviviality. Godefroy's daughters asked me what it was that interested me along the street and if I was not afraid of conducting interviews and observing interactions in this *quartier populaire* (working-class neighborhood). They informed me that the concentration of Muslims in the neighborhood on Fridays represented a specific threat. However, in opposition to this apparent fear of Muslims relating perhaps to the social mobility of Godefroy's daughters—they had, as they put it, "moved up and out of such working-class neighborhoods"—other shopkeepers' children and grandchildren visiting their relatives' shops showed different attitudes. These were perhaps also socio-economically predicated, as social difference

had abstracted them from a shared Jewish-Muslim North African Arab past, but they did not reject such a connection. For example, grandson Jonathan Ouizgan would tell me that he visits out of a curiosity for "what came before" in North Africa; that is, in regularly coming to see his grandmother, shopkeeper Michèle Ouizgan, he seeks, as he puts it, *relations interreligieuses* (interfaith relations) played out in situ and in Arabic on the street and in the shops.

In parallel to the kind of emic curiosity that Jonathan demonstrated, the shopkeepers themselves would interact dynamically with a France-born Maghrebi Muslim clientele. Young, well-dressed, professional women accompanied female relatives to purchase dresses and accoutrements. As the shopkeepers were aware of the purchasing power of the second and third generations, Godefroy would focus his sales patter on these women, often traditionally dressed to a high standard (he immediately recognized expensive fabric) and who would return to purchase other dresses and accessories. In multiple instances these women who, like him, practice seamless translanguaging between Darija and French, appeared to be aware that the shopkeepers were Maghrebi Jewish and showed signs of enjoying the mise en scène by taking their time and speaking at length about the occasions for which the dresses were to be bought. For these new generations, who may never have lived alongside North African Jewish families, the desire to feel and perpetuate an imagined intercommunal North Africa in tandem with what might be deemed as voluntaristic *relations interreligieuses.* There is a displaying or performance of inclusivity around North African ritual and cultural identification in these young women buying their garments from Godefroy.

The intergenerational reactions of rejection, difference, and curiosity all point towards the shifting dynamics within spaces of communal identification that la Goutte d'Or represents. The curiosity of later generations particularly reflects their abstraction from a Maghrebi past and their understanding in terms of language, dress, and customs that underpin the previous generations' ways of identifying

with North Africa. These spaces form a part of a Maghrebi trajectory in France and can be viewed, therefore, as neither an anachronism nor a space of nostalgia—a forgotten world for people who have left the Maghreb—but rather as the establishment of a fragile post-migratory affective attachment to the Maghreb, which creates a relational constituency that maintains a Jewish presence in a predominantly Muslim Maghrebi historiography.

**Racialized Solidarities and Separations**

While this emerging constituency is the site of a meaningful encounter, many of the shop owners in la Goutte d'Or reflect upon prejudice sparked by the state of tension that has arisen since their position as Jews in a predominantly Muslim context has meant that they may be specifically associated with Israel. When their attitudes to this externally imposed positioning were questioned, they adopted a default Israeli solidarity, as opposed to a more immediate and practiced Maghrebi affective bond. Social groups appear to revolve around not only ethnicity but also social class in Barbès, where racialized forms of separation exist and mobility is visibly present among Maghrebi populations while Black Africans are economically and discursively at the bottom of the French social strata.[11] Racial stratification is mapped onto a colonial ethnic hierarchization of Whiteness (from European to Indigenous to Black) in which Jewish populations are viewed as less Indigenous and thus more privileged than Muslims. This picture gets complicated in relation to religion among both Muslim and Jewish communities with both secular and antisemitic reactions to this hierarchy, an entanglement that also involves a strong Islamophobic thread.

Godefroy recounted that his son, Zeroual, would like nothing more than to leave France because there were too many Muslims. His son's racism had, he told me, sprung up in recent years and it was common in the younger Jewish generations to hold strongly anchored anti-Muslim and specifically anti-Arab sentiments.[12] Zeroual, in his movement away from his father and the mixed (and humble) public lycée (high school) he attended, found it

easier to harbor anti-Arab opinions. However, only a few years earlier, before he had become successful in the IT business, Zeroual had worked with his father in the shop where his charm and wit had had a fantastic effect. Zeroual had enjoyed himself a great deal. His racialized views therefore reflect a progressive yet ambivalent generational polarization pertaining to ethno-religious separation and the difficulty of reconciling simultaneously being Jewish and Arab in the contemporary geopolitical climate. This sentiment is linked to Israeli solidarity and perhaps, more importantly, feeling more freedom to voice an overtly pro-Israeli attitude in public. This is the point at which Zeroual differs from his father. His father is aware that his livelihood and attitudes are interlinked with Arab-Berber solidarity and is not willing to show open signs of hostility to anti-Israeli attitudes. Indeed, he found cause for concern in many of the anti-Arab attitudes of his son.

However, being squeezed on all sides (by friends, family, and clients) means that at times Godefroy cracked. For example, when Maghrebi Muslims used anti-Jewish expressions in his presence, the consequences were quite dramatic. One day in his shop, Godefroy confronted a client, proclaiming if he didn't stop saying *hashek lihoudi* (with apologies, a Jew), then what was to stop Godefroy himself from saying *hashek lmuslim*? Godefroy and the client fought. Godefroy, who is slight of build, managed to eject the client from the shop and hit him with a piece of wood. Under the gaze of many onlookers, the police intervened and both men were taken to the hospital. Not long after this incident, the shop was robbed, stock taken, and money stolen. Godefroy felt that the two events were linked and that when he had "stood up for himself on his own terms," the favoritism that had been accorded to him as a North African had been taken away as a non-Muslim. Public incidents of racial tension are nevertheless rare, and the social position of being a long-standing shop owner meant that Godefroy was surrounded by an implicit safety net in which he could fight explicitly for non-racist modes of communication. Godefroy was unwilling to compromise on racial prejudice aimed at Arab Jews uttered by an Arab Muslim because his vision of Muslim-Jewish relations is not segregational. Yet there is a slippage in the perception

of race and religion between generations here. While Zeroual claims no ethnicity by distancing himself from North African "Arabs," he simultaneously identifies more strongly in terms of religious difference ("Jewishness") and, therefore, with the fragility of a minority group, ethnically. His father, Godefroy, has always been North African but, in line with his son, feels bound to Judaism as ethnicity when his religion becomes a marker of differentiation to his own "Arab" in-group.

## Conclusions

Broad communal racialized positionings can map on to what sociologist Les Back called the "metropolitan paradox"—that is, negative representations coupled with mundane intimacies in mixed urban contexts.[13] In Barbès there is both an ongoing push for gentrification and a vernacular social push of post-migrant population neighborhood continuity. Textiles in la Goutte d'Or are a particularly apt focal point for demonstrating shared and historically contiguous and continuous Jewish and Muslim Maghrebi affinities that have survived transplantation from the Maghreb to France. The street and Godefroy's shop, however, highlight divergences between generations in these affinities, ranging from an apparently class-based North African Parisian distancing from Maghrebi Muslims, on the one hand, to a proximity with Maghrebi culture that can be Jewish (the view of Jonathan Ouizgan) or Muslim (the view of multiple young French Muslim women buying dresses from Godefroy) on the other. These feelings generative of trust and primarily mediated by commercial contact are today often further mediated by the lens of interfaith engagement bringing us back to Derrida's point about the triangulation of "faith" by fiduciary ecclesiatical politics.[14] Traversed as it is by contemporary ethno-nationalism, the separation of faith communities and the desire for social mobility in post-migratory Jewish affective attachment to the Maghreb is a fragile relational constituency that can only strive to find a place and voice in a transnational but predominantly Muslim Maghrebi historiography of migration. Today, ethnically-inflected positionings that enable both pride in identifying with Israel as a default French Jewish political solidarity and also sticking up for being Arab Jews coexist alongside one another in the same families and commercial circles, positions that we tend to think of as incongruent.

## Endnotes

[13]   Les Back, *The Metropolitan Paradox* (London: Routledge, 1996).
[14]   Jacques Derrida. *Acts of Religion*. Edited by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2001).

# Everyday Gendered Racism:

## Injunctions to Assimilate in the Lives of Veiled Muslim Women in France and Switzerland

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Muslim women wearing headscarves have been at the center of intense public scrutiny for several decades in France, as in other European countries. They have also proved to be the group most targeted by Islamophobic discourses and acts. (Strabac et al. 2016; Beauchemin, Hamel, and Simon 2016; Esposito and Kalin 2011; Perry 2014; Allen 2014; Tisserant, Bourguignon, and Bourhis 2014; Gustavsson, Noll, and Sundberg 2016; Helbling 2014; Gianni, Giugni, and Michel 2015; Sarrasin, Fasel, and Green 2019; Weichselbaumer 2016).

Scholars who study the specific processes of racism and othering that target veiled Muslim women—in the media, institutions, and daily encounters— have mainly looked at how they react and manage to self-define inside or outside these normative discourses and representations, such as their supposed submissive nature, embodiment of backwardness, gender oppression and foreignness, and excessive religiosity. We also discuss, and nuance, accounts of these negotiations and tactics that veiled Muslim women deploy in contexts marked by rising Islamophobia. However, we use these accounts to shed light on the practices of power exercised over veiled Muslim women in everyday contexts and to characterize the social interactions through which it is deployed. To this end, we underline the intersectional dimension of these interactions—how both sexism and Islamophobia, as well as class and age, are leveraged asymmetrically to impose assimilation into the majority's norms (Karimi 2023).

Indeed, conceptual elaborations on everyday racism have stressed that the relevant focus of inquiry should be at the level of daily interactions where systemic racism is woven into the social fabric (Fanon 1952; Essed 1991). Ideas about cultural differences and about racial and national superiority are weaponized in everyday interactions that marginalize, contain, and problematize racialized women (Essed 1991, 10). This is particularly true for veiled Muslim women, whose belonging to the nation is constantly questioned. Research shows how in the United States, Germany, and France, they are denied participation and belonging in the national community through ordinary interactions (Fernando 2014; Bendixsen 2013; Galonnier 2021b; 2021a). In France, the normative discourse of secularism frames visible Islamic religiosity as excessive and deviant, thereby pushing hijabi women to "unveil" their motivations for wearing the veil.

The case studies we examine here occurred in France and Switzerland. The legal and political context in Switzerland differs from France since the notion of secularism is not prevalent there, but in both countries veiled Muslim women are asked to explain themselves and accept constant scrutiny in their daily interactions. These common experiences suggest that other processes than the pressure of the secular order are at play in the scrutinizing and constant demands made to hijabi women to talk about their hijab, about their feelings, and about their motivations or attachments to veiling.

To explore the mecanisms of everyday gendered Islamophobia, we focus on interactions narrated by hijabi women during which they are asked to renounce an important part of their religious practice, such as taking off their veil or opting for another form of veiling more in line with the majority's cultural and secular norms (such as wearing a turban). This demand is not based on the idea that hijabi women do not belong to the national community—like other forms of discrimination against Muslim women (Bendixsen 2013)—but rather it is

because they are recognized as members of the national community that they are asked to conform to norms of "proper" gendered emancipation. We look at interactions between veiled Muslim women and white figures of authority (such as employer or school director) to identify how assimilation to the majority's norm (by unveiling or changing veiling style) is extolled even when it is not legally compulsory. We focus on situations where legal restrictions on veiling do not apply but veiled Muslim women are asked to unveil anyway.

**Methods**

This research is based on qualitative interviews with 46 veiled Muslim women in France and Switzerland. These two countries offer contrasting contexts in terms of the legal regulation of Islamic forms of veiling. France has been at the forefront of legalizing prohibitions: first in 2004 with a legal ban on conspicuous religious signs worn by students in public school that targeted the hijab, then in 2010 with a law banning the hiding of one's face in public spaces, which targeted the niqab. These stringent laws, following several judicial decisions, were complemented in 2016 by a law authorizing private businesses to forbid veiling by their employees, especially if the latter are in contact with the clientele. It has been considered impossible for veiled Muslim women to be public servants—without any actual jurisprudence on the matter—simply because of narrow interpretations of the duty of state neutrality of civil servants and since a 2021 law made it impossible for public services or public entities to contract with businesses that hire hijabi women (Hennette-Vauchez 2022). Both judicial and legislative frameworks have proliferated in France that severely limit the schooling and job opportunities of hijabi girls and women. Recently, when a municipality authorized that modest bathing suits could be worn in public swimming pools, the minister of the interior issued a decree banning this possibility.

In France we interviewed women in Paris and its surroundings as well as in a middle-size city in southern France. In Switzerland we interviewed women in French-speaking cantons (Geneva and Vaud) as well as in a German-speaking canton (Zürich). The interviews were conducted between April 2021 and April 2022. Each interview lasted between one to three and a half hours. Interviewees were aged between 19 and 57, but a majority were younger than 35. They were either citizens or legal residents in France or Switzerland. While most of the women were of migrant descent, or migrants themselves, their perceived race or ethnicity varied: they included women from former eastern Yugoslavia, North Africa, East Africa, West Africa, Middle East, and white converts. We focus principally on young Muslim women who are often Swiss or French nationals rather than immigrants. They come from various educational and social-class backgrounds but most have a post-secondary degree.

Interviews focused on the life stories of the interviewees and retelling accounts of discrimination, Islamophobia, sexism, or racism. We did not impose these terms on the experience of the participants but rather first asked them to tell us positive or negative experiences related to the wearing of the hijab.

**Imposing Assimilation by Other Means**

France and Switzerland do not have similar regulations for the Islamic veil, yet the situation remains strikingly similar. The Islamic veil is not prohibited in employment in Switzerland, but it is partially prohibited in France (in public service and in businesses that have a public service mission, as well as any business that adheres to strict internal rules of neutrality). Despite this difference, we collected similar stories in both countries about the lack of clear rights protecting veiled Muslim women when they apply for jobs, or when they wish to do specific undergraduate training that necessitates an internship. For most positions, the absence of clear protections for religious rights opens the door to proscriptions based on each business owner's or manager's own arbitrary and unpredictable reasons.

In this respect, injunctions to assimilate differ from other forms of violence recounted by hijabi women, such as insults in the street or direct exclusion as they trigger

discussions, negotiations, and arguments to persuade veiled women to yield. In private interactions involving a power asymmetry, such as job interviews, the negotiation to assimilate to the majority's norm may take the form of bargaining about the way to wear the veil. Where legal norms prohibiting the veil exist, such as for public service agents (both in France and in some Swiss Cantons) or in French public schools for pupils, institutional authorities attempt to extend the prohibition to other categories of women not included in the purview of the prohibition, for example by asking veiled Muslim women who are not subject to the French 2004 law banning headscarves for pupils in public school—such as mothers of enrolled pupils, or potential or former students—to also take off their veils.

Taïz's story and the lengthy discussion she had to endure is quite representative of the process by which she is supposedly invited to consent to unveil and, in practice, coerced into doing so if she wants to get the job. Taïz is a 20-year-old woman with Yemeni parents who immigrated first to the United States and then to Switzerland. She is the youngest of three children, all observant Muslims. After graduating from high school, she started studying law before quitting after a year, convinced that she would not have any job opportunities as a lawyer with her veil. She switched to a bachelor's degree in social work to become an auxiliary care giver in preschools. No law formally forbids the wearing of the veil in any job in the Vaud canton where she lives, but Taïz knows it will also depend on the preschool manager and on the human resources manager. She also needs this internship to obtain her diploma as a preschool auxiliary. She asked around in her network about preschools that would be open to hiring an intern wearing the veil and applied to a place where she knew another auxiliary was wearing a turban. After two days of her internship, she was summoned by the director of the preschool. During our interview, Taïz recounted her meeting with this white, middle-aged woman:

> She [the director of the preschool] told me, "Here at the school, the way you wear your veil, it doesn't work for us. If you want to stay, you have to wear it as a turban." She explained to me that there was another girl who wore it that way in the nursery and that it didn't cause any trouble. She said, "we are a laïque [secular] nursery, we don't want to shock the parents," while I knew that none of the parents would complain about it. Then she explained to me that, in summer, I might be hot because of the way I wear my veil. At that moment, I wanted to laugh, I couldn't believe it. [...]. And then she explained to me that I could wear a turtleneck with the turban.

The negotiation in this quote has to do with what Taïz would agree to give up. In particular, the preschool director asked her if she would be willing to wear her veil as a turban, by tying her headscarf, rather than in the traditional form of the hijab where the headscarf covers the neck. She first brought up one argument, the secular nature of the preschool (an argument with no real legal traction in Switzerland), then that of the possible rejection by the parents, and ended up discussing Taïz's possible discomfort ("you might be hot"). Here, the negotiation is manifested by the deployment of a multitude of arguments, which often have no link with each other but nevertheless share the same objective to "convince" Taïz to change her veiling style, or more to the point, bargain her internship position against her willingness to take on a physical appearance more in line with the majority's notion of proper womanhood. The inconsistency between the various arguments shows that the director of the preschool cannot rely on a pre-existing rule prohibiting the veil but nonetheless attempts to make Taïz conform to what she, the director, thinks is "proper" in the workplace she manages.

Among these arguments, we also note the reference to hypothetical situations related to the job. In particular, the director mentions the fact that this could "shock parents." This situation is indeed hypothetical since no parent complained after the two days of trial when Taïz was wearing her veil. It is also interesting to underline that the school principal initially did not want to prohibit Taïz from wearing her veil when Taïz explicitly asked her if her veil would "cause any trouble" during her first job interview.

Taïz was willing to forgo the internship if she could not wear her veil as she wished, and she successfully worked during her two days of trial. By changing her mind after Taïz began the trial period, the director of the preschool was able to impose a lengthy round of bargaining on her and to push Taïz to submit to a norm of assimilation that was never made explicit. Indeed, the proscription of the veil is the result of an argumentation that allows the preschool director to obscure her own personal point of view concerning the veil in her decision, as if she were enforcing a norm that is not her personal preference. This shows on the one hand that she is aware of the unethical nature of her demand, but also of its potential unlawfulness.

In addition, the pressure to give in and yield is often presented as valuing compromise. Giving in would be the equivalent of "making an effort" or being "open-minded." What this shows, from the point of view of the production of violence, is that it is not necessarily related to the object of the veil, or even to its religious symbolism, but to what it represents as a form of resistance to institutions, as an active or passive refusal to conform. The discussions about the possibilities for Taïz to give in on what matters to her, would therefore be proof of her allegiance, of her willingness to assimilate.

In some cases, assimilation is imposed by figures of authority in spaces where young women are particularly vulnerable. This is the case in French high schools where administrative authorities tend to extend the prohibition on veiling beyond its legal scope (the pupils on school premises targeted by the 2004 law). This situation is exemplified forcefully in the story of Bakhta. Bakhta is an 18-year-old woman from a family of Algerian origin who lives with her family in the suburbs of Grenoble. Due to an illness, she had to miss several years of high school before finally re-enrolling. The stakes are high, as she is over the compulsory school age, and it is therefore up to the school to choose whether to accept her or not. In her interview, she recalled her meeting with a school director about her potential enrollment. Bakhta is aware of the law that allows her to enter the building with her headscarf as long as she

is not registered as a high school student, and thus presents herself with a headscarf for the interview. She explains that,

> When I arrived, the woman [the principal], who was a little bit old, welcomed me. And when I was about to enter her office, she said to me: "Oh yes, but the veil, on the other hand, you will have to remove it" [to enter her office]. I asked why, I was shocked, I said "Why?" She said, "It's out of respect." And I was so scared. I was so afraid of not finding a school. […] I took it off, and I then cried in the corridor. Then she welcomed me back, and she had this big smile, great. [...] I felt so bad. And after that I tried to talk to her [to ask her why], I said to myself, at least I can get something. She said to me, "No, but you understand, afterwards the other students will wonder why." She was giving me totally incoherent examples.

The director herself is aware that the veil is allowed in this type of situation but imposes a moral argument without justifying it. The terse explanation," out of respect," hardly hides the bare power at stake here. Indeed, far from providing a justification, the director does *not* explain for what or for whom respect is warranted. Rather, what is demanded is unconditional acceptance of the arbitrary nature of the demand to yield and assimilate.

**Conclusion**

We have aimed to describe interactions that hijabi women recount as moments of humiliation and violence, moments when they have felt voiceless, shattered, or frozen by what figures of authority said to them, and more importantly what they asked them to do. Detailing these everyday gendered Islamophobic interactions, we aimed to shed light on insidious forms of violence against hijabi women and to reveal authority figures' ultimate goal of ensuring the erasure of visible religious difference and to extort the "willingness" of hijabis to assimilate.

We also hope to contribute to a more precise understanding of ordinary violence. Everyday interactions have become sites to harness the power of public

discourse—about veiling, Islamophobia, secularism, national belonging, and gender emancipation—against hijabi women in order to keep them in their place at the bottom of social hierarchies. The recent public debate around abayas in French public schools, which emerged after the new minister of education declared on August 31, 2023, that these loose-fitting robes are now forbidden on school premises, illustrates once again the ongoing coercion to assimilate that is exercised on young Muslim women. More than 20 years of debates on regulating the veil in France in the name of secularism were never about the veil itself or about secularism. They were about targeting, and erasing, a sign that matters for pious Muslim women. New signs may be identified as markers of religious identity, like the abaya, but the intent remains the same: assimilation.

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# Refusing Disavowal and Discovery:
## Notes on Narrative Epistemic Blackness as Method(ology)

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This essay builds on observations of ritualized practices (politics and epistemologies) of discovery and disavowal during the 2020 Black Lives Matter mobilizations. While understood as recurring features over time and space, the paper focuses specifically on comparative illustrations of these phenomena in European sites such as the United Kingdom and Belgium. The paper brings this specific moment in conversation with other locales and times of seemingly great societal changes, as focusing on disavowal and discovery illuminates how a colonial status quo is both reproduced and invisibilized. I zoom in on academic disciplines and scholarship as complicit sites of learned knowledges and sense making and offer narrative epistemic Blackness as but one of the many possible methodological and analytical moves to confront, refuse, and mitigate disavowal and discovery. The paper seeks to rehearse and reflect on how knowledge-making practices can be deployed and (re)thought on terms that go beyond talking back to Whiteness or repackaging global racial capitalism with the virtue-signal of the moment. As such the essay calls for a more explicit re-alignment of academic sense-making with science "as if people mattered" (Koomen et al. 2023) or at the service of life (Myers 2023, McKittrick 2021) rather than power (Dussel 2008), i.e., the ethos of decolonial and anticolonial scholarship.

In the first part I offer a comparative narrative to illustrate the praxes of disavowal and discovery. The second part analyzes these in a wider context of what Charles W. Mills called epistemologies of ignorance (1997) and white ignorance (2017) as categories of social epistemology rather than observation of knowing and not knowing at the level of individuals. Before turning to a tentative conclusion, the third part develops a clearer understanding of what (narrative) epistemic Blackness *as method*––rather than *as identity*––and a politics of refusal could be about.

**Disavowal and Discovery: Comparative Notes on the Epistemologies of Ignorance**

> Thus in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made (…) a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities. (Mills 1997, 18)

> The primary difference between Britain and other empires was not "we were not as bad as the Belgians or the Third Reich"—which is true but is such a shit boast—but that Britain succeeded in dominating the globe and still kind of does, albeit as a second fiddle to the USA in the Anglo-American empire. (Akala 2018, 150)

> One of Christina Sharpe's definition of "notes," reads: "a brief record of facts; thought written down as an aid to memory."[1] (Sharpe 2023, 2)

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"What did you learn in school about empire and colonialism?" I asked my BA international development studies students every year after I came to the United Kingdom in 2013.

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I never went to school in the United Kingdom myself, but I did in Belgium and Italy. (Same difference?) I worked as a journalist, researcher, and civil servant in these places as well as in France, Germany, and more recently South Africa.  All the while I have been exposed to the cultural overreach of the United States as a lens through which to narrate (fiction, Hollywood) and know the world (news outlets).

**

The responses of my students were usually a variation of: "We once had an empire upon which the sun never set, or something like that. And then there were the World Wars, which we won. And then we lost the empire. And then the migrants came."

**

The first time I heard a version of this account, I was somewhat taken aback. As a Black person from continental Europe—a second generation Rwandan born and raised in Belgium—everything in the United Kingdom and the United States had always sounded and felt so much more progressive and sophisticated. I was soon to find out that the British version of colonial amnesia just sounds more polite. That it had—probably much more importantly—benefitted from a more sustained, politically Black, organized pushback and contrapuntal (Said 1993) thinking over the decades. That the US version of this, minus the politeness, was based on similar histories of Black organizing; yet it suffered from a systemic siloing (if mentioned at all) of the genocidal, settler colonial part of this arguably 500-year-old story.

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(The Europeans'—including the Brits'—disavowal of their part in this history is probably why the word outsourcing was invented.)

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In the United Kingdom and the United States, transatlantic slavery makes a guest appearance in these accounts. In Britain it is recalled as something firmly located in history because successfully abolished.[2] Abolition in this account, of course, was achieved in no small part because of the heroics of illustrious white British people, like William Wilberforce.

**

In Belgium we do not learn about him, from what I remember of my own experiences in 90s Flanders. We are, however, informed that, in spite of all the shade thrown at Leopold II, part of his concern was to curb the Arab slave trade in the Congo. (!)

**

Wilberforce's heroism is powerful enough to make us forget about the constitutive relation between wealth accumulation, the Industrial Revolution, the expansion of the British empire and colonial systems, and Britain's contemporary grandeur and wealth. Global colonial racial capitalism, quoi.

**

So, in the United Kingdom they remember and teach Wilberforce, but forget Olaudah Equiano (eighteenth century former enslaved Black abolitionist in London) and erase Edward Colston's main profession (eighteenth century slave trader, "philanthropist," and member of Parliament from Bristol)—for very different reasons, mind you.

**

The US version of this story is that it never had (as many) colonies as the others—not true—and that it is a nation born out of an anticolonial zeal for freedom and self-determination. That it has helped so many nations

gain their freedom and independence. (In International Relations, we are taught self-determination through Woodrow Wilson's Four Point program.)

And democracy.

And the freedom of their women.

*En passant,* it helped to "free" capital and markets (for extraction and exploitation).

**

All of this—barring the capitalist extractive side of the story—also not true.

**

Belgian (and other continental European) engagement with the transatlantic slave trade is next-level denial. People say, "we were not part of the slave trade," and "the Congo Free state and Belgian Congo helped protect the Congolese populations from the Arab slave traders"—as I mentioned before.

**

When teaching international (development) studies in the United Kingdom—which cannot, should not, avoid a sustained engagement *from the beginning*, with empire and colonialism—the one pushback I sometimes received was that the colonial "encounter" surely had some beneficial features too? What is meant is the magnanimous transfer of features of the standards of civilization as understood in Western modernity's self-image: literacy (written, in a handful of legitimate metropolitan European languages), the right religion or lack thereof, hetero/patriarchal/ nuclear/monogamous family structure, rationality, medicine and hygiene, (land)ownership, metropole- oriented state (infra)structures, and homogenized systems of governance.

**

The other pushback: the British empire had at least not behaved as badly as what they heard about Leopold II and his colonization of the Congo. Or Hitler.[3]

**

I remind students that I am from Belgium, and that the arguments there perfectly mirror theirs: "At least we did not try and colonize almost the whole planet like the Brits." (Or like the French, who still haven't left West Africa.)

**

I try to remember what *I* learned about Belgian colonialism in the Belgian school system. The factual details may differ, but the story (and especially the omissions and disavowals) sound all too familiar. It goes something like this: "There was this adventurer who discovered the Congo. He told the Belgian King Leopold II about it, and he was super interested. He confiscated a piece of land 80 times the size of Belgium and called it—no irony—Congo Freestate. Other big powers like Great Britain and the United States were jealous of a small country like Belgium having such a vast piece of land in the middle of Africa and that's when journalists from those countries started publishing reports on systematic human rights abuses, like chopping off hands if certain daily quotas of rubber production were not reached. To mitigate and control some of these practices Congo Freestate was transferred from Leopold II's private ownership to the Belgian people in 1908 and thus became Belgian Congo. After that everything was much better. We built railroads and other infrastructure with the help of ingenious engineers, introduced modern medicine with the help of generous doctors, and literacy and Christian religion with the help of generous missionaries and teachers, and political order and stability with the help of the many Belgian civil servants and their families who moved overseas. By the end of the 1950s, for unclear reasons, Africans across the continent started asking for their independence, which we gave them in 1960. That was when we made a big mistake, by giving it to them way too quickly and leaving them to their own devices/demise. And that explains the many problems we still see in Congo to date."

**Disavowal, Discovery as Epistemologies of Ignorance: An Analysis**

> Sharpe (2023, 2) cites Charles Chestnutt (1969, 329) who says: "There's time enough, but none to spare." To which I would add Katherine McKittrick's: "We have no time." (2021, 6)

<div align="center">***</div>

The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) mobilization in the late spring and summer of 2020 saw a remarkably large amount of people on the streets of many Western metropoles and beyond. Various forms of activism (such as tossing the statue of Edward Colston into the waters of Bristol Harbour), virtue signaling and clicktivism (for example, the black squares on Instagram), and policy proposals and initiatives (like renewed attention to "diversity and inclusion" in hiring practices, curricula and reading/watching/listening lists, changes in street and square names, questioning the police, calling for their defunding/abolition, initiatives to revisit the colonial and slavery past with related questions of reparations and apologies) followed or accompanied this street activism.

I want to engage with two sets of observations that come out of that (ongoing) moment. These observations fit into a larger context of what Táíwò has labelled elite capture of identity politics (2022) that often presents itself as some sort of progressive politics, and what scholars identify as more reactionary and right-wing "Whitelash" (Bonilla-Silva 2020) against what they have wrongly identified as cultural Marxism, culture wars, woke-ism, even Critical Race Theory, or—the irony—cancel culture.[4]

The observation that appears from a liberal or progressive participation in this mobilization carries with it phenomena that we could conceptualize as *discovery*. In 2020, not for the first time but amplified by the size of the moment, a professed commitment to antiracism was expressed against a background of a new discovery, shock, surprise, and ritualized consternation at the depth and severity of racism as an organizing principle of local and

global orders. It allowed the participants to feel as if they were inscribing themselves into *the start* of a new, exciting conversation and movement, a vanguard of sorts.[5]

Similar to the time of colonial conquest and transatlantic slavery, discovery goes hand in hand with a desire to name (terra nullius), so as to capture and control. This requires an erasure, blindness, or denial of what and who is already there living and thriving, in ways that might be (willfully?) unintelligible to the conqueror who needs nothingness, emptiness, and absence to legitimize their existence and actions.

I conceptualize the second observation as *disavowal*. While it appears more clearly from the backlash/Whitelash camp against the resurgence of this antiracist movement and moment, it is somehow also present in the discovery activities of the liberal or progressive participation in the movement. Rather than a new phenomenon, disavowal is an equally ritualized resurrection of tired and tried tropes and pushbacks that are expressed statements like, "colonialism was in the past; why are we copying what is happening in the US? What about anti-white racism? This is going too far; we have to be wary of cancel culture and woke-ism gone bad/mad."

Similar to the times of colonial conquest and transatlantic slavery, disavowal is needed to make the violence, impositions, atrocities, injustices, and extractions that are a constitutive factor of the global order appear natural and invisible. This global order is in tension with the self-image of the colonizer and enslaver as civilized, enlightened, and morally superior.

While I present the phenomena here as a binary for analytical purposes, it might be more apt to imagine them as a circular continuum. They also do not necessarily point to predefined distinct groups of people, or to a difference between progressives and conservatives or even reactionaries. In that sense, the tropes of *discovery* and *disavowal* are enmeshed with each other as part of (but two sides of) the multifaceted Rubik's cube of coloniality and concrete enactments in the larger biotope of Mills'

epistemology of ignorance (1997) or white ignorance (2017) which he qualifies as social epistemology. They are characterized by both not knowing (absence of true belief) and distortions and wrong knowledge (false beliefs) (Mills 2017, 53).

I offer *discovery* and *disavowal* here as phenomena or technologies of the status quo reproducing itself, even in the face of seemingly big changes underfoot. They walk alongside anticolonial and antiracist activism and scholarship, carried forward by various actors and political orientations—intentionally or not—at the service of the status quo. Radical and potentially revolutionary propositions are side-tracked or halted because they are pushed to attend to the same questions over and over again, *as if it were the start of a new conversation.*

While the context I have painted thus far builds mostly on public debates in the world "out there" or in the classroom, I would argue that scholarship and the various disciplines through which we are trying to make sense of the world, like International Relations (IR) or political science or sociology, are an integral part of this phenomenon.[6] We could—again for analytical purposes—conceptualize these two sites, the "world out there" and academia respectively as spaces of politics and epistemologies of disavowal and discovery. In reality, of course, both appear in both sites. Politics in the places where we do knowledge, and epistemologies in the "world out there," where we are seemingly engaging in practice, politics, and activism only.

*Methods and Disciplines*

I now turn to the epistemological side of the story by engaging disciplines like IR and political science and sociology through which scholars—in a systematized way—try to make sense of (global) social realities and phenomena. I specifically zoom in on the methods we choose to deploy and transmit.

I am thinking out loud about some methodological strategies that can help us confront the technologies of disavowal and discovery (that are both epistemology and

politics) without attending to the agenda and time they are designed to demand from us. Which methods and methodologies do not allow for disavowal, consternation, or moves to (White) innocence (Wekker 2017)? Which ones make sanctioned ignorance (Spivak 1999) and colonial amnesia (Krishna 2001), or presentism, appear as impossible, inacceptable to the point of obscene?

Amongst the already existing and practiced methods and methodologies in the social sciences and humanities, here I offer narrative epistemic Blackness *as method*—rather than *as identity*—inspired by insights from thinkers like Christina Sharpe (2023, 2016), Katherine McKittrick (2021), or Joshua Myers (2023), to engage Blackness as a locus of enunciation to know about the world with the purpose of imagining one where many fit, or one that works for all. I argue that a focus on storytelling and narrative approaches (for IR see Inayatullah 2010, 2022; Dauphinee and Inayatullah, 2016) conveys more directly the stakes of our scholarly practices instead of being constricted by factual or rational truth finding as the only way in scientific sensemaking of the world. I read and offer them as possible strategies and avenues of "confronting, not attending to." I conceive of this offering as an open and ongoing invitation, as there is not one (set of) method(s) that can address these concerns. Neither is it work that can ever be fully accomplished. So, the idea is not to replace existing practices and methods with other better ones and close the conversation. The methodological invitation or offerings or propositions should be read in a spirit of proliferation and abundance rather than as pawns in a zero-sum game.

1

"We have no time." (McKittrick 2021, 6)

Ever since I decided to focus on knowledges and experiences of peoples of African descent to make sense of the world (a non-exhaustive understanding of epistemic Blackness), I have been thinking about how much time we could have saved. In our sense-making. In our sense-making at the service of the will-to-life (over the will-to-power).[7]

- Intervention from the audience: "Lianas have come to us via the story of Tarzan. We need to retrieve their existence and significance outside of that narrative."

- Response of a professor panelist: "My mother lives in the village and she has known of lianas her whole life. She doesn't know Tarzan. There is nothing to retrieve here."

The above is a paraphrased rendition of a conversation that took place at the 4th Ateliers de La Pensée in Dakar, Senegal, in March 2022. Les Ateliers are two yearly conversations conceived and curated by Felwine Sarr and Achille Mbembe since 2016. They bring together academics, writers, poets, and other artists (dancers, photographers, painters, theatre makers, musicians) to think and imagine Africa and the world from Africa.

The lines above are a mash-up of an insightful conversation between panelists and a question from the audience. They reflect the challenge to both articulate and legitimize what epistemic Blackness could be about, more specifically in the postcolony. The challenge is to have an imagination of sense-making that centers the knowledges and experiences of (politically) Black peoples and peoples of African descent both on the continent and in the diaspora and in between, without overlooking or privileging one over the other.[8] This is no easy feat as many if not most of us find ourselves in one or the other positionality or have been socialized to legitimize one over the other to make sense of the world beyond the self.

What I took away from the exchange above was this: epistemic Blackness and, maybe more broadly or more specifically, thinking the world "from Africa," needs to encompass the knowledge systems and experiences––the loci of enunciation––of both the peoples that know lianas (proxy for those thinking about relationality and many other things) only through the trope of Tarzan and those who know them in the absence of an explicit Tarzan. An additional important insight I stumbled upon while listening to this exchange is, first, that the dividing line between both does not neatly map onto a black and white frontier, or even west and non-west one. Second,

regardless of whether one knows lianas via the trope of Tarzan or not, one's existence as African, person of African descent, or as (politically) Black person, all our lives have—both invariably and in various ways—been impacted and violated by all that Tarzan is and represents. Herein lie both the stakes and legitimacy of the methodological project that epistemic Blackness seeks to be. These two, the stakes and the legitimacy, were best summarized in another poignant intervention during this fourth edition of Les Ateliers. Drawing from his novel *Beyond the Door of No Return* (2023) scholar-novelist David Diop recounted the story of Michel Adanson, a tale told in colonial times, by a colonizer and slave trader about peoples in a fishing community who had been asked why they left their fish to dry overnight on the rooftop of their huts, seen as every time a part of their catch had been eaten by wild animals. Their response was: "*Il faut que tout le monde vive.*" Everyone (literally the whole world) has to live. It is imperative that everyone lives. This everyone includes the beyond-human life. This more or less fictional anecdote re-joins the essence of what Enrique Dussel draws from the decolonial: it is the fundamental difference between the "will-to-power versus the will-to-life," with decoloniality explicitly putting itself at the service of the latter.

I want to explicitly tie my conceptualization of epistemic Blackness as method to this project of life. *Pour que tout le monde vive.* Rather than identity, bodies, or particular histories in isolation. We hang epistemic Blackness on a project of life and thriving because shifting our trained gazes from the White colonial center of experiencing, and making sense of existence, is expected to have more survive, live, and thrive. In dignity. Because the opposite of this purpose has been inflicted, perfected, and experimented upon Black lives during the last four to five centuries at least.

The encounter around the lianas at Les Ateliers de la Pensée in Dakar, Senegal, is a reminder that this Blackness can in any case never be flattened out to a single identity, not even a relational one with regards to oppression or resistance. But it also shows how, irrespective of one's position in Blackness, defining the extent to which we were

more or less explicitly spoon-fed the Tarzan narrative, the fact that this trope was ever brought to life, continues to affect the global majority's everyday, and the possibility and quality of life within it.

**Concluding Remarks**

"1. You already know enough," writes Sven Lindqvist in *Exterminate All the Brutes.* "So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions." ([1992] 2007, 2) He starts his book with these lines and ends it in the exact same way,

> 168. Everywhere in the world where knowledge is being suppressed, knowledge that, if it were made known, would shatter our image of the world and force us to question ourselves—everywhere there, Heart of Darkness is being enacted. 169. You already know that. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions. ([1992] 2007, 172)

The 166 subsections in between these first and last lines of the book are a testament, through meticulous illustration, of their deep, uncomfortable truth.

<center>**</center>

We know. Do we though? And who is *we*? And *for what purpose* do we know (or forget, pretend not to)?

<center>**</center>

I started writing this essay at a time when Ukrainians magically became White in the eyes of Western Europe. This meant that suddenly Europeans, especially their politicians, remembered how to organize taking people in, with dignity even. With access to social security. To the labor market. None of the *permission-to-stay-harassment* for at least two years. As it should be.

Meanwhile, Black and Brown people fleeing the same or other life-threatening situations, remained non-White.

This means: stopped at the same borders of Fortress Europe. From the same Ukraine or elsewhere. Collectively subjected to cruel neglect, disposability, and premature death.

It means Palestine and a televised genocide. Yet again. One that did not start on October 7, 2023.

<center>**</center>

As scholars, we have to complicate how colonial amnesia and White Innocence operate and transform our engagement with it as a constructive intervention at the service of life. Rather than dwell in the fleeting satisfaction of being right—for a minute, until everyone forgets again. 'Cause, where is the joy in being right about racism?

<center>***</center>

> By employing interdisciplinary methodologies and living interdisciplinary worlds, black people bring together various sources and texts and narratives to challenge racism. Or, black people bring together various sources and texts and narratives not to capture something or someone, but to question the analytical work of capturing, and the desire to capture, something or someone. (McKittrick 2021, 4)

> Black method is precise, detailed, coded, long and forever. The practice of bringing together multiple texts, stories, songs, and places involves the difficult work of thinking and learning across many sites, and thus coming to know, generously, varying and shifting worlds and ideas. (McKittrick 2021, 5)

> If we are committed to anticolonial thought, our starting point must be one of disobedient relationality that always questions, and thus is not beholden to, normative academic logics. (McKittrick 2021, 45)

> (… the work, the practice, is disobedient, not undisciplined). (McKittrick 2021, 35 ftn 2 on Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*)

<center>95</center>

However, such efforts must stay creative in how relinking, marginality, and solidarity are conceived not the least because one effect of imperialism, neoliberal globalisation, and colonialism is that we know so little about those we are in solidarity with. We know so little about the most important aspect: experiential knowledge and ways of staying at the multiplicity of human experiences that do not then instrumentalise how and what we know. (choi 2021, 67)

**

I am trying to think of various locations of epistemic Blackness. Not as a set of predefined, discrete places where it can be found or accessed but more as a method question. When I define epistemic Blackness as a methodology of centering, of starting with or taking seriously the experiences and sense makings of peoples of African descent and (politically) Black peoples, then part of the question that a commitment to this project entails is: How do we go about this? Does the positionality or relation to the colonial of the "we" matter, including geography (of one's intellectual traditions)? Let me foreground my engagement with this question by proffering that the answer to this question is decidedly infinite, and we probably should try to resist the desire to answer it in the abstract or in closed, exhaustive terms. For the purpose of my intervention here, I have dwelled on two methods because I am most curious about them as scientific methods at the moment, and also because they do not tend to take center stage in the family of serious or legitimate scientific methods, especially not in the more traditional or conservative disciplines of IR and politics. I say this not to reproduce the idea of their strangeness or illegitimacy, and certainly not to erase the beautiful and creative work that has been conducted so far in these fields with these methods. I rather seek to signal how these disciplines reproduce themselves through syllabi and pedagogy: the autobiographic example and narrative approaches are not those that feature in most undergraduate or even postgraduate methods courses in those programs (Rutazibwa 2020).

**

We must build spaces to re-member that we Black folk have a tradition of recognizing that it is all a lie. (…) asking what produces the lie, rather than what constitutes the lie, is a more necessary response than simply refuting the lie. For the lie, this capacity for lying, is the very idea of the West. (…) something much more profound than the racialized signifier of "Black" (…) It was about experience. There was the lie, and then there was *life–living.* (Myers 2023, 2–3)

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### Endnotes

[1]  Other of Sharpe's (2023, 2) iterations of notes are: **VERB:** to notice or observe with care; to notice, observe, and related senses. **TRANSITIVE VERB:** to take notice of; to consider or study carefully; to pay attention to; to mark. **NOUN:** a symbol, character, or mark used in writing, printing, etc. **NOUN:** tone, call, sound; a particular quality or tone that reflects or expresses a mood or attitude. **VERB:** to make, or have the effect of, a note. **NOUN:** a single tone of definite pitch made by a musical instrument or the human voice.

[2]  When invoked in the present (as people smugglers, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, sweatshops), it is firmly displaced as something that continues to happen *elsewhere* or is done by criminal *others* in the here and now.

[3]  Unlike Akala's by-the-way mentioning that this might well be true, I would not as easily make such assertion—it would require us to agree on the terms of comparison. More importantly, considering the obscenity and morbidity of such an endeavor, I'd rather make a case for a deployment of politics of refusal when it comes to these types of hierarchical (anti-) virtue-signaling comparisons of who is implicated in the most death and destruction.

[4]  An interesting point of further exploration is probably the extent to which we are dealing with opposing positions on a continuum or rather at a much messier picture of overlapping and interlocking complicities in disavowal.

5   Again, an important and interesting further elaboration of this point could be drawing out the stark contrast (and similarities?) with the use of the idea of the vanguard (party) by the Black Panther Party for Self-determination and its theorists like Huey P. Newton or Eldridge Cleaver.

6   In IR for instance, we saw this combination of ritualized consternation, discovery, and disavowal of the importance and existence of race and racism as a constitutive feature of both the study and the practice of IR in the discussion around securitization theory (see Howell and Montpetit 2020 and Wæver and Buzan 2020) in the journal *Security Dialogue.*

7   Dussel, 2008.

8   I try to resist drawing up a clear definition of epistemic Blackness as ideally it is a tool for knowing the world differently with no closed meaning, nor built on exclusions and otherings. My invocation of (political) Blackness here is an explicit move in that direction. I gesture towards the rich traditions of scholarship and activism/organizing that have brought this term into being to name the solidarities and actions, as well as shared experiences—especially in the United Kingdom—of Black and Asian "minorities" in the past, and often forgotten in more contemporary invocations of Blackness and intersectionality. It is in this regard that in my use of (political) Blackness I align myself with the contemporary invocations of this spirit by Gary Younge when he stated that "there is no country in this world without politically Black people." (BISA Conference 2021, *Keynote: Geographies of Racism*, with Robbie Shilliam and myself: https://youtu.be/-WV8SlxFJgE )

# Football's Commandments:
## On Sport, Race, and (Post)Coloniality

*Paul A. Silverstein, Reed College*

> There was racialism in cricket, there is racialism in cricket, there will always be racialism in cricket. But there ought not to be. (CLR James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 58)

In his autobiography, *Beyond a Boundary*, the Black Trinidadian Marxist writer, critic, and activist CLR James conveys the centrality of sport—and cricket in particular—to the reproduction of and resistance to colonial racial structures.[1] When the predominantly Black petit bourgeois team Shannon played against white aristocratic Queen's Park in Trinidad, or when the English Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) traveled to the Caribbean to take on West Indian sides, the matches became theaters of—and "metasocial commentary"[2] on—the palpable contradictions between sporting ethics of fair play and meritocracy and the blunt colonial realities of racial segregation and white supremacy. Learie Constantine, a Shannon man and the first Black West Indian player to succeed in the professional English county leagues, succinctly articulated the heavy weight of colonial sporting and racial hegemony, which even a decolonial militant like James had internalized. To James' bemoaning of the ostensibly low moral standards of West Indian cricketeers as compared to the English heroes described in *Jubilee* encyclopedias that he had devoured as a young player at a government preparatory school, Constantine responds, "You have it all wrong. You believe all that you read in those books. They are no better than we." As James came to realize, "'They are no better than we' did not have a particular application. It was a slogan and a banner. It was a politics, the politics of nationalism."[3]

Cricket, for Black West Indians like Constantine and James, opened opportunities for self-realization under conditions of blocked social mobility, for momentary visions of a "society lived otherwise,"[4] for a "sentimental education"[5] (as Clifford Geertz would put it) in playing with passion while keeping a straight bat. And sometimes those passions would boil over, as they did on January 30, 1960, when a visiting MCC side played a test match against a West Indian XI at Queen's Park Oval in front of a massive crowd of 30,000 spectators who erupted in bottle-throwing when the Trinidadian Charran Singh was given a questionable run out. The crowd's reaction to what they took to be pro-British bias registered decades of pent-up frustration over the racial exclusion of cricketers of color from Queen's Park Club and the captaincy of West Indian sides. It was the first public act in the final decolonial push for Trinidadian independence, finally achieved two years later. As James famously put it, "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" thus transforming Kipling's imperialist salute into a decolonial rallying cry.[6]

The history of sport is a history of colonialism. And, mutatis mutandis, the history of colonialism is a history of sport. To make this claim is not to engage in reductionism—to reduce sport to colonialism or colonialism to sport—but simply to insist on their co-constitution within a long nineteenth century. Madina Thiam and Baba Adou have likewise documented in their papers in this collection that colonialism has laid the racialized and gendered social and political ground from which our contemporary world has sprung. The French and British empires were certainly not equivalent, but they continually defined themselves through each other and ended up converging in their deployment of sport—from physical education and gymnastics to cricket and football—to save (male) indigenous souls and discipline (male) indigenous bodies. Contemporary sport carries the weight of such gendered and racialized colonial elaborations, even as the so-called "civilizing mission" has become transformed into a postcolonial integrating mission, which articulates itself in the ostensibly color-

blind language of liberal universalism. As Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire have averred, being attuned to the "liveliness of colonial memories" in the present does not in any way imply "a linear heritage, an identical reproduction of past practices." Rather, they continue, "thinking the postcolony is to necessarily understand how the phenomena engendered by the colonial fact have continued but also hybridized, transformed, retracted, reconfigured."[7] Much the same might be said of categories of race and processes of racialization, understood as the historical transformation of fluid categories of social difference into fixed species of embodied otherness—something which Olivia Rutazbiwa and Solène Brun have likewise shown in their papers, if in quite different ways.[8] In the colonial situation, race—to gloss Bernard Cohn—constituted a language of command through which imperial administrations performatively ordered a heterogeneous social world that did not naturally resolve to polarities of Black and white, colonizer and colonized, but which the command of racialized language enabled colonial subjects to navigate.[9] James' fraught decision to join Maple, the club of socially-mobile Brown professionals, rather than Shannon indexes the complex intersectionalities of gender, class, ethnicity, and even religion within West Indian cricket's particular racial formation, much as existed across the landscape of the colonial North African football clubs I will discuss below. Decisions faced by postcolonial footballers whether to play for France or the national side of one of its former colonies index similar complexities of identification, affiliation, and belonging that are neither single nor static.[10] Postcolonial sport in France and North Africa remains ever racialized, even as those racialized differences continue to mutate around contemporary Islamophobia and the rise of Amazigh indigenous activism.

**Colonial Bodily Discipline and Decolonial Sporting Passions**

If the British Empire (like the Battle of Waterloo) may have been won on the proverbial playing fields of Eton and other public schools—where future colonial officers and civil servants imbibed an ethic of muscular Christianity through cricket and rugby—French imperialism can trace part of its lineage to the Ecole Normale de Gymnastique in Joinville-le-Pont, a military training school whose curriculum centered around emergent French methods of physical education. In the wake of the "national humiliation" of the 1871 defeat by the Prussian armies, such military gymnastics would become a mandatory part of the now secular, compulsory education under the Third Republic. Framed within a nascent eugenics movement, ideologues like Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, championed physical education to counter what they saw as the biological degeneration of the French "race" ravaged by "social plagues" (*fléaux sociaux*) of decadence and alcoholism.[11] Such concerns over social hygiene were likewise projected onto the colonies where military officers and schoolteachers exported gymnastics training both to prepare French soldiers for the rigors of colonial life and to "civilize" and "masculinize" indigenous recruits into the auxiliary troops necessary for further imperial conquest (euphemized as "pacification"). Coubertin, among others, championed colonial sport as an "instrument of acculturation"[12] to convert and assimilate indigenous populations and strengthen the national unity of Greater France (*la plus grande France*).[13]

Assimilation, however, was at best an ambivalent colonial policy, with administrators primarily concerned with maintaining order, regulating—indeed segregating—relations between settlers and *indigènes*, and catering to settler sensibilities of superiority. As Evelyne Combeau-Mari has concluded, "Colonial governors and administrators were convinced of the importance of promoting physical exercise among the colonized populations for patriotic, health, economic, and 'civilizing' purposes as long as such activities remained limited to the barracks and schools."[14] She reports on a 1930 physical education textbook written by Joinville instructors, which recommended "that races be separated...lest jealousies arise."[15] Indeed, when Coubertin attempted to extend his Olympic model to French Africa in the 1920s, in part to demonstrate the athletic superiority of the white race, colonial administrators rejected the proposed *Jeux Africains* out of fear of destabilizing the social order, even

symbolically, in the case of an indigenous victory.[16] In the meantime, beginning in the late nineteenth century, colonial settlers in North Africa and beyond began to invest in leisure sports like football, pétanque, sailing, cycling, horse racing, and automobile rallies. These sports lent themselves to exclusive bourgeois clubs, imposing infrastructure, and extravagant spectacles that signaled and performed settler distinction as modern and cosmopolitan—"the privileged sign of 'pied-noir' identity."[17] Cross-country cycling tours and auto rallies further constituted a "symbolic (re)conquest" of colonial space,[18] with trans-Saharan rallies demonstrating the "administrative unity of the French Empire" and the "sportive Frenchification (*francisation*)" of the North African region.[19]

And yet such sports did not remain an exclusive pied-noir domain but soon appealed to indigenous elites who saw themselves as the settlers' equals, if not superiors, in masculine virility. Exceptional North African cyclists and footballers were recruited onto professional teams in the colonies and metropole, and individual runners and boxers came to represent France in international competitions. Postcolonial activists and scholars have resurrected memories of the pioneering feats of African athletes like Larbi Ben Barek (football), Ali Benouna (football), Marcel Cerdan (boxing), Raoul Diagne (football), Louis Mbarek Fall (boxing), Ali Mimoun (athletics), Ahmed Boughera El Ouafi (marathon), Abdelkader Zaaf (cycling), and others competing on the world stage of the Olympics, Tour de France, and World Cup in the early decades of the twentieth century.[20] Moreover, as the pathbreaking historian Bernadette Deville-Denthu has maintained,[21] indigenous men (and to a lesser extent women) across Africa came to reject the forced discipline of physical education and gymnastics imposed by schoolteachers and military instructors, opting instead for collective games like football, "much to the distress of colonial administrators."[22]

Algeria exemplifies these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.[23] If Europeans organized the first football clubs in Oran, Algiers, Constantine, and other major centers of colonial settlement around the turn of the century, by the early 1920s Muslim, Jewish, and other racially-marked Algerians (including Kabyles and Corsicans) had created dozens of sporting associations in the same cities primarily dedicated to football. Among those was the Mouloudia Club Algérois (MCA) whose ties to the 'ulama movement and green and red jerseys—the colors of the future Algerian flag—signaled its proto-nationalism.[24] While explicitly Muslim, Jewish, and European-identified teams initially played in the same sports leagues, colonial administrators in 1928 sought to prohibit matches between them and beginning in the early 1930s required a minimum number of European players on otherwise indigenous teams.[25] Once mono-racial clubs were re-constituted as Franco-Muslim "unions" or "ententes,"[26] the result was at least a fleeting moment of intercommunal sociability where football clubs, pitches, and stadiums provided what Driss Abbassi has provocatively termed a "relational space" (*espace-relation*). Here Algerians encountered each other across racialized terrains of ethnic and religious difference, embedded within a broader "socially hierarchical and ethnically segregated social order."[27]

By the late 1940s, intercommunal violence and rising anti-colonial nationalism foreclosed such relational spaces, with the colonial government re-segregating the football leagues and the FLN calling for a boycott of settler sporting institutions. In the meantime, post-war "integration" policies and hesitant efforts to transform the French Empire into a pan-racial "Union"—as documented by Oumar Ba and Audrey Celestine in their papers—facilitated the mobility of colonial footballers to play for metropolitan professional sides and even the French national team. In these venues, they were subject to repeated public questioning of their identity and loyalty, notwithstanding the fact that a full 35 percent of those who have played for French national sides have had family backgrounds outside the metropole (Blanchard 2010).[28] Among them were Rachid Mekloufi and Mustapha Zitouni who shortly before the 1958 World Cup clandestinely left France to join the FLN's team based out of Tunis. While never recognized by FIFA, the team would eventually include 35 players, all but one of whom had been playing professionally in France, and would play 80 matches across

the world with the explicit goal of promoting Algerian independence.[29] The FLN capitalized on the long work of indigenous teams like the MCA to construct an anti-colonial national identity, and indeed many of the FLN's commanders, including the first Algerian president Ahmed Ben Bella, were accomplished footballers.[30] Like the decolonial militants Aimé Cesaire and Léon Damas who organized an Antillean football team, "New Hope,"[31] a young generation of Algerian nationalists discovered their collective agency in Muslim sporting associations, thus distinguishing themselves from the elder generations they saw as marked by "fatalist quietism."[32] As Commandant Si Azzedine would recount in his memoirs, "Sport was for me a school of nationalism, and the pitches were my first battlefields."[33]

**Postcolonial Legacies**

Constitutive colonial ambivalences of integration and segregation, inclusion and exclusion, did not resolve at the moment of decolonization, but rather have taken on new racialized dimensions on the entangled sporting fields of postcolonial France and North Africa. In France, the civilizing mission (*mission civilisatrice*) transformed into an integrating mission (*mission intégratrice*) directed at those of postcolonial immigrant background inhabiting peri-urban (*banlieue*) housing projects and other *quartiers populaires* racialized as zones of insecurity, "social fracture" (*fracture sociale*), sectarianism (*communautarisme*), and even *jihad*, as Hamza Esmili and Marwan Mohammed unpack in their papers. Sport has been a central component of urban revitalization programs, which have privileged the building of athletic infrastructure and establishment of sports programs for young men and women to re-discipline their bodies, secularize their dispositions, and counter their ostensible attraction to so-called "fundamentalism" (*intégrisme*).[34] Such discursive opposition of (secular) sport and Islam as incompatible bodily practices underwrites both the racialization of the latter and the suspicion cast upon Muslim-French footballers whose actions are surveilled and whose loyalties are questioned. The French Football Federation (FFF) has banned the wearing of *hijab* in any

competition or exhibition held under its aegis at any age level, a regulation upheld by the French high court in June 2023 in spite of strident protests by a group of covered sportswomen, Les Hijabeuses, and contrary to FIFA's explicit policy allowing covered female players to participate in the World Cup.

Male football players are similarly commanded to set aside their religious obligations to fast during Ramadan, which the professional leagues have refused to accommodate and the national team has effectively made a prerequisite for selection. Failure to abide by these secular sporting commandments—or to enthusiastically sing the national hymn—can lead to being labeled as "unprofessional" or even as "troublemakers." As a result, talented Muslim footballers like Nicolas Anelka, Hatem Ben Arfa, Karim Benzema, and Samir Nasri have fallen afoul of the French Football Federation and been excluded from the national sides. Others like Rayan Aït-Nouri, Sofiane Boufal, Riyad Mahrez, and Romain Saïss have elected to exit France, ply their footballing trade overseas, and compete for their heritage nations; their commitments are as biographically particular and psychically fraught as James' (later regretted) opting for Maple over Shannon.[35] While the men's 1998 World Cup winning team was broadly embraced as emblematic of France's multicultural (*black-blanc-beur*) future, secularist pundits like Alain Finkielkraut have derided subsequent sides as "too Black," and the national coaching staff under Laurent Blanc controversially contemplated a racial quota system to ensure the representation of white players, eerily recalling late-colonial policies in Algeria.[36] In the meantime, Black players like Lilian Thuram and Christian Karembeu have used the legacy of the 1998 team to connect contemporary racism and inequality to a largely unaddressed history of slavery and colonial violence.[37] And Les Hijabeuses have expanded their struggle against the secular patriarchy embedded in the women's game, which likewise derives from a long-standing colonial trope of saving Muslim women from Muslim men.

North African states have likewise deployed sports to navigate their own postcolonial contradictions,

including the continued vitality of inherited colonial racial categories that regimes have ambivalently denied and embraced. As historian Philip Dine has recounted, "Independent Algeria moved quickly to appropriate the ex-colonial sports system as a means of fostering domestic legitimacy and international recognition," hosting a number of international mega-events in the 1970s and 1980s.[38] To date, international encounters between North African national sides and France—like during the 2023 France-Morocco World Cup semi-final—have served as spectacular occasions to memorialize colonialism and reflect on the unfinished business of decolonization. Moreover, North African states have deployed such spectacles—and sports more broadly—to bolster national loyalty among its heterogeneous populations, many of whom reside abroad in the diaspora. Much as in France and other North African countries, the Algerian Ministry of Youth and Sports invested in sporting infrastructure to channel the passions of younger generations and reorganized the football league to "abolish regionalism and chauvinism" in favor of national identification.[39] In spite of such efforts to order spirits and discipline bodies, stadiums became salient sites for anti-regime protests as well as the expression of religious and ethnic identification.

Notably, the Jeunesse Sportive de Kabylie (JSK) parlayed its continental success into regional pride. Its matches serve as a site for supporters to advocate for cultural and language rights with songs and banners composed in Taqbaylit, with Amazigh flags held high, and with its canary yellow jerseys becoming the de facto uniform of the transnational Amazigh movement.[40] Football clubs in Agadir and Hoceima have played a similar role in Morocco. In the southeastern Moroccan oasis town of Goulmima—a center of Amazigh activism for the last 30 years with an ethno-racial heterogeneity much as described by Judith Scheele in her paper—the main local amateur side calls itself the Jeunesse Sportive du Ksar (also JSK), wears canary yellow jerseys emblazoned with the Tifinagh alphabet symbol for freedom, and adopts the names of Amazigh cultural heroes for its players. Many of the area's activists got their start playing for the local JSK, particularly in Ramadan tournaments during which religious piety—*pace* both

French commentators and salafi reformists—has never been incompatible with either athletic endeavors or ethnocultural identification.

Football is but one of the sports practiced in peripheral areas like Goulmima. If football, in its practical simplicity, lends itself to easy appropriation, local variation, and political deployment, the other sport increasingly associated with Amazigh activism, pétanque, with its indelible connections to French settler colonialism and *pied-noir* leisure, most certainly does not. Today, the casual sociality of the old colonial pétanque court, which continues to attract the sons and grandsons of former tribal notables who have a surplus of leisure time, stands in stark contrast with the new martial arts clubs whose modalities of self-discipline and master-disciple relations parallels that practiced in both Sufi and salafi traditions and which tend to be frequented by poorer, formerly enserfed residents now racialized as "Black." Younger ("white") Amazigh activists have organized regional pétanque tournaments that map out rural circuits and networks that layer on top of (and often in direct contrast to) those channeled by state infrastructure. These tournaments are isomorphic with new claims for regional self-determination and indigenous sovereignty in the area. *Les boules* (pétanque steel balls) replace *les balles* (bullets) in new performances of the martial masculinity by which Amazigh pastoral groups were racialized by French colonial officers. Throwing a steel ball (*kura hadidiyya*) further constitutes a symbolic riposte to the "years of lead" under the former King Hassan II as well as the ongoing extraction operations and Arabization policies from which the local landscape and residents' bodies still bear the marks of violence.

**Conclusion**

Playing a decidedly colonial game in a landscape indelibly marked by the violence of colonialism and postcolonial development underlines just how malleable sporting practices are to appropriation and domestication. Postcolonial racial projects like the Amazigh movement necessarily involve acts of bricolage, working, in the words

of Claude Lévi-Strauss, with the "remains and debris of events... 'des bribes et des morceaux'... odds and ends... fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or a society."[41] Sporting practices like football and pétanque, as well as racial categories like "Berber" or "Muslim," are part of such "imperial debris"[42]—the remains and rubble which colonialism has left behind. But legacy is not destiny. The meanings and meaningfulness of race and sport are not determined by the colonial order of things, itself internally heterogeneous, dynamic, and contradictory.

As Laurent Dubois has insisted, "Across its history in imperial and postcolonial France, football has not only crystallized social conflicts but has also sometimes seemed to overcome them, showing the way for a society to live other how and otherwise."[43] Legacies, in this regard, need not only be burdens or commandments but can also be inspirations and provocations—not only "models of" but also "models for"[44] a world organized on different racial and sporting grounds. What do we know of race who only race know?

## Endnotes

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3   James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 112–113.
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5   Geertz, "Deep Play," 27.
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# "Anti-White Racism" and "Anti-France Hatred:"

## Prosecution of Rap Music and the Paradox of Racist Use of Anti-Racist Legislation in France (2003–2019)

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In the United States, United Kingdom, and France, rap is the only musical genre to be subject to sustained prosecution over the last two decades. Rap song lyrics have been used as evidence in criminal trials in the United States (Kubrin and Nielson, 2014; Dennis and Nielson, 2019) and the United Kingdom (Fatsis, 2019; Owusu-Bempah, 2022). In France, the songs themselves constitute the grounds for indictment: they are then most often subject to the Law of July 29, 1881, on Freedom of the Press, and are therefore judged in the chamber devoted to press law.[1] The criminalization of rap music reveals the way that post-slavery and post-colonial countries deal with the artistic and political freedom of speech of "minority groups" (Guillaumin, 2002) to which the rap genre has been attached (Hammou, 2009).

Developments in France between 2000 and 2020 offer an especially significant example of the evolution of the accusation of "anti-white racism" in the prosecution of rap music. Researchers agree more (Möschel and Fournie, 2022) or less (Debono, 2020) that the struggle against anti-white racism very quickly became a hobbyhorse of the far right. However, in the 2010s it became a cause taken up by a major anti-racist association in France, the International League Against Racism and Antisemitism (LICRA). LICRA joined the civil action in a lawsuit alleging anti-white racism in 2012, devoted its 2013 annual congress to this issue, and filed a complaint alongside the far-right association the General Alliance Against Racism and for the Defense of the French and Christian Identity (AGRIF) against the rapper Nick Conrad in 2019 for a music video entitled "*Pendez Les Blancs*" (Hang the Whites).

Through a chronological study of public denunciations of rap's violent lyrics, I examine how this musical genre has served as what the French pragmatist sociologist

Chateauraynaud has called a *prise,* a means of not only gradually bringing the category of anti-white racism into the public arena but also of making it a legitimate legal issue.[2] I focus on three moments that reveal this evolution. First, I examine the 2003 Sniper trial where the category of anti-white racism appears explicitly mostly on the far right. Second, I discuss the turning point of 2005 with the law proposed by the government deputy François Grosdidier, which attempted to legally recognize the term while penalizing rap music. Finally, I study the trial of the rapper Nick Conrad in 2019, where the attempts to reverse anti-racist legislation to protect the majority group instead of minorities extended well beyond the far right.

### The Sniper Trial: Anti-White Racism is Mobilized but Still a Repulsive Category

The rap group Sniper, composed of one Black singer (Blacko), one Maghrebi DJ (DJ Boudj) and two Maghrebi rappers (Tunisiano and Aketo) from the Paris *banlieue,* enjoyed some success in the early 2000s. They wrote songs dealing with France's working-class neighborhoods, particularly the racism experienced by their residents ("*Pris pour cible*") as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ("*Jeteurs de pierre*"). One of their songs, entitled "*La France,*" became the subject of public denunciations in 2002, especially because of the chorus ("France is a bitch, and we've been betrayed …we need to change the law to see soon Arabs and Black ruling in the Elysée") and one of Tunisiano's lines: "a single mission, to exterminate ministers and fascists." Deputies belonging to the UMP (a French right-wing party) denounced the lyrics as "an inadmissible call to violence and racial hatred."[3] The group targeted by this "call to racial hatred" is not always named in discussions in the National Assembly, but it is mentioned in the leaflets distributed in 2003 by militants of

## Violents - haineux - racistes anti-français
### Ils veulent "niquer la France" avec notre argent !
### Non au concert de Sniper !

La discothèque Le Loft, rue de la Sinne, à Mulhouse organise dans ces murs ce 20 juillet un concert du groupe de Rap, Sniper.

Ce groupe se caractérise par une haine pathologique de tout ce qui est français et blanc. Il se signale également par son agressivité à l'égard des policiers, traités de "chiens" dans la chanson "Nique le Système".

Encore plus ignoble, ces rappeurs font l'apologie des viols collectifs. En effet, dans la chanson "Faut de tout pour faire un monde", Sniper affirme : "Y a des meufs graves, nymphomanes qui s'font ner-tour pas plus de 20 mecs dans les caves".

Traduction, si des "meufs" (des filles) se font "ner-tour" ("tourner", c'est-à-dire violer), c'est qu'elles sont nymphomanes et donc consentantes !!!

Voici également le refrain de la chanson-phare de Sniper, intitulée "La France" : "La France est une garce et on s'est fait trahir - Le système voilà ce qui nous pousse à les haïr - La haine c'est ce qui rend nos propos vulgaires - On nique la France sur une tendance de musique populaire - On est d'accord et on se moque des répressions - On se fout de la République et de la liberté d'expression - Faudrait changer les lois et pouvoir voir - Bientôt à l'Elysée des arabes et des noirs au pouvoir - Faut que ça pète !"

La chanson se termine par le chant d'un coq interrompu par le bruit d'une balle. Une balle pour la France...

Mépris de la République, haine de notre pays, discrimination à l'égard des populations d'origine européenne, tout y est... Sniper veut "niquer" la France. Ses membres haïssent les Français de souche et trouvent que les filles violées sont des "nymphos"...

Les propos de Sniper constituent indubitablement un grave trouble à l'ordre public. Comment peut-on concevoir que se produise à Mulhouse un tel groupe ? Les frontières de la liberté d'expression sont clairement dépassées.

La discothèque Le Loft a-t-elle connaissance des textes de Sniper ? A-t-elle invité ce groupe en toute connaissance de cause ?

### Avec nous, demandez l'annulation de ce concert !
### Appelez la discothèque Le Loft au 03 89 45 16 01 !
### Faites leur part de votre indignation

## www.jeunesses-identitaires.com

• • • • • • Bulletin à retourner à JI c/o NR · BP 13 - 06 301 Nice cedex 04 • • • • • • •

❏ Je demande l'annulation du concert de Sniper car ce groupe bafoue la France et les Français, appelle à la violence et fait l'apologie des viols collectifs.

NOM . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . PRÉNOM . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

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## Marre du racisme anti-blanc :
### EXIGEONS QUE L'ALBUM DE SNIPER SOIT RETIRÉ DES VENTES !

Le 20 mai, le groupe de rap Sniper a sorti son nouvel album et bénéficie à cette occasion d'une très large promotion médiatique. Comme NTM, comme Ministère Amer auparavant, ce groupe n'a pourtant comme seul discours que la haine et le rejet de la France et des Français ! Lisez attentivement ce qui suit, il s'agit d'une sélection de quelques phrases issues du titre "La France" présent sur leur dernier disque :

« La France est une garce et on s'est fait trahir
[...] On nique la France sur une tendance de musique populaire
[...] Faudrait changer les lois et pouvoir voir
Bientôt à l'Elysée des arabes et des noirs au pouvoir
[...] Frère je lance un appel, on est là pour tout niquer
[...] Mon seul souhait désormais est de nous voir les envahir »

Ce disque est disponible dans tous les Virgin, FNAC et autres distributeurs !
Pourtant aucune association antiraciste n'est venue dénoncer ces paroles d'une violence inouïe... Le racisme anti-français et anti-blanc est toléré alors que nous savons très bien que, chaque jour, de nombreux Français sont victimes d'agressions verbales ou physiques en raison de leur couleur de peau !
Les membres du groupe doivent être condamnés par la justice pour incitation à la haine !

PARCE QUE NOUS SOMMES FIERS DE NOTRE IDENTITÉ, UN SEUL DEVOIR : **RÉSISTER !**

## www.jeunesses-identitaires.com

• • • • • • Bulletin à retourner à JI c/o NR - BP 13 - 06 301 Nice cedex 04 • • • • • •

❏ Je soutiens l'action des JI contre le racisme anti-français et anti-blanc
❏ Je souhaite adhérer aux Jeunesses Identitaires

NOM . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . PRÉNOM . . . . . . . . . . . .
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the far-right group Jeunesses Identitaires (Laroche, 2015). These leaflets claim that Sniper's lyrics convey a "hatred of all that is French and white." One leaflet is titled "Fed up with anti-white racism." The term anti-white racism is associated with, or even taken as a synonym for, anti-French racism or anti-European racism.

These leaflets are based on a racialized conception of the nation: anti-white racism is equivalent to anti-French racism. Denouncing the violence of the lyrics then contributes to the othering of the rappers, despite their formal membership in the French community (they are all part of it according to the criterion of nationality). The textualization and accumulation of virulent lyrics (containing insults or descriptions of violent acts) outside their context of enunciation constitutes a "strategy of scandalization" (Offerlé, 1998: 123). The far right relies on this strategy to illustrate and support the idea of growing racism on the part of minority groups against the majority group.

This use of lyrics for scandalization is reflected in the strategy of AGRIF, an association specializing in legal matters. AGRIF played a decisive role in the attempt to recognize anti-white racism. While the initial strategy of the far right was to abolish all anti-racist legislation, AGRIF chose to hijack it in order to promote the notion of anti-French, anti-Christian, and anti-white racism (Bleich, 2018: 70–74), an objective far removed from the intentions of the authors of the 1881 Law (Möschel and Fournie, 2022: 61). In other words, AGRIF aimed to change the enforcement of legislation that was intended to protect minority groups into something used to defend the majority group. This strategy is especially deployed within press law (60).

Indeed, in France, press law includes an article akin to hate speech legislation (Article 24 of the 1881 Law). Moreover, Article 132–76 of the French Penal Code makes it an aggravating circumstance to commit an offence "on the grounds of membership or non-membership, real or assumed, of a particular ethnic group, nation, race or religion." AGRIF therefore relied on the abstraction of the law's wording to ensure that it was applied in defense of the majority group. The initiatives of AGRIF mostly concern forms of verbal violence. Rap music has thus become one of its preferred targets—however, the specificity of rap in AGRIF's strategy has been little discussed in the existing French literature.

Since the early 2000s, during the Sniper affair, the association has tried to ban the group's concerts by taking it to court. After a first success in Toulouse, its strategy failed in Lille. The courts dismissed all of AGRIF's claims and clearly stated that "the text of this song does not contain any racist remarks within the meaning of Articles 24 and 48–1 of the Law of 1881."[4] AGRIF then wrote a letter to Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of the Interior, who championed the moral crusade against the group in the National Assembly (AN) (Hammou, 2012) and referred to their songs as racist and antisemitic texts. However, in the archives of the AN, the term anti-white racism does not appear directly in the minister's words. The complaint against the group does not contain any accusation of racism or antisemitism.[5]

In the early 2000s, the accusation of anti-white racism therefore appeared explicitly mainly on the far right. The term as such only occurs in the debates in the Assembly in euphemistic forms. Such charges were not prosecuted. At this point, AGRIF has not yet succeeded in getting its fight heard in the legal arena. In addition, the fact that the category of anti-white racism comes from the far right in itself delegitimizes its denunciation, as the defense of Sniper attested. In a letter addressed to the Minister of the Interior, the rappers (probably in consultation with their lawyer) wrote: "We regret to note that your remarks are identical to those of the movement Jeunesse Identitaire. It is strange for a great democrat like you to take up far-

right remarks."[6] The argument is echoed by Communist deputies. However, the idea of virulent rap that would target the majority group soon circulated far beyond the extreme right. In 2005, this idea was notably explicated and theorized by the initiatives of François Grosdidier, a UMP deputy and ex-member of the Parti des Forces Nouvelles, an offshoot of the Front National (Kauffmann, 2016).

**The 2005 Turning Point: An Attempt to Legally Recognize Racism against the Majority Group by Penalizing Rap Music**

The debate over anti-white racism became more widespread in 2005, after a high school demonstration in which groups of young people robbed and beat up demonstrators. Most of the media's interpretation of events was then racialized: the high school students were cast as victims of "anti-white racism." On March 26, an appeal against anti-white racism was signed by several intellectuals, but it also elicited numerous reactions of disapproval from other organizations, particularly anti-racist ones (Kokoreff, 2005).

A year later, Grosdidier attempted to legitimate this notion with a bill in the National Assembly.[7] The bill aimed to "reinforce the control of provocations to discrimination, hatred or violence," a reinforcement justified by the quotation of lyrics taken from various rap albums, especially a song and music video by the rapper Monsieur R, "FranSSe."[8] The track opens with a denunciation of France's role in slavery and colonization, followed by the lyrics "France is a bitch, don't forget to fuck her" while the clip features two dancers in pornographic imagery. To better understand the context that preceded this bill, we must go back to the riots in the fall of 2005 in the Île-de-France region, following the death of two teenagers chased by the police. As a result of rap being associated with the *banlieue* (Hammou, 2015), a group of right-wing deputies rallied around Grosdidier and accused rap of inciting "unstructured or lost" youth to commit this violence. The moral crusade led by Grosdidier took place in a context in which "spectacular images of burned cars" were repeated over and over for three weeks until they provoked

"dramatic" reactions, like the images broadcast in the United States that presented France as being on the brink of civil war. Rap music was then "strongly emphasized to account for the contagion of the riots" (Kokoreff, 2008: 86).

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EXPOSÉ DES MOTIFS

MESDAMES, MESSIEURS,

Un chanteur de RAP nommé « Monsieur R », diffuse sur son site officiel un clip haineux et subversif d'une chanson intitulée : *« FranSSe »*, assimilant la France et les citoyens au IIIᵉ Reich et ses troupes d'extermination. Si le clip de « Monsieur R » n'est pas diffusé à la télévision, son disque est en vente libre dans les grandes enseignes. Alors que le sentiment anti-occidental est tristement au cœur de l'actualité, la Fnac n'hésite pas à le classer dans les « coups de cœur » musicaux !

Dans son clip, l'autorité Française est représenté par « Monsieur R » en gendarme ridiculisé. La France est symbolisée par deux femmes européennes totalement nues : une blonde et une brune aux allures d'actrices pornographiques se disputent le drapeau français et le transforment en un accessoire d'exhibition, rampant sur le capot d'une voiture. Des scènes X cryptées apparaissent dans le clip, au son du refrain : *« La France est une garce, n'oublie pas de la baiser jusqu'à l'épuiser, comme une salope il faut la traiter, mec ! ».* Simultanément, de jeunes caricatures urbaines adressent aux deux femmes sensées représenter la France et ses citoyens des gestes sans ambiguïté. « Monsieur R », en plus de comparer la décolonisation avec la politique d'Adolf Hitler, accable l'État français de tous les maux, manipulant les images des forces militaires françaises en Côte d'Ivoire pour leur donner des accents de répression sanguinaire. Au refrain s'ajoutent d'autres paroles inacceptables comme : *« La France est une de ces putes de mères qui t'a enfanté » ou bien « Moi je pisse sur Napoléon et leur Général De Gaulle ».*

« Monsieur R » introduit et conclue la chanson sur une précision qui tente de nous faire accepter l'inacceptable : *« Quand j'parle de la France, je ne parle pas du peuple Français mais des dirigeants de l'État Français [écrit en majuscule en référence à Vichy]... ».*

Mais « Monsieur R » est loin d'être le seul. De nombreux autres chanteurs ou groupes de musique incitent sans ambiguïté au racisme, à la haine et à la violence dans leurs chansons. On notera que ces incitations ne sont plus uniquement orientée contre les français (*« céfrancs »* ou *« gouers »*) définis par un critère juridique mais aussi contre les blancs (*« faces de craies »*, *« gringos »*, *« navets »*, *« toubabs »*, *« babtous »*...) répondant à un critère purement racial.

**Le groupe 113**

Extrait de leurs chansons :

*« J'crie tout haut : J'baise votre nation* (en parlant de la France)
*l'uniforme bleu, depuis tout p'tit nous haïssons*
*On remballe et on leur pète leur fion* (à propos des policiers)
*Faut pas qu'y ait une bavure ou dans la ville ça va péter,*

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*Excerpt from the 2006 bill*

One of the concrete modifications proposed by the group of deputies in their bill consisted of adding the phrase "whether it is a minority or a majority" after the sentence in Article 24 of the Law of 1881 that states, "those who… will have provoked discrimination, hatred or violence towards a person or a group of persons." The proposed addition is justified by a symmetrical conception of the social relations of race, denouncing in passing the inaction of anti-racist associations:

> Associations of protection against racism…remain passive in the face of anti-white racism. The MRAP[9] even supports these singers under the pretext of expressing social distress. Any kind of racism is condemnable, there are none more legitimate than others. Racism is not simply the fact of a majority towards minorities, it can also come from a minority towards a majority. Whatever their form, racism feeds on each other, creating a climate of hatred.[10]

By making the rights of all groups and individuals equally defensible against a "climate of hatred," the argumentation in Grosdidier's bill relies on the same "appeals to judicial neutrality" underpinning AGRIF's strategy since the mid-1990s (Bleich, 2018: 71). It trumps "classic antiracism beliefs" (72)—the historical inscription (Cervulle, 2013: 20) and asymmetric relational dimension of the concept of racism as formalized by the social sciences (Hajjat, 2020). Significantly, the accusation of antisemitism presented in the bill is depicted as a consequence of this "anti-white and anti-occidental racism." It aims to strengthen the cause of the majority group, the Jews being described as "super-whites," victim of minorities, and not as a minority group themselves.

Although the bill was not passed, it nevertheless testifies to a growing institutionalization of the concept of anti-white racism and its acceptance beyond the far right. In the mid-2000s, a considerable fringe of the French right attempted to establish the legitimacy of the denunciation of anti-white racism by pointing to rap music lyrics they deemed to be violent and whose harmful effect they perceived as contributing to the 2005 riots.

**The 2010s: AGRIF Less and Less Alone**

After Sniper in 2002 and Monsieur R in 2005, AGRIF filed an unsuccessful complaint against the group ZEP in 2012 for the song "*Nique la France*" (Fuck France). The instrumental is based on a few accordion chords, an instrument associated with traditional French folklore. The light-hearted atmosphere conveyed by the accordion contrasts with the critical content of the lyrics ("Fuck France / And its colonial past," goes the chorus). Despite two appeals, the Court of Cassation confirmed the acquittal. Since press law is very precise, the court was able to justify the acquittal by noting that the vague group

targeted by the remarks that were deemed offensive is not specifically covered. The term "white French people" was not considered "a protected group of people within the meaning of the provisions of the Law of 1881 on the freedom of the press"[11] (which Grosdidier's bill attempted to change). The acquittal invokes the context of the song, the specificity of the rap genre and, for the first time, explicitly recognizes that it is part of a "debate of general interest" concerning the consequences of colonization. In the case of ZEP, the incitement to violence against the "white" group is too difficult to demonstrate: the lyrics could instead be interpreted as targeting institutions or those responsible for colonization.

A turning point came with Nick Conrad, in 2019. This time, AGRIF was not alone in making the accusation. While the authors of "*Nique la France*" were not convicted because of the vagueness of the targeted category, Nick Conrad's title is on the contrary very explicit in terms of ethno-racial category. The song is entitled "*PLB*" "*Pendez Les Blancs*."[12] The video for this song is based on a reference to the opening scene of the film *American History X*, but the roles are reversed: the torturer, played by the rapper, is Black and the victim is white. At the end of September 2018, the video clip was condemned across the political spectrum, from the far right to *France Insoumise* (the main left-wing organization).



The argument promoted by the AGRIF's strategy of hijacking anti-racist legislation seems to have been widely adopted even by the parliamentary left, though not for the same reasons. The leader of *France Insoumise*

published on Twitter the following message: "All racists, all communitarian hatreds, are our enemies! … In France, racism is not an opinion, but a crime! #NickConrad." The reference in the Tweet to an abstract universality, the equating of all forms of violence, justifies the condemnation of the song. This reference may be particularly effective in the context of the French "republican universalism" claimed by the majority of the political spectrum, which prescribes in the public sphere an "indifference to the particular attachments"[13] to which the ethno-racial categories are reduced.

Moreover, in the Nick Conrad case, the LICRA, a major anti-racist association in France, became a plaintiff alongside AGRIF. During the hearing, LICRA's lawyer closed her argument on the will to make white people a category "protected by article 132–76."[14] This article of the French Penal Code aimed to aggravate the sentences related to crimes committed because of a victim's membership in "a so-called race, ethnic group, nation or determined religion," directly responding to AGRIF's goal. Although this objective was not achieved in the Nick Conrad trial, LICRA's participation shows how, through the criminalization of rap, the fight against "anti-white racism" is no longer delegitimized by its far-right roots and connotations.

**Conclusion: Hate as a Moral *Prise* to Depoliticize Racism**

In the cases presented here (Sniper, Monsieur R, ZEP, Nick Conrad), the notion of "hate" appears to be central. It is one of the emotions specific to the enunciative regime favored by rap (Pecqueux, 2007) and more broadly, the part of a structuring opposition (love/hate) summarized by the expression "us versus them," which is at the foundation of many popular cultures (Hoggart, 1970; Sonnette-Manouguian, 2015). Silverstein describes this message of hate in rap as a "masculine rhetoric of allegorical violence against a racist state" (Silverstein, 2012: 115). Yet, at first glance, hate has the characteristic of being both the emotion and the negative evaluation of the emotion (Ogien, 1995). Like violence (Claverie,

Jamin and Lenclud, 1984), describing an emotion as hate implies a form of moral condemnation. Significantly, in Grosdidier's bill, the terms hate and racism are juxtaposed; on several occasions, only the expression "racial hatred" is used. Thus, different political actors take rap songs at face value and selectively focus on the music's stylization of strong emotions (such as hatred). These denunciations of "allegorical violence against a racist state" tend to create a proximity, even a confusion, between the notions of hate and racism. Hajjat sees in this reduction to a "primitive emotion" a depoliticization of the struggles against racial domination, "taken out of their social and political context" (2020: 73). Denunciation of racism here takes the form of a primarily moral condemnation.

This conclusion about the French case invites a more systematized comparison with the United States and United Kingdom. In the national context studied here, the racism battle is played out primarily on the field of freedom of speech and the inversion of the legislation against racist hate speech. The reversal relies not only on the principle of judicial neutrality, the abstract universality promulgated by the law and reinforced by the ideal of republican universalism, but also on the prominence given to the notion of public order, which in France can rival the freedom of expression. Does the specificity of the First Amendment (mobilized for example during the 2 Live Crew trials), make this type of conviction rarer in the United States?[15]

Above all, a comparison of the French case with the American and British cases reveals a similar pattern when it comes to the prosecution of rap music. In the three countries, rap lyrics and video clips are taken out of their context of enunciation. Their interpretation depends on not considering rap as an art form in its own right. In the American and British contexts, researchers demonstrated how treating lyrics as evidence for crimes led to the excessive incarceration of young Black men. In France, the imposition of the category of anti-white racism through rap's criminalization tends to control the forms of anti-racist discourse and reverse legislation in favor of

the majority group. Thus, the use of the legislation against racial hate speech against rap music has (paradoxically) racist effects.

Indeed, in the French context, pointing to rap songs to advance this message of "racial hatred" has a double effect. First, it can "scandalize," and second, it confers a racial identity on those who originate the scandal. More generally, the world of rap is one of the few spaces where the majority group can be particularized (in other social spheres whites are usually not even named and embody the universal), and in some cases, criticized as wielding power over minority groups. Penalizing rap music in France through this lens then brings up questions about how accusations of anti-white racism can lead to "symbolically inverting a relationship of material racial domination in order to disqualify those who challenge the historically white-dominated racial order" (Hajjat, 2020: 72).

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## Endnotes

[1]   In France, the issue of freedom of expression and what English literature refers to as hate speech is mainly covered by press law.

[2]   In the English translation published in 2015, the authors wrote: "*Prise* (from the verb *prendre*—to take) can translate into English as the 'grasp' a person has of things: their sense of things or their take on things. But in French it also works the other way round: *prise* can also be the 'hold' that things or people can have over (another) person." (Bessy and Chateauraynaud, 2015: 2). "*Les prises*" refers to the possibilities for engagement that objects (here, rap music) offer to people and which they seize. The notion is close to that of affordance.

[3]   National Assembly, question n°2618, September 16, 2002.

[4]   Sniper's criminal case file, forwarded by the group's lawyer.

[5]   The grounds for the indictment were "incitement to injure or kill officials of the Ministry of the Interior" and "insult."

[6]   This letter was also found in Sniper's criminal case file.

[7]   Proposition de loi n°2957 aimed at tightening controls on incitement to discrimination, hatred, or violence, registered with the National Assembly on March 14, 2006.

[8]   The double S refers to the Nazi police, suggesting a parallel between the racism of contemporary France and that of the Nazis.

[9]   Anti-racist association important in France.

[10]   Quote from the Proposition de loi n°2957.

[11]   Court of Cassation, December 11, 2018, reference number: 18–80525.

[12]   Hang the Whites.

[13]   A formula notably popularized by Dominique Schnapper, one of the crucial promoters of a "republican ideal of integration" in the 1980s and 1990s.

[14]   Nick Conrad's hearing, January 9, 2019.

[15]   Cases where the lyrics are the crimes themselves can be found in the 500 trials surveyed by Dennis and Nielson (2019: 13–16), under what they call the "threat scenario." In this case, the lyrics are considered as "true threats." Thus, they are not protected by the First Amendment.

## The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York. For more information, see http://www.pomeps.org.