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Expressing and contesting minoritization in 'minor mode': online conversations of Black youth of West African descent in the Paris region

Lila Belkacem

Interdisciplinary Research Institute on Social Issues (IRIS), Ecole des Hautes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France

ABSTRACT

This article explores daily online conversations between Black young people of West African descent in the Paris region. It analyses how they react to the racial and social categorizations which they are subjected to. How do they express and/or contest everyday racism, discrimination, and their being defined as a social and ethno-racial minority? What are the social effects of these modes of expression? Away from the explicit and organized discourses from associations and anti-racist groups, these conversations show how people invent modes of expressions and/or contest everyday racism, using spaces and modes which are not always explicitly political or militant, but refer to their experience of minoritization. Analysing 'minor modes' of expressing and contesting opens to a study on the processes of community building among black people in the French migratory and postcolonial context.

KEYWORDS

West African descendants in France; minoritization; contesting everyday racism; community building; Internet

In an issue seeking, among other things, to shed light on the heterogeneousness of 'Black experiences' in Paris, this article deals with the everyday existence and social experience of the young daughters and sons of West African migrants raised in the Paris region. Before going any further, a few specific background elements are needed to provide a broad sense of the persons surveyed, between 2006 and 2013, during my doctoral research in sociology. Aged from 15 to 30 years, they share the experience of migration (whether directly or indirectly) and of being minoritized (whether socially or ethno-racially). For most, their fathers were former farm-workers from the river Senegal valley (between Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania), who arrived alone in the Paris region from the mid-1960s, to be rejoined by their wives about 10 years later. The youth interviewed define themselves and are categorized on the basis of their phenotype ('Black'), religion ('Muslim'), and ethnonyms ('Soninke', 'Bambara', 'Fula', etc.). Another common trait is their material conditions of life, identifying them as members of the working classes. Their parents, because of their low education and also because of the type of jobs routinely assigned to immigrants hailing from sub-Saharan Africa, work in unqualified, low-skilled and very casual sectors of the economy, often as labourers or as cleaning staff. In addition, most of them live in the notorious 'Parisian *banlieue*', in working-class areas often labelled as 'zones urbaines sensibles'.¹ To this precarious material living must be added

experiences linked to stigmatization and discrimination, themselves due to social processes of racialization and minoritization at work in France (De Rudder, Poiret, and Vourc'h 2000; Guillaumin 2002; Fassin 2010; Hamel and Simon 2010; Poiret 1996). In numerous media and political discourse, the fourfold stereotype 'forced marriage/excision/polygamy/Islam' often labels the interviewed persons. Such discourse is tinged with culturalist and essentialist interpretations, even racist ones, and led to the emergence, by the 1990s, of the 'Malian syndrome' (Timera 1997, 45). The interviewees experienced a form of social and ethno-racial minoritization and are represented *via* reified and discredited figures: the polygamous father, the silent and withdrawn head of the family, or the almighty, traditionalist person; and the submitted and illiterate mothers, forced into marriage and excised. Then, the many children appear to be uprooted offsprings, torn between 'two cultures'; the boys often associated to figures of urban threat, and the girls to victims of the sexist violence of their fathers and brothers.

Part of my doctoral research analysed conversations on blogs and Internet forums, in which descendants of African migrants talk about themselves. In such spaces, minoritization is frequently challenged through discourses, images, and sound. On the Internet, this youth represents itself and protests against discrimination and 'everyday racism' (Essed 1991). In blogs and discussion forums, these forms of protest are often voiced in what Palomares (2008) has called 'minor mode'. This notion makes it possible to approach politics from below, that is, by studying the everyday discourses of ordinary persons (at a remove from association leaders, for instance). These unfold, for example humorously, their experience of minoritization, thereby illustrating the 'minor mode' dealing with what is perceived as racialization processes from the 'majority', alternatively called 'Français' (French), 'Blancs' (White), or 'Toubabs'.

In this respect, this article analyses how minoritization is expressed and contested online. How is the experience of discrimination put in words and images? How is racism dealt with? How do groups, created online, posit themselves in the French society? What type of *Black African Paris* is delineated online? In order to address these questions, this article first emphasizes how this youth uses the Internet to conjure up a shared life experience of minoritization and discrimination. Then, it shows that this common experience crystallizes flexible categories of 'us': 'Africains', 'Banlieusards' (housing-estate people), and 'Noirs' (Blacks). Finally, I propose a political analysis of these forms of community building, notably by discussing Pap Ndiaye's (2008) work. This study draws on two main sources: the discussion forum, *Soninkara.com*, presented by its administrators as the 'virtual Soninke village', and the *BamakoSoldat* blog, hosted by the son of Malian immigrants, whose articles generate numerous comments.

1. At the root of a shared experience

1.1. A daily confrontation with discriminations and racism

The numerous expressions of a 'shared experience' (Brouard and Tiberj 2005, 130–131) are first rooted in the daily experience of youth labelled as Blacks in the Paris region. In July 2005, *BamakoSoldat* posted a humorous note on his blog soon to be largely commented upon: 'Noir et Fier' (Black and Proud). The text recalled various forms of discrimination (e.g. racial profiling), of stigmatizing representations of 'Blacks' in the French society:

Many of you wonder 'What's good about being Black in France?'

Many of you feel rage, and will bleach their skins and change their habits to pass off unnoticed in crowds, and will hang about with Benoits and Genevièves, or listen to techno or heavy metal.

But let's put an end to all this! Diby will get things straight, by reminding you how good it is to be Black in France.

It's often so hard to get a job, and that leaves you ample free time. [...]

You'll find great portraits of us in *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tarzan* [...]

You might be a rap or football superstar but you still remain 'The Black man'.

Best way to get talked about is a cool police foul-up.

True we play the roles of thugs or drug-dealers, but TF1 channel likes to shoot reports on us.

Wherever we may go we are VIPs: 'veritably infamous persons'.

Some will refrain from sitting next to us on the Metro, which leaves us space.

We are always hired as security men [...]

The school curriculum is faithful to our history: Asterix is my ancestor.²

These experiences are depicted as common to Blacks in France, and are associated to practical and symbolical living conditions shared by African migrant families in the Paris region in the 2010s. For instance, the video from the rapper Médine, *Boulevard Vincent Auriol*, was put online on BamakoSoldat's blog. This often-commented piece was inspired by the tragic story of a Senegalese family discriminated against on the housing market; scornfully shrugged off by various French institutions, it moved into some derelict South-Paris building, before perishing in an arson³:

Last coat of lead-based paint, therein lies their socialism

But it is our children who suffer from saturnism [...]

Often does the atrocity of death generate change

For now they live beneath beds of roses

The chief of police's last insulting stunt:

Are all these Blacks legal immigrants?

Here is the blood of former colonies

Here is the respect paid to the families.

Like the lyrics of *Boulevard Vincent Auriol*, Internet users routinely conjure up a shared experience based upon the fact of being looked down upon. Precariousness, bad housing, and exploitation in the workplace are what most conversations are about.

In September 2007, as the right-wing president, Nicolas Sarkozy, turned the deportation of 'undocumented immigrants' into a cornerstone of his migration policy, BamakoSoldat posted a text entitled 'Quiet! Repression's ongoing!', alongside a video by the Black Citizen Alliance Association. It showed people forcefully expelled from public housing tenements in the Seine-Saint-Denis area. Many comments were posted. They revealed how a collective 'us' was being forged through the perception of and identification with a community treated in a degrading way, unworthy of a State claiming to have 'invented the Rights of Man': 'They will do just about anything to debase us, to defile us. The way they expel those persons is just inhuman' (Galsen-Haine-91, October 2007).

The problem with this State is that the undocumented migrant is not regarded as a human being, only as the cause of various problems. [...] That's why they get away with shameful expulsions which are 'ordered' by local authorities representing the government and by the

government itself, before they're carried out thoughtlessly by the police forces. France, the 'inventor of human rights'? This motto is a delusion. I am a Black woman, I am French, but very little proud of it [...]. (Kyle, October 2007)

Internet users not only talk about state policies and 'inhospitality legislations' (Fassin, Morice, and Quiminal 1997) but also refer to a common and daily experience of racism and of discrimination. The experience of 'social contempt' (Boubeker 1998; Renault 2001), of everyday racism, and of how closed to otherness the 'French' are do spark many conversations.

Notice for instance the video *Welcome to Our Place*, by Moussa from the 94 *département* (2007), which was extremely popular among the surveyed websites. This tells humorously of the experience of African families having to cope with the intolerance and hostility of the 'majority', be it from 'white French' neighbours irritated that Black Africans have moved into their area or from the social housing agent working for the *Habitat à loyer modéré* (public subsidized housing). Construed as scorn, racism, or close-mindedness, this daily dealing with 'Africans' is seen as all the more unfair and immoral as immigrants make up a crucial workforce to French society. In September 2007, after the article 'Quiet! Repression's ongoing' posted by BamakoSoldat, Internet user Bintou remarked: 'The French man doesn't like difference, doesn't like mixing. But to sweep the faeces of their fuckin' dogs, and to clean their fuckin' offices, undocumented immigrants are welcome'.

1.2. The history of slavery and colonization

In many conversations, the history which has bound France to the African continent since slavery times leaves the former metropolis indebted towards its former colonies. From the 'plundering of resources' with 'resources' understood both in human and material terms to the 'sacrifice of Senegalese *tirailleurs*' during the two world wars,⁴ numerous are the depictions of a shared experience resting on the history of slavery and colonization. Such evocations are not only put into words, but also into images. A large number of videos intertwining the history of slavery and colonization to the contemporary experience of descendants of Black African immigrants are often praised on blogs, as is the case with the rapper Mokobé's:

Slave blood in your veins, feel the whip scars on your back [...]
 Colonist son, a spear at your back [...]
 For centuries we've been suffering, watch my brothers and sister emerge from the hole, why not?
 And do you recall the *tirailleurs* from Senegal?
 When they defended France, canon-fodder but soon with no pension! (Mokobé 2007)
 There was a time when we were not slaves
 But when is it mentioned in the images we're fed? [...]
 We were sold like we were coffee, then exchanged for tobacco [...]
 Language, name, they took us everything [...]
 My colour is the colour of misery, I'm Black and I'm proud, brother
 Descending from slaves, we crossed the sea
 Every single day my roots catching up with me. (Mokobé & 113 2007)

The focalization on and exposure of 'history-forged social relations' reveal not only that 'racial discrimination opens wounds which affect individuals well beyond the specific

moment of directly experiencing this discrimination' (Perraudin 2011, 449), but also that the descendants of migrants involved in the surveyed online spaces are bearers of 'a past which isn't past' (Leclerc-Olive 2003), a history whose violence and injustice is depicted as unacceptable. This is all the more so as minority experience in France actually comes to activate this history afresh, to perpetuate it, and as the wrongs inflicted (whether past or present) are only partly acknowledged by French institutions (Stavo-Debaugé 2007). On those blogs guaranteeing total anonymousness, declarations promoting close-mindedness towards the 'French' on account of this past and this present are sometimes characterized by a high degree of verbal violence. The same goes when the invoked facts do not primarily concern French history. Such is the case for comments posted in the wake of BamakoSoldat's publication, in December 2005, of an article entitled 'Forgive but never Forget', displaying a slideshow of racist murders committed in the USA, notably by the Ku Klux Klan. A verbal exchange involving two Internet users is worth being quoted at length, illustrating as it does scornful and close-minded reactions towards the majority population:

'Man' from 93 writes: 'Forget? No. Forgive? Even less. I love my people too much for that. This is at the root of everything taking place right now: after slavery, the new modern slavery. Just look at the *Reno's* situation in this fuckin' country.'

Guinean girl responds: 'These photos, they're American ones, so you should expect amends from *them*, not from the *Franchouilles* (French), right?'

'Man' from 93 answers back: '1/ Maybe these come from the U.S. but even so, just tell me who brought the Blacks to the U.S.? That's what was called triangular trade: Europeans, and among them the French, would go to Africa to get the 'merchandise', who were none other than our ancestors, in order to bring them to the U.S. So your *Franchouilles* (White French) are accomplices to that, and just as guilty as the U.S.! And the U.S., they made amends, acknowledged their guilt, whereas the French did nothing. 2/ As far as I know it was the French who went to Africa to colonise and mistreat our ancestors, not the U.S.'

2. From a shared experience to the forging of flexible collective identities

The online evocations of this shared experience founded on the daily experience of discrimination and racism, as well as on a colonial history which is regarded as not past, not resolved, and not acknowledged, all come to bolster three types of calls. Intertwined as they are, all three seem to rest upon the willingness to reverse the discrediting processes which Internet users claim they are the objects of. The first invites them to display their pride in belonging to minoritized collective groups, the second to choose an alternative and critical reading of history, and the third to unite and mobilize collectively.

2.1. From shame to pride

Inspired by discourses on some common experience and experience in a migratory, minority, and postcolonial context, many Internet users are saying they should not hide but instead be proud of the collective Black African 'us'. This Black pride is generally legitimated in three ways. History is the first of these: many indeed evoke glorious historical periods or figures, from the Mandiguo Empire to the Pharaoh times, from Kunta Kinte to Nelson Mandela, without forgetting Martin Luther King. Culture is the second. True,

some practices seen as 'traditional' (i.e. polygamy and excision) are more or less strongly criticized, but there remains a near-consensus around the cultural wealth of this Black African 'us'. The body is the third legitimization, especially in personal blogs: harking back to the 1960s' American slogan 'Black is Beautiful', depictions of 'Malian', 'African', or 'Black' beauty are frequent. One blogger from the 78 *département* (Yvelines, to the West of Paris), who was 21 at the time of the survey, displays many photos of himself and of his male friends. Representing various clothing styles (often in '78 fashion' but also sometimes in 'boubou fashion'), these photos have inspired numerous comments by the blogger: 'Youssouf and I: there's hunkiness in Mali too, not only in America. Here you get 100 percent Mali, Soninke to be more precise'.

As for female beauty, it is expressed, by males as by females, through the attributes of femininity: grace, fine tastes, and roundness of shapes, all of which respect the required decency. 'Black' or 'African' beauty sometimes becomes enhanced by drawing comparisons with and by depreciating the 'White' body. Such is the case, for instance, with Leïla-Galsen-Mali in August 2005 after the article 'Black and Proud' posted by BamakoSoldat:

I'm a beautiful *renoi* [reverse slang expression for 'Black'] and proud to be. Bleaching stuff I leave to those who can't understand that there's nothing more beautiful than the black colour [...]. I only love *renois* and I can't see myself with anybody else. It's true we get imitated. Them white girls, they would like to have our hips and our bodies, and to be as stylized as ourselves. And what about the *bab* [*toubab*] that would like to have the handsome bodies of our handsome Blacks! But there'll be plenty work for them because they get there!

2.2. From invisibility to historical greatness

When invoking a shared experience among postcolonial African migrants and their descendants in France, a substantial number of Internet users promote a critical reading of history, at a remove from the history taught at school and in the media. Such advocacy of an alternative reading of history is at play primarily through an emphasis on other periods and figures of history. In online spaces, the avatars used illustrate this. Several online videos and posted comments actually bolster such promotions of an alternative and critical reading of history, as is testified by these verses from the song *Parole de Soninké* (Mokobé), which many Internet users like to quote:

The baobab's strength lies in its roots
If you want to search for our past and our sufferings watch *Roots*
My hero is Kunta Kinte, not Bruce Willis

The *We Are* video, by Doudou Masta (n.d.), alternatively shows illustrations of the slave route, of white colonists, of Egyptian pyramids, of Nelson Mandela, Bob Marley, Joey Starr (a French rapper from the *Suprême-NTM* band, from Martinique), and of numerous figures from North and sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, a vast number of discourses and images together build up an ancient and global history of the African continent, which is not founded only on domination, but also on glorious figures and times, the times of Pharaohs, of great West African empires, or of the 'Black African diaspora'. These historical references seem to reflect the kind of discourse that many minoritized Internet users wish to publicly promote. Not only are certain historical events brought to the fore more than others, but

the times and figures relevant to minorities are reappraised, promoted anew and away from the perspective of a majority population history written by this very same population. In September 2007, after the 'Quiet! Repression's ongoing!', Bintou thus remarked: 'Maximum respect for guys like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and of course the Black Panthers. We hear about "liberty, equality, brotherhood" [the motto of the French Republic]. Yeah, and monkeys might fly out of my butt!'

In a July 2006 conversation on polygamy, *Papillon* ('butterfly') asked on the same blog:

Have you ever read Cheikh Anta Diop? A Senegalese who spent his life studying the history of Africa. A God whose writings we should teach our kids about, instead of teaching them about the killings by that moron Napoleon.

Such critical and alternative readings of history, which seek to promote historical periods and figures made invisible in a minoritization context, may also lead certain Internet users to reappraise and reinterpret the foundations and practices normally connected to this Black African 'us', precisely in the perspective of a European past based on slavery and colonization. In October 2007, on *Soninkara.com*, Yero Tambado argued for instance that he would rather define himself as Soninke rather than Malian, since 'Mali, Senegal and Mauritania to me are European creations, fostered by Black African collaborators', forgetting all the whilst that even the construction of ethno-linguistic groups owes a lot to colonization as well (Amselle and M'Bokolo 2005). Another illustration is provided by *Papillon* who wishes the writings of Cheikh Anta Diop were taught rather than Napoleon, and moves on to sustain that polygamy in Africa spread not because of Islam but because of slavery, and that monogamy itself was not created by the West at all:

Do you know why polygamy spread so extensively? Listen up [...], 'cause you'll never read this elsewhere: at the time of slavery, our white friends would come and [...] help themselves to dirty nigger girls. Since their community was vanishing, the village chiefs had no other choice but to reproduce more swiftly, and they therefore took several wives. Monogamy had been prevalent for ages. [...] Monogamy among Egyptians and then Nubians set in and then spread towards East Africa without it having any connection whatsoever with the whites. Monogamy doesn't mean the West. [...] So please stop pissing me off with things like a 'one man, one woman' couple is stuff for whites.

2.3. From division to unity

One last illustration of this promotion of an alternative and critical reading of history will provide a fitting transition with the third type of promotion. This is about the conjuring up of a common experience binding together postcolonial Black African immigrants in France, and calls upon a unity and union of an 'us' rather than upon its division and disruption. Online are staged numerous internecine rifts within the Black African 'us', be it between men and women, or between 'Maliens' and 'Senegalese'. These have been notably debated on BamakoSoldat's blog, after the 'Mali Galsen' article was published. Such feuds were to inspire the following comment by *Keum malien* [reversed slang expression for 'Malian guy'] in May 2006:

[1] There was a time when these countries (Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Guinea) made up one single large Empire known as the Mandinka Empire. Thereafter the 'whites' came to fuck it up altogether (plunder, slavery, etc.). They divided the countries, used rulers to trace borders [...]

And you guys still manage to shoot one another in the foot. You might not know that, but all the ethnicities found in Senegal are also to be found in Mali, etc. and *vice versa* (Fula, Wolof, Bambara, Soninke, Mandinka, etc.). We're not gonna help Africa move on by shooting one another in the foot (...) If you're a tiny bit intelligent, then you must realise we must stand shoulder to shoulder.

The link being made by this blog-user between history and the union of this 'us' is worth underlining. In order to lay stress upon how absurd are the feuds involving different persons from distinct countries, *Keum malien* reminds his fellows not only that all ethnolinguistic groups are to be found in all these countries, but also that before the very foundation of these states (the colonial and postcolonial origin of which is again made clear), only the Mandinka Empire would actually exist. Invoking the glory and past unity of the area, the blog-user is summoning his fellows to 'stand shoulder to shoulder' instead of 'shoot[ing] one another in the foot'.

There are many persons that, not unlike *Keum malien*, appropriate for themselves the 'union makes strength' slogan by utilizing the minority and postcolonial migratory context:

[2] Truly, there are many Blacks who'll fall in traps laid down by Whites. There was a time when we were united. Those *bounty*⁵ and *baptou* bastards have tricked us really. Divide and conquer! [...] Those that won't be tricked are those who haven't forgotten their history. We share the same religion with a single God, and Mohamed is His Prophet. [...] Let's put an end to such division because God sees our deeds. [...] Senegal and Mali, it's the same thing really. (Fatoumata, August 2006)

[3] Me I'm Senegalese but I ain't got nothing against other *kainfri* [Africans]. [...] We got fucked up real bad enough by the *babtou* [toubab], let's stop the beef among us, it'll lead us no place. If Africa's in a bad state, it's because there isn't enough mutual help among us. Union makes strength is what I say. (Galsen-man, May 2006)

[4] The Sarkozys, the Le Pens, the racist *babtou*, if they see that, they'll be the happiest persons in the world really: some *renoi* people humiliating each other, it'll make them laugh. Let's put an end to divisions. (Modibo, January 2007)

Noteworthy here is the fact that, not infrequently, these promotions of union are expressed alongside calls for mobilization and collective action. Sometimes such mobilization even takes on an electoral form. 'Fuck Sarkozy and his law on immigrants, don't forget to vote in 2007!', writes Galsen-man in May 2006 on BamakoSoldat's blog. At other times still, the promoted collective action takes on an activist form, with common political struggles or causes being advertised. In July 2006, Seynabou commented on the film *Fatou la malienne*⁶ on the *Soninkara.com* website and lamented the fact that the 'Malian community' did not really mobilize against what she saw as an affront:

[5] To mobilize is tough. We all tend to wait for the train to arrive before we jump on it [...]. We think that we're here to earn money and not to have quarrels with the *toubabs*. But clearly, we must reach beyond that way of thinking and start acting. And everyone of us can contribute.

Another illustration is provided by the following 'Message to all' posted in November 2007 by blogger BamakoSoldat:

[6] A quick message to all my brothers and sisters from Mali, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Guinea or other: you ought to become aware that many things are bringing a bad name to our community. What I'm talking about here is events like Vincent Auriol, Cachan, Aubervilliers, Saint-Denis, Lamine Dieng, Villiers-le-Bel⁷ and what-not. These are tragedies or terrible events

befalling people that could be your parents, brothers or sisters, events we don't want to see again or hear about. For that to change, there must a complete mobilisation any time anything of the kind happens. Because when there are parties, *Big Aprèms* or some-such venues, the *renois* are the first to get together. Whereas when some calls for support to expelled families are heard, nobody's to be seen. There must be a collective awareness and everyone must bring his / her contribution so that things may change for the better. If you do nothing, it's like you say they're right to do all that!

The preceding five quotes testify that calls for unity and mobilization delineate communities with flexible identities. In [5] for instance, Seynabou promotes the mobilization of an 'us' whose traits are clearly fixed: 'Maliens' feeling directly stigmatized by the film *Fatou la malienne*. In [3], the 'us' called upon to get together and to mobilize refers to a larger group, but a group which is also bounded, with 'Africans' and 'Africa' being invoked. Similarly in [4], the bounded 'Black' collective group is called upon to unite in order to oppose themselves to the 'racists'. In the other three quotes however, the identities of the collective groups summoned to unite in order to act are more unstable: *Keum malien*, blog-user [1], invokes both 'Africa' as a whole and the 'ethnicities' who once peopled what used to be the Mandinka Empire. BamakoSoldat, blog-user [6], starts by speaking about his 'community', in other words about 'all my brothers and sisters from Mali, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Guinea or other', but then broadens his call to all 'renois' taken as a whole, and more specifically those among them who are regular festive events goers. As for Fatoumata, blog-user [2], she first of all conjures up a broad 'us', that of 'Blacks who'll fall in traps laid down by Whites', but then, owing to the type of debate she's engaged in, narrows this down to African Muslims originating from that part of the continent: 'We share the same religion with a single God, and Mohamed is His Prophet'. Ultimately, whatever degree of flexibility in the forms of 'us' summoned to take an active part in the mobilizations, these identities are legitimated by the necessity to unite in a context wherein persons labelled as Black and/or African are described as stigmatized, racialized, minoritized, and discriminated against.

3. Some thoughts on community-making in a minoritization context

What sort of political analysis may be made from these various calls (for pride, for an alternative reading of history, for union and mobilization), and how should one appraise the collective groups emerging from the flow of conversations on minoritization processes?

3.1. The foundations of the 'us': thick vs. thin identity

In *La Condition noire*, Pap Ndiaye (2008) distinguishes two forms of collective 'Black' groups, according to whether these rest on a 'thin identity' or a 'thick identity' (Shelby 2002). In a minority perspective, a minoritized group founds itself primarily on the basis of a 'thin identity', in other words not through the assertion of a common 'culture' or 'identity', but through the identification of a commonly shared social experience (minoritization, stigmatization, and discrimination) as well as through the identification of common interests (the need to unite and be strong to better struggle against discriminations and to promote the emergence of a non-racialized society). On the analysed

blogs and forums, such a minority logic is at play in certain videos which are very popular among the descendants of immigrants. One instance is *Banlieusard et fier de l'être* ('Housing-Estate Man and Proud to Be') in which rapper Kery James (2008) summons 'his folks, Arabs and Blacks most of them and [...] proletarian and housing-estate *Babtous*'. He calls upon the awakening of this collective group which, however heterogeneous, is united by the experience of economic precariousness, of residential segregation, and of social (but not only ethno-racial) minoritization:

Us in the ghettos, them at ENA [*École Nationale d'Administration* – Grande Ecole for Training Civil Servants]
 Us behind bars, them at the Senate
 Despite the repression, the oppressions
 Discriminations, and then prosecutions
 Despite provocations, incarcerations [...]]
 It's about time the second France awoke [...]]
 Ain't nothing will stop a *banlieusard* with a fight
 We're young, strong and our sisters beautiful
 Immense is the talent they have in them.

To follow up on Pap Ndiaye's analysis, community building may alternatively rest on a 'thick identity', as opposed to this 'minority logic' resting on a 'thin identity'. This may be about asserting the existence of some 'origin', 'culture', or 'identity' seen as common, thereby delineating 'one people' and specific 'interests determined by this collective identity'. For Ndiaye, that type of rationale is bound to fail politically, since it falls into 'the identity self-seclusion trap, making it unable to act politically because it will not generate links with and convert to its cause all persons of good-will' (Ndiaye 2008, 410, 414). On the analysed blogs and forums, some conversations do indeed dovetail with this 'identity logic'. Such is the case when blog-users sound afraid that their 'us' might be swamped in the great mass of the majority group, and come to advocate marriage only within the community. Notice for instance how, in September 2006 on *Soninkara.com*, Absa posted the following comment in a chat on the 'marriage between two young Soninkes born in France':

Mixing between a 'bledard' [people born and bred in Africa] and a 'child of France' [descendants of immigrants in France] is better because being different, this brings a whole of things to the couple [...]] We learn stuff every day about the habits and customs of others. Especially for us, children of France, this helps us blossom through our loved one, by feeling really *Soninke*. Because if we remain among 'French' and are deprived of a specific willingness, then we may see our children become real 'whites'. In time and with the pressures of every day life (professional, schooling demands, etc.), we may set a bad example to our children by ending up becoming French families.

3.2. Qualifying the distinction between identity logic and minority logic

In some cases, expressions of community-making resting on 'thick identity' may then bespeak a close-minded vision of this 'us'. Paradoxically then, to challenge minoritization may be coterminous with reification and essentialization, therefore then with a form of close-mindedness, often labelled 'communautarisme' (self-ghettoization) in French political and media discourse. Having said that, four elements invite one not to spontaneously confer on the 'minority us' greater political virtues than on the 'identity us'. At the same

time, one ought to be wary with analyses radically pitting the 'us' which are political because based on 'thin identity' against the 'us' which have fallen into the 'identity self-seclusion trap, making it unable to act politically' because based on 'thick identity'. Firstly, the 'minority us' may very well promote the agency of actors and of minority success stories, thus forgetting to denounce structural barriers generated by minoritization. It is precisely what has been criticized in the *Banlieusards et fiers de l'être* video. With assertions such as 'Get up and Move on', 'I started with nothing, I braced it all', 'I'm an indie, I wanna be a winner', 'It's right about time we made cash', or also 'You must learn, understand, and initiate', Kery James has been 'accused' by Milk Coffee and Sugar, in the *Alien* video (2010), of conforming to the 'If you want, you can' rationale, supposedly conducive to a denial of discriminations:

Because they wanna make me a soldier with a creditworthy bank account,
I'm telling you I'm doomed to fail [...]
If to be successful means to have a salary and a mortgaged suburban house
Then allow me to be doomed to fail [...]
When rebellion's about making cash, this becomes a last-port of call
I ain't a business card nor a CV: no self-fulfilling job, I'm part-time in a Kleenex-type job
I used to like their ballads, now they irritate me, make me realise I ain't got strings to my bow, I
can't sing, rap, slam, direct or design

Secondly, the calls for sticking together and the invocation of an 'identity' presented as common and primary do not necessarily develop into close-mindedness towards the majority population. For instance, the *Big Family* video by Moussa from 94 has a chorus which goes 'Welcome to our place, make yourself at home', thus emphasizing welcoming values and hospitality. Thirdly, in the online space researched, discourses deemed too reifying always end up being contested. On *Soninkara.com* for example, during the debate on the 'marriage of two young Soninkes born in France', Ethnic Roots sends a message to a blog-user who advocates endogamy because 'other communities' do the same anyhow. Whilst acknowledging that he will do his 'utmost to teach his children the values of *soninkaxu* [Soninke identity]', Ethnic Roots sounds critical of such (impossible) quest for authenticity:

We must promote our community and serve it, whilst avoiding to develop a form of *communitarisme* [self-ghettoisation]. [...] Alhassane, can you please make your thought clearer? What do you call 'bled culture' [back-home culture] which, it seems to you, has vanished or is vanishing? [...] Which of our ancestors are you talking about? Grand-parents? Great-grand-parents? Great-great-grand-parents? Beware, because reaching too far back in the past will only make you dizzy!

Fourthly, and lastly, although the assertion of collective groups founded on a 'thick identity' may include some reifying and self-enclosing elements, it still remains a fact that blog-users will mobilize very flexible references. These constantly articulate minority and identity patterns, thus making it impossible to generate collective groups which are exclusively based upon one pattern and not the other. For instance, depending on the way the online discussions evolve, some will start off by defining themselves according to ethnic patterns, and end up refusing any identification along ethno-racial lines, as is the case in July 2005 for Thiago who defines himself as 'Tissmé' (*mixed race* in reverse slang), from Cape Verde/Vietnam:

What you're saying is wrong. Me, I hang about with whites sometimes, and I also listen to heavy metal. And what do you think that means? That I'm not proud to be Black, is that it? So you listen to Fifty Cent and you think he represents Blacks? He breaks my balls big time! The only thing the guy wants is your cash, whether you're *renoi* or *blavant* [slang expression for 'White'].

4. Conclusion

On the Internet, to mention or contest racism may have paradoxical consequences, that is, the promotion of an essentialization and a close-mindedness among the collective groups met in the Paris region (*Africains, Noirs, Maliens* or also *Soninkés*). Nevertheless, this paradox is far from being one-sided, not least because the descendants of immigrants will mobilize very diverse 'us', and because the collective groups generated thereby will themselves be very flexible. Moreover, the social and ethno-racial minoritization context must be taken into account. When faced with the evocation of past and present wrongs inflicted (slavery, colonization, racism, and discriminations), a very large number (almost everybody, really) will express allegiance to collective groups and models that, at other times, they will keep at arms' length. Thus, the process of 'image manufacturing' among this 'us' (Avanza and Laferté 2005), which is particularly sophisticated online, is evidently connected with a concern with representation in a social and ethno-racial minoritization context. This leads us to question the validity of analyses such as that made par Marc Breviglieri (2010), who calls 'exile pathology' and 'security obsession' the idealization of one's 'community of origin' and the impossible meeting with the 'Other' resulting from such idealization. Indeed, online discourses and conversations do reveal that if there be a pathology (and that itself is far from certain to me), then this is less connected to exile as such than it is to the processes of racialization experienced by the descendants of immigrants. Ultimately, the Black Paris delineated in this article is as flexible as it is inextricably bound up with the humdrum and everyday experience of minoritization.

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Notes

1. The 'zones urbaines sensibles', also known as 'quartier en difficulté' (*problem areas*), are characterized by a high unemployment rate and the presence of large numbers of high-rise buildings and dilapidated housing.
2. 'Asterix the Gaul' is the hero of a comic series by Goscinny. The motto 'Our ancestors the Gauls' (*nos ancêtres les Gaulois*) was for a long time part of the history curriculum, including in former French colonies.
3. In August 2005, 17 people (including 4 children) died in the arson that wrecked this public-owned building serving social housing purposes. Malian families lived there, awaiting for public relocation. That summer, other buildings hosting immigrant families also went in flames. Fifty people died. In 2011, both the association in charge of the Boulevard Auriol building and the construction company which had renovated it were convicted of involuntary manslaughter and unintentional injury.
4. It ought to be borne in mind that although called 'tirailleurs sénégalais', those soldiers came from different parts of French Africa.

5. 'Bounty' is an offensive reference which meaning is similar to 'Oreo' in the USA (Black outside, very white inside).
6. This TV film was directed by Daniel Vigne (2001), broadcasted prime time on a public-owned French channel and sparked some controversy. It was thus presented in the press:

It tells Fatou's story, a young Parisian girl of Malian origins, a perfectly integrated, outstanding high-school student, whom her parents want to marry with an uncle from 'back home'. This story was based on true facts was watched by 8 million people nationwide. (*Le Parisien*, 21.04.2001).

7. These names refer to events which are designated as racist, discriminatory, and unfair by a lot of Internet users. For example, Lamine Dieng was the 25-year-old son of Senegalese immigrants who died in a police van during a search in a housing estate to the east of Paris. In 2014, the police officers were officially declared not guilty, but Lamine's family and several Paris associations are still calling the events a 'police foul-up'.

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