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"T'appelle ça du racism?" French-Maghrebi Youth Culure and the Politics of Anti-racism

Mohammed Agzar

Language, Culture, Society Doctoral Unit, Mohammed V-Agdal University, Rabat, Morocco

Abstract: **This paper examines the forms of antiracist praxis which have developed among Maghrebi communities in France. The significance of these interventions, it will be argued, derives from their inscription in a tradition of political struggle inspired by black militancy in the overdeveloped world. Their conscious incorporation of "race" as an analytical category and a political stance despite the republican ban on the use of "race" goes against the grain of mainstream antiracism embodied by local state bureaucracies and civil society organizations that claim to be steadfastly colorblind and race-neutral. Its political significance has been muffled by a monolithic republican antiracism where race is abstracted from the politics that constitute antiracism. Because of its informal style and its primarily *cultural* aspect that has significantly resisted institutionalization this movement has hardly been accepted as anti-racist; also, its distance from the political institutions of liberal democracy, being led by *beur* [1]youths as a marginalized cultural force, carves out new modes of action that redefine the realm and the contours of the *political*. Rap music is explored here as a circuit for antiracist intervention whereby young *beurs* anatomize the structures of racial privilege and discrimination and ponder on the way race is implicated in power dynamics and serves as an organizing aspect of their social world.**

Keywords: **anti-racism, France, *beurs*, republicanism, race, rap, hip hop.**

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will examine the strands of antiracist militancy that have been articulated in response to media and political reactions to various racial events around Maghrebi settlement. It brings into critical scrutiny the politics of antiracism and the related forms of self-organization and mass mobilization both within and beyond formal politics. This is to make the case that, while Maghrebi communities have struggled through mainstream political institutions and agencies, their most dynamic and efficient strategies of political action have developed beyond these formal venues, mainly in the field of cultural expression and culture-centered forms of political action. Examining the political language of this movement will highlight a more complex picture of Maghrebi ethnic culture, even as the political tactics and strategies it espouses may not readily fall within the received repertoires of political struggle developed within Western liberal democracy. Some of the strands within this movement may not readily be identifiable as antiracist, but their politically charged cultural expressions may amount to a political critique of the forces of racism and white supremacy that have shaped social and political life in France.

The movement I want to chart here has been active in various moments in the French postwar history, including the numerous riots erupting in the French *banlieues*. Its mode of political action and organization is loosely defined here to include community organizations, youth groups, street riots, neighborhood jams, dance floors, music clubs, and other spheres of underground Maghrebi youth subculture. Its political significance is submerged by more mainstream antiracist forces and the biased practices of the French media. By comparing them to the more institutional and bureaucratic strands of antiracism, including those associated with the left, I will also argue that these culturally oriented movements have evinced a more refined and complex understanding of contemporary racism. The problems of definition and strategy that underlie formal antiracist mobilizations will be highlighted by examining their antiracist content, programs and sloganeering.

[1] *Beur* is a French backslang based on a phonetic variation of "Arabe," referring mainly to people of a North African descent.

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II. BUREAUCRATIC ANTI-RACISM

Racist groups and racial ideologies have spurred various reactions in France. These responses have varied in complexity, ideology, modes of action, and antiracist outcome. The ideologies they espouse are at times marked by significant overlaps, making the task of mapping and periodizing antiracism in France rather a daunting endeavor. However, three strands of antiracist praxis can be delineated, even as the lines separating them are at times blurred by the forms of affiliation and the cross-over influences that may occur in various moments between them.

The first strand of antiracism may be said to comprise the set of policies and programs which has emerged from the interventions of various local and central state institutions and bureaucracies. Besides their primarily "institutional" and "bureaucratic" nature, an essential feature of these interventions is that they have operated within a republican framework that self-presents as race-neutral where racial divisions have no analytical significance for understanding the forms of racial inequality in the French society. Being confined to the reactionary, anti-democratic and extremist actions of neo-fascist groups constitutes another hallmark of this strand. Below I consider the major developments within this trend which I refer to here as "bureaucratic antiracism."

The problematical position race has assumed within the French political culture has been explored in some detail above. It has been suggested that France has boasted a republican Universalist tradition where race and "racial considerations," to quote nineteenth century ideologue Ernest Renan, are viewed as alien to French democracy and the provision of the French civic parity. I have shown, nevertheless, how this claim to a colorblind Republic was less of a reality and more of a political pragmatism whereby France's rather asymmetrical and ethnically disparate populace could be unified into what Benedict Anderson called an "imagined community" (1983, p. 3). The racial assumptions underlying this model were exposed in the second half of the twentieth century by the pervasive specter of an exclusivist and ethnically absolutist ideology of white nationalism whereby admission into national community and substantive citizenship is defined along strict lines of race. I have explored this debate elsewhere (Agzar, 2015). In the present analysis I want to highlight how the ideology of color-blind universalism has carried into the politics of antiracism.

The general denunciation of race in France suggested by the various bans the French state has placed on the use of the term in devising public policies and in census taking (and more recently by François Hollande's decision to remove race from the Constitution) has had few implications for antiracist policies and legislations. Though France did not emerge from 1945 as openly antiracist, political synergies between the 1940s and 1970 were mainly directed towards the denial of racism in the Hexagon (Bleich, 2000). World War II created an anti-fascist climate where the French antiracist agenda was focused on acts of racial hatred (Salmi, 2011). Only two major, yet insignificant legal outcomes have flowed from these antiracist mobilizations: The 1972 law and Gayssot law of 1990, developed in response to Vichy and the phenomenal rise of neo-fascist groups into the French political scene in the 1980s, respectively.[2] The Gayssot law, which originates in a parliamentary proposal submitted by the Communist Party led then by Guy Ducolone concerning what it viewed as the rise of antiracism in France, mainly verbal and physical attacks against immigrants, strengthened penalties against racial crimes. It also promoted the intervention of antiracist associations, such as Mouvement Contre le Racisme, l'Anti-semitisme et pour la Paix (MRAP) and Ligue Internationale Contre Racisme et Anti-Semitism (LCIRA) in the antiracist fight. Before these two laws the only legal framework sanctioning racist acts was the Marchandeau Decree which was developed in response to fascist and anti-Semitic crimes under Vichy regime (Bleich, 2000).

Marchandeau law involved stiff penalties for hate crime perpetrators. However, only two successful prosecutions were catalogued between 1945 and 1949. Additionally, that the 1990 bill involved the withdrawal of civil rights to perpetrators of racist acts, which had implications for the freedom of the press, engendered a heated debate that diverted attention from the more significant question of conceptualizing race, race consciousness and the more substantive and widespread

[2] Other minor laws that sanction the same forms of racism include Article 24 of 1981 Act on incitement of hate crimes, article 32 and 33 of the same Act directed at "defamation and public insult based on religious belonging," the 2005-284 Decree of 25 March 2005 on "non-public defamation," the 49-956 Act of July 1949 on "racist propaganda," the 1881 Press Freedom Act on "hate provoking publications intended for young people," and L.332-7 article of the French Sports Code punishing xenophobic acts in sports. Though these laws are primarily directed at anti-Semitic and fascist behaviors, they are described by an official report as "a robust legal framework for combatting racism." See Tolérance et non-discrimination II (2013). Réponses de la délégation française. Retrieved from http://www.osce.org/fr/odihr/105564?download=true

aspects of racism (Bleich, 2000). If anything, it only played to the hands of the neo-fascist groups it denounced. For instance, FN's Jean-Marie Le Pen claimed that the law targeted his party, decrying the bill during an FN annual rally as "a wicked law" that aimed at "the political death of patriots" (Lochak, 1992, p. 292).

Neither Gayssot law nor the 1990 law incorporated race into their imprimatur while the forms of racism they purportedly sanctioned were confined to racial bigotry and racist acts. In this way, they marked no fundamental break from previous legislation. The suppression of race, suggested most recently by Hollande's removal of this term from the constitution, is based on the assumption that it infringes republican values and is tethered to a longstanding view in the French political thought that circumventing race and racial references in favor of a republican rhetoric of "indivisibility" and "citizenship" can "suddenly undo the processes that were produced and institutionalized over the course of four hundred centuries"(Fleming, n.d.). The dissociation of race from antiracism yields an uneasy conceptualization of contemporary racism that confines its impacts to the sheer realm of prejudice and the exercise of dismantling it to the mere dissipation of those *ideas* via educational campaigns and the ban of race-laden referents in the public discourse. In other words, racism is reduced into an *aberration*, an idea when denounced, the social realities tied to it abolished. Quite expectedly, the legal instruments that ensued from this construal have had subsidiary output in terms of eradicating racism. Even the hate crimes they were purportedly devised to eradicate have scarcely generated substantial convictions as illustrated by Marchandeau Decree discussed above.

The problem with this strand of French antiracism is that it confines racism and, by extension, antiracist practice to the daily micro-aggressions of relatively marginal political forces, mainly the anti-Semitic and neo-fascist fringes of the extreme right. Less intentional but more destructive forms of racial domination and privilege have been completely conjured out of the politics and practices that constitute this mode of antiracist intervention, a fact that stems in my view from a failure to acknowledge the process whereby racial boundaries are socially constructed and are sustained by the state. The forms of racial domination that have most profoundly shaped the lives and the experiences of Maghrebis in France are located beyond mere episodic racial hatred that preoccupy the French state, in the more dynamic mainstream social realms, not the least of which are the criminal justice system, political and media representation, housing, employment and health care.

Though official reports and virtually much of the academic research in France are hardly reliable in yielding insights on the racial dynamics of poverty due to their fundamental refusal to incorporate ethno-racial data, a point I will return to later, the numbers they support give some indication of the disadvantaged position Maghrebi immigrants and their descendants have occupied in the processes of meaningful employment. For instance, a report by l'Inspection Générale des Affaires Sociales (1997) has determined that three quarters of jobs in France have involved discriminatory criteria that exclude non-European immigrants and that one of every three jobs are reserved for whites. Ironically, this racial division of labor has been reproduced within the same very institutions and bureaucracies crusading for racial equality and antiracism.[3]

III. CIVIL SOCIETY ANTI-RACISM

The second variety of antiracism involves the relatively independent organizational bodies that have operated on the margins of bureaucratic antiracism, but whose praxis has oftentimes been defined by the institutional processes of the French state and the party affiliations of its agents. Excepting a number of black organizations that will be discussed below, an open rejection of *race* as an analytic supports a seam of continuity between this antiracism and the bureaucratic strand. It is possible to isolate two periods in the development of this antiracist mobilization.

A. First-Generation Anti-racism

The first wave comprises organizations that operated during the 1960s and 1970s and that consisted of various political, religious, and intellectual mobilizations organized around a set of shared themes, mainly the war in Algeria, May 1968, immigration restrictions, and solidarity with migrant workers. Notable among these movements was MRAP (Mouvement

[3] Similar criteria have informed the allocation of social housing. See V. S. Pala. (2013). *Discriminations ethniques: Les politiques du logement social en France et au Royaume-Uni*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes. (2013).

contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peoples). Politically affiliated to the Communist party, MRAP was initially engaged in anti-colonialist and anti-Apartheid campaigns. Starting from the 1960s, however, antiracism became the leading demand around which the organization mobilized. Many conferences and campaigns were organized in denunciation of neo-fascist movements. Its journal *Droits et libertés* was one of the main expressive platforms for the first-generation antiracists featuring the work of the organization's key figures such as Pierre Praf, Charles Parant, and Jean Pihan (Gastaut, 1994).

Its leading role in the twentieth century antiracism notwithstanding, MRAP subscribed to a limited definition of antiracism confined to mobilization against neo-fascism and in which eradicating racism was to be waged without reference to racial categories. In waging antiracism without races it represented a civil-society equivalent of bureaucratic antiracism. The following statement by MRAP's Service Juridique sums up the organization's abstract and narrow definition of antiracism, one that is viewed interchangeably with universalism:

Part of our activity was concerned with anti-Semitic writings or speech; but later the analysis was that the fight against racism constitutes a single set because precisely, this fight is based on a universal approach. That is, we are not going to specify, or we are not going to separate all the different victims of racism… by specifying different forms of racism, but we combat all racisms […] Precisely our approach is antiracist, therefore universal for the unity of humankind, which doesn't mean denying different dynamics of different forms of racism. (as cited in Salmi, 2011, pp. 133-134)

The political mobilizations of the small number of activists under the banner of MRAP brought into light the first antiracist legislation in post-war France: The 1972 law discussed above. It is unsurprising that a young movement such as MRAP was able to affect a change in the French legislation. That the movement appeared primarily as a response to Vichy and has remained consistent with the race-neutral outlook of the republican state may contain an explanation to its antiracist achievements. In the 1940s and 1950s the movement was concerned with what it viewed as "the post-Vichy rebirth of anti-Semitic movements." Though it addressed structural discrimination in employment, housing and the provision of public goods, its main concern consisted of eradicating racial bigotry and hate crimes. It is unsurprising, then, that MRAP's most remarkable antiracist achievement, the 1972 law, was consistent with the official outlook by engaging a limited conception of contemporary racism, seen exclusively in terms of prejudice and hate crimes (Bleich, 2000).

Another antiracist movement was LICRA. Founded in 1927 the movement was traditionally concerned with anti-Semitic offenses. Its interest in immigrants grew only in the late 1960s and remained relatively marginal on the antiracist scene. In the fashion of MRAP, race was truncated from LICRA's antiracist discourse and zeroed down on as irrelevant to the French context while antiracist activity is reduced to the mere opposition to crimes of racist hatred. In the words of a LICRA spokesperson "the histories of the United States lend themselves to this type of analysis, but in France's system and history, in my opinion, it does not enter the framework" (as cited in Salmi, 2011, p. 133). The Anglo-American multicultural models supported the basis for the dismissal of race and against which a championed colorblind French universalism is defined.

On the left end of the political spectrum emerged organizations and committees, such as the extreme-left affiliated La Gauche Prolétarienne, Secours Rouge, and le Mouvement des Travailleurs Immigrés. Maoists also waged antiracist struggles exemplified by the journal *La Cause du peuple*. In 1971 the leftist group Révolution advanced the idea of "a front for migrant fight" whereby the migrant question is articulated into the core of revolutionary class struggle. Religious organizations involved in the struggle included Secrétariat pour les Relations avec l'Islam (1971), Action Catholique Ouvrière (1950) and Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et pour le Development (1961). The political interventions of Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Clavel, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean Genet opened an intellectual front in this antiracist struggle (Gastaut, 2000).

B. Second-Generation Anti-racism

The rise of left to power in 1981, the new political realities around mass immigration, and the rise of the extreme right created a favorable climate for multiculturalist claims and seeded the conditions for the new wave of antiracism. The left's political sloganeering during the 1981 presidential election heavily drew on a multicultural rhetoric, inspired by France's ethnic diversity and the changing demographics in major metropolitan centers (Bleich, 2000; Gastaut, 1994). Some of these early mobilizations involved mainly descendants of immigrants voicing their desire for full integration and their objection to the xenophobic forces of the extreme right. The ethnic dilemmas pertaining to the position of Maghrebi

migrants and their dependents in the French society hijacked the new wave of antiracism, albeit, as we shall see below, the legal and policy outcomes of this movement, largely due to their inscription within a republican framework of color-blind antiracism, were of little significance.

The new antiracist generation involved associations as diverse as the Red Crescent, Mouvement d'Action Non-Violent and migrant youth organizations, such as Jeunes Arabes de la Banlieue Lyonnaise, Conseil des Associations d'Immigrés de France, reviews such as Sans Frontières (1981), and radio stations such as Radio Beur in Paris. However, the most resounding articulation of the new generation was SOS racisme (1984). According to its founders Julien Dray, Didier François and Harlem Desir who were also leftist militants,[4] SOS originates in a growing *beur* political mobilization in the early 1980s exemplified by the high profile marches known as *Les marches des beurs* (Juhem, 1998). Led by Christian Delorme and Farida Belghould, the marches were triggered by the 1981 riots in les Minguettes and were focalized on the deteriorating youths-police relations. They were modeled on the Civil Rights struggle in the United States and involved mainly hunger strikes and peaceful protests. The marches first received support from various public and independent institutions; yet their recourse into more radical identitarian politics increasingly led to their marginalization. Thus, by the end of 1984, there had been no organization that would articulate the concerns of *les jeunes issus d'immigration*. These developments provided the conditions for the emergence of SOS racisme in the following year.

Since its formative moments SOS was aimed at defending the leftist antiracist values against the rise of the extreme right in the municipal election of 1983. It marked a relatively significant break from earlier antiracism by opening a cultural front in the antiracist struggle. Its distinct cultural style in which music, cinema, and television were used as mobilization tactics was instrumental to its rise to prominence. Roger Hanin's film *Train d'enfer* (1985), Mhedi Charef *le thé au harem d'archimed* (1984), and various songs by Daniel Balavoine, Michel Berger, Pierre Perret, among others, are only some of the cultural expressions that were incorporated into the movement. Instead of meetings and protests SOS held festivals and concerts with badges as an informal way of pledging allegiance. A free access concert organized on 15 June 1985 gathered around 500.000 in *la place de la Concorde* (Juhem, 1998). Similar concerts were organized in May in the cities of Boudreaux, Lille, Lyon, Rennes, and Belfort culminating in a large concert in Paris on 15 June. Many of the concerts were modeled on the cultural events in Britain between 1979 and 1980, such as Rock Against Racism and Rock Against Police. They were sponsored by many public subventions from the Ministry of Culture while major media outlets such as TF1 allotted them considerable air time. In 1986, a SOS concert that gathered over 200.000 participants was broadcast on television and dubbed "the night of all colors." This style in antiracism attracted not only sympathetic whites but also elements from the extreme right. For the organization, this innovative style did not entirely break from the leftist tradition and significantly attracted youths who were usually distanced from formal politics. Through its festive character SOS was intended by its founders to be an apolitical mass movement. The panoply of political and cultural forces it represented became an essential feature of the political field in the 1980s (Gastaut, 2000).

SOS Racisme's reception contrasts with that of its more formal contemporaries. For instance, France-Plus, an association that was founded in the same year and that turned upon an older strategy of inviting young *beurs* to enroll in electoral lists and run for public office, generated only 4000 adherents. A 1988 poll showed that 25 % of the French sympathized with SOS and 48 % viewed the movement as efficiently antiracist. The new movement also outdid the previous movements such as GIST and FASTI even as these remained active on the antiracist scene. One of SOS' achievements involved the constitution of a ministry for La Villes et Politiques Publiques concerned with peripheral neighborhoods. It also investigated the ban placed on the access of Maghrebi youths to dance floors and nightclubs ("Discrimination," 2014). Additionally, the movement protested against the brutality of neo-fascist crimes, such as the death of Aziz Madak on 22 March 1985 in Menton. This hate crime focused the press coverage on SOS Racisme making it the most celebrated antiracist organization while eclipsing other movements, including those led by *beurs*. The murder of Nourredine Hassan Daoudji on 30 March 1985 in Miramas became another rallying point for the organization that led an investigative effort and took charge of repatriating the deceased's body. SOS rejected the police side of the story which linked the death to gang violence, calling it rather a "racist crime" (Robine, 2004, p. 140).

With the change in the political majority in 1986 and the rise of Charles Pasqua as a minister of Interior, a number of reforms were introduced, such as the modification of *le Code de Nationalité* and the expulsion laws which were received

[4] They were members of leading leftist groups such as Mouvement des Jeunes Socialistes, PLUS, l'Unef-Id, l'Unef-U, MAS, Mouvement de La Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire which never made antiracism their main goal.

favorably by a vast segment of the French electorate. Significant cuts on the public subventions for SOS engendered timid criticisms of these ministerial measures by an organization that still maintained itself as *apolitical*. However, the first direct criticisms were triggered by the episodes of brutal policing which led to the death of Loic Lefebvre at the hands of a CRS in July and of Malik Oussekine in December 1986. From within the *beur* collective came accusations of affiliation to public and private powers upon which SOS depended for sponsorship; SOS was also accused of hijacking antiracism into a festive and moral reactive antiracism that hardly spoke to economic and political injustices. For many *beurs*, due to its emphatically *apolitical* style, SOS lacked a detailed agenda for its largely "moral" denunciation of racism. Its peaceful strategies contrasted with the radical language of second-generation immigrants embodied by *beur* marches and the insurgent actions of 1981 riots, while the subsidiary position of immigrants within SOS' leadership board conveyed to its critics its hegemonic nature (Robine, 2004; Juhem, 1998; Salmi, 2011).

Yet, whether SOS Racisme was coopted due to its affiliation with mainstream public forces or was predominately led by middle class leftist militants is not the question here. Its antiracist program reveals more insightful valuations of this line of antiracist practice. The newness of SOS antiracism collapses under the sheer weight of the obsolete and theoretically narrow definition of racism it espoused. Despite its professed commitment to combat subtle and less direct forms of racism, prejudice remains center-stage as the dominant discursive framework for understanding contemporary racialized relations. The emphasis on hate crimes, that is intentional racism, suggested for instance by the organization's key catchphrase "Touche Pas à Mon Pote," emulates that of bureaucratic antiracist organizations and political parties, diverting attention from the more substantive and unintentional forms of racism and privilege. This focus on prejudice and on the authors of discrimination heavily influences the types of activities in which these organizations engage, namely education and awareness building. Where hate crimes are certainly significant as the case in Menton and Miramas exemplify, they do not constitute the sole forms of racial subordination that influence the lives of immigrants in France. As the case of bureaucratic antiracism reveals, the conceptualization of racism that focuses on prejudice and its related crimes casts racism as the aberrational practice of often marginal extreme groups and ideologies. The failure to engage subtler racial forms is coupled with SOS' reluctance to view race as an analytic. This is, for instance, evident in its critique of the communitarian and identitarian logic of the *beur* movements. In the race-neutral approach of SOS, "the right to difference" called for by these movements reproduced the absolutist assumptions at the heart of Lepenist cause (Bleich, 2000). It also appears in the way the organization responded to complaints of race victims. SOS's fight against hate crimes is belied by the suspicion with which the organization has regarded hate complaints. In ways consistent with its race-neutral and non-communitarian stance, the subjectivity of hate crime victims is denied by SOS. In Salmi's words:

[The] refusal to focus on the subjective victims of discrimination links back to attempts to circumvent race by avoiding victim-based identification that result in communitarianism. Concentrating on perpetrators allows for a discussion of racism without dealing with how race is constructed and manifests through racist incidents. (Salmi, 2011, p. 124)

SOS's take on the social significance of ethno-racial data also reveals many elements of the limited conceptual framework that informs its antiracist praxis. Ethno-racial data are traditionally avoided in France. Census and formal policies refer to national background rather than ethnic origins. A 1978 law made it illegal, "except under restricted circumstances" (Sabbagh, 2008) to collect census data based on racial or ethnic attributes. A recent amendment that would have allowed for collecting such data has been resisted and eventually withheld as unconstitutional. The result has been a major lack of statistics on immigrants' economic and social conditions

SOS' refusal to consider race and ethnicity in generating data about the conditions of immigrants germinates from its steadfast disposition to view race consciousness as morally unjust. The rejection of ethno-racial statistics was recently stated by Hadiren Lenoir, a representative of SOS, who stated his organization's support for these statistics only in research and as long as they are not collected by the government. This position is problematical, first, because most research about minorities in France is state-sponsored and, second, because SOS has steadfastly opposed the groundbreaking work of French scholars who investigated discrimination in France based on ethno-racial statistics (Fleming, n.d.). Where this approach is consistent with a general denunciation of racism in its vulgar pseudo-scientific sense, race as a *social construct* with ample analytical power for understanding present-day social relations in France is conjured out of discussion. The failure to include race as a variable leaves out of these demographic counts the vast number of naturalized "French" and those who became French by birth or nationality, but whose transition into *Frenchmen* often does not mean they are not identifiable as "alien" by virtue of their racial visibility. Additionally, in this race-neutral approach to census-taking, the problems faced by immigrants are viewed by the French state as typical of the

problems faced by all residents. How social disadvantage is disproportionately determined by belonging to specific racial groups is truncated from this model. The social significance of ethno-racial data is compromised for the benefit of an abstract republican universalism where discussing race and racial identities is immediately countered with accusations of "promulgating and promoting communitarian ideas" in a republic "where… race does not officially reside even as racism and discrimination are long-term residents" (Stovall, Keaton, & Sharpley-Whiting, 2012, p.4).

To argue for the instrumentality of ethno-racial data is by no means to reify racial categories. Racial distinctions, needless to say, are scientifically unfounded and have no essential reality of their own. Rather, their meanings are *socially constructed*. The *social construction of races* is a fancy word for saying that people are not born to view each other as racially inferior or distinct; they are socialized into that. Thus, the need for ethno-racial data being suggested here is dictated by the social realities that are still profoundly structured by these categories. In other words, eradicating race and racism must begin from an acknowledgement that they *exist*, that they are *socially* real. Until the social relations and inequalities they sustain are abolished, racial and ethnic data must be incorporated into antiracist struggle. Acknowledging race exists socially—its ontological status being irrelevant here—is, therefore, key in dismantling the structures of domination it perpetuates. Such a complex conceptualization of racism and contemporary social relations around race is at the heart of the more recent mobilizations that have sprung from the racial experiences of black communities in France. These constitute an exception within organizational antiracism. In the following section I want to consider their political language as well as the definition of racism they espouse which in my view has many implications for a more robust politics of antiracism in the Maghrebi migrant context.

IV. BLACK ANTI-RACISM

The 2000s was a watershed decade for the politics of antiracism in France. The outbreak of nationwide riots in 2005 revived the public debate on the deteriorating race relations and created a massive mobilization centered on the position of black minorities within the French society (Fleming, n.d.). A new wave of antiracist organizations emerged which, unlike the previous movements, appealed to ethno-racial identifications in utter defiance of the republican law and mainstream strands of antiracism. A key feature of these mobilizations is that they have incorporated a broader view of racism as mainly systemic and culture-wide, articulating race into their conceptual framework for analyzing social situations and relations.

One black organization that has embodied this outlook is Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN). Spurred into existence by the 2005 revolts in the French suburbs, CRAN is remarkable for attempting to document the specificity of anti-black racism, incorporating the taboo terms of race and "black" to its antiracist repertoire. The race-conscious political language of the movement which engendered accusations of "ethnicizing the social" and for advocating communitarianism (Laplanceh-Servigne, 2014, p. 144) is meant to expose the process whereby the politically correct ideologies of Universalist republicanism and color-blindness obscure the ubiquity of whiteness and the deep racial divisions in the French society (Stovall, Keaton, & Sharpley-Whiting, 2012). Rather than a voluntary act of communitarianism as it is usually dismissed in official criticisms, the race consciousness of CRAN is presented as a political dictate imposed by the forces of racialization in a color-conscious society. In the words of CRAN leader P. Lozes:

Races do not exist, yet "black" is a social notion. And as a social factor, a factor of suffering and discrimination, it founds and legitimizes the action of CRAN. [...] What unites us is a common social experience of discrimination, related to an indirect belonging; indirect, in the sense that it is not necessarily chosen, but is imposed by society. (2007, p. 52)

In the political philosophy of CRAN, race and the racialized body become a "political resource [for] defending interests, claiming places and consolidating positions" (Fassin & Fassin, 2006, p. 89). This central vision of race is at the core of CRAN's advocacy for the collection of ethnic statistics. The movement has crusaded for legalizing this kind of data which it deemed instrumental for gauging discrimination and for assessing the impact of antidiscrimination policies (Sabbagh, 2008).

CRAN and similar black movements turned upon the radicalization of blackness in both its self-reflexive and ascriptive forms. The conscious reference to blackness is an attempt to unearth the racial history of France's black communities, which is anchored in the experiences of slavery, colonialism and post-colonial indenture. The radical traditions of black America and South Africa supplied relevant political idioms for mediating struggle and organizing consciousness within

the French context. Paris as a node for black international flows and transatlantic cultural crossings has supported a black diasporic network whereby the racial struggles of blacks in metropolitan France can be synchronized with other black militarisms around the globe. Prior to the rise of these movements, black American figures like Malcolm X and Josephine Baker were already of high socio-historical significance in Paris; their racial struggles significantly seeped into the political consciousness and sensibility represented by these movements. For instance, the African identity affirmations articulated by France's black antiracists derive directly from the Afrocentric tradition and the Black Pride movement of the 1960s United States. This diasporic network has imbued them with a keen awareness of the racial dynamics of black (in)visibility, the official refusal to engage "race" in public debate, and the historical link between contemporary racism and the race relations under the French empire. In the words of a CRAN spokesperson:

The paradox is that the blacks of France are individually visible, but are invisible as a social group. First as a social group, they are supposed not to exist, since the French Republic does not officially recognize minorities and does not count them anymore … The problem has complex historical roots, related to slavery and colonization. Our goal is to mobilize people's willingness to improve the plight of these populations, and to combat the racial discrimination they suffer. (as cited in Salmi, 2011, p. 23)

Black antiracist movements have drawn attention to the more systemic forms of racial domination. In the 2000s, when these movements appeared, "daily racism" accounted for most of press reports on racism (the term featured 857 times between January 2000 and the end of 2009). Unlike SOS where personal testimonies of racism are viewed with suspicion, black antiracism places a premium on the subjective perceptions of racism; that is, the racial experiences from the viewpoint of victims are as important as the objective definitions of racism (Laplanche-Servigne, 2014). CRAN's emphasis on a context-based antiracism contrasts with that of MRAP and SOS which see the experiences of racism as similar across social groups regardless of ethnic origin and skin color, and hence view antiracist mobilization as unitary and in many cases a matter of "moral militarism" (p. 152). Black antiracism's emphasis on individual narratives of racism is a direct response to this approach. It highlights the need for a context-specific conceptualization of race that attends to a specifically black experience of racism (Jovelin, 2011). This view is expressed clearly by MIR (*Le Mouvement Des Indigenes de la République*), another black antiracist movement that emerged in the aftermath of the 2005 riots: "We are not a generalist movement. We participate on a case-by-case basis in actions and common projects with other forces, while retaining our particular position linked to the specific oppression of *les Indigenes*" (MIR, 2005).

Though fashioned to address a distinctively *black* experience of racism, CRAN and other black movements that proliferated in its orbit have a significant import for what I view as a more progressive form of Maghrebi antiracism. For example, I have demonstrated above that the experiences around coercive policing have been all the more evident among Maghrebi communities. The specificities of this anti-Maghrebi racism cannot be addressed in generalized color-blind and largely moral antiracist frameworks, like those represented by SOS and MRAP. In this context, black militarism can have significant implications for addressing the experiences of racial subordination specific to Maghrebi migration. The relevance of the black political struggles to Maghrebi communities has escaped sustained critical consideration, but some of its most potent expressions have appeared at the most grassroots level of working class culture in the form of cultural contact and the artistic production of music-centered Maghrebi youths. In the following section I will chart the contours of this grassroots youth movement. I will illustrate how its cultural expressions and its political tactics provide what I view as an *alternative* form of anti-racism, even as the movement cannot be reductively confined to a mere response to racism.

V. GRASSROOTS MAGHREBI ANTI-RACISM IN BLACK

Black artistic figures like Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright have underscored the centrality of popular culture to the struggle for black emancipation and racial uplift. Hughes famously declared: "let the blare of Negro Jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing the blues penetrate the close ears of the color near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand" (1928). In Wright's words, the black culture will enable the black novelist "create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die" (2008, p. 49). The strategies of political action that evolved within the black communities in the overdeveloped world have appealed to various collectivities that refashion the politics of blackness to speak to their immediate contexts of negotiation and struggle. In Britain, for instance, the way the expressive cultures of black America and the Caribbean have appealed to black youths has received bountiful scholarly attention. For instance, Paul Gilroy (1987) illustrates how blackness in Britain was developed, thanks to the syncretism of

various black diaspora cultural forms, into a color of opposition, a politically open and fluid category through which Britain's blacks and South Asians, as well as their white supporters have organized into what Edward Said calls an "interpretive political community" (1985, p. 136), articulating demands around race and class.

In France the appeal of black cultural politics is all the more evident in the political struggles of North African youths whose appropriation of what Tricia Rose calls "black cultural expressivity" (1994a, p. 10) is mandated by limited existential conditions as much as by the contact with blacks with whom they share the spaces of urban poverty and exclusion. Here the appeal of black culture is epitomized by the historical role that the French capital has played as a global nexus for black diaspora cultures. These transnational networks are strengthened by a history of black internationalism to which Paris was site, mainly *Négritude*, the Harlem-in-Paris Renaissance, and the Nation of Islam as symbolized by Malcolm X's historic visit to Paris in 1965. The transnational flow of black aesthetics has created a niche for Maghrebi self-definitions whereby a new and a distinct identity can be forged on the decadent peculiarities of the white French culture. This cross-racial identification with black diaspora cultures is made possible by the shared memories of colonial servitude, imperialism and exile.

Within the context of the social struggles against racism, however, some of the most dynamic protest strategies developed by Maghrebi youths in the French suburbs have been inspired by the black culture of the United States and the Caribbean, precisely the one mobilized around hip hop. Since its emergence in the 1980s, hip hop in France has been more than a cultural undercurrent to be confined to musical production, dance, and graffiti; it also evolved as a cultural-political movement articulating racial consciousness and social demands. It has supported a political stance in the fight against social inequalities structured by race and a strategy for progressive intervention within the French political and popular culture. This alternative mode of antiracist intervention mediated through hip hop arguably engages the complexity of contemporary political environment and the subtlety of racial ideologies and racially structured relations which have escaped the more mainstream antiracist organizations discussed above.

Understanding the political aspect of hip hop and its implications for waging antiracist struggle might begin from comprehending the overall political and pop culture scene in the 1970s and 1980s United States where this music-centered cultural sensibility first appeared. Commonly known as the post-Civil Rights era, the 1970s and 1980s were a period of seismic social transformations marked mainly by the rise of a new economy of sophisticated technology and high-skill labor in which the working class morphed from an expandable resource for industrial development half a century earlier to a surplus population on the margins of an emergent postindustrial society. The urban renewal policies under Ronald Reagan's administration altered the distribution of poor populations in major American cities. For instance, in New York City, hip hop's birthplace, the abrupt, yet politically motivated urban renewal led to a massive relocation of black and Latino communities into the South Bronx where they formed a segregated underclass while the flight of the black middle class ushered in eroding communal relations in the emergent ghettoes. In this context, the political meanings of Blaxploitation, the Black Power and the Civil Rights had little relevance for black youths reduced by the forces of deindustrialization into the margins of socially viable urban space and distanced from mainstream representative institutions. It was around this period that the first sonic rumblings of Afrika Bambaataa and Grand Master Flash, hip hop's forefathers, were heard in the basements of the South Bronx tenements, heralding the emergence of a new cultural fad that would soon erupt into a global culture (Neal, 2012; Hill, 2012).

The potency of the political meanings to which hip hop gave expression was also consolidated by the complacency of the pop culture scene in the 1970s. Much of the black soul music, the top ranking music genre in that decade, reflected the distanced realities of a black middle class embroiled in consumption, perceived as the means to integrate in the white society. The decline in the black communal and political sphere represented by the flight of the black middle class, the abrupt mass displacement of poor black communities into the margins of segregated postindustrial space, and the attendant emergence of the crack coke epidemic received little echo in the politically quiescent songs of the leading black soul singers like William Robinson, Denis Williams and Jeffrey Osborn (Neal, 2012).

The new realities of the postindustrial city lie at the heart of hip hop's emergence. Because of its festive character, hip hop's ability to engage the realities of the rapidly changing cultural and political terrain has largely gone unnoticed. For many within the black academia the end of the Civil Rights movement foreshadowed an era of black political disillusionment and a decline in the Black Public Sphere. However, scholars closer in the totem pole of class to the black inner city communities where hip hop emerged confidently emphasized the political aspect of the culture, championing a

view of hip hop-centered youths as the postindustrial heirs of the Civil Rights generation. For instance, Todd Boyd's optimistic declaration that "it's time for the new niggas" (2012, p. 439) is reflective of a growing interest among intellectuals of the hip hop generation in delineating the centrality of the nascent music culture to the political struggles of black communities in the post-Civil Right era. For these scholars, the militant poses of the black panthers and the high profile marches of the "Race Men" were rendered anachronistic by the sophisticated scratchings and rhythms, and the heavy streetwise lyrics dictated by the realities of an eroding urban landscape, even as the political figures of the previous era like Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Assata Shakur have remained a constant refrain in the music. Just like deindustrialization altered the *social*, hip hop transformed the parameters of the political.

These contextual aspects of hip hop's emergence were woven into the rhythms, beats, lyrics as well as the performances. They were packaged with the music forms which crossed over the Atlantic to be processed by youths whose urban experiences also seemed to be shaped by racial subordination and economic marginalization. Even as the neoliberal economy was globalized, oppositional meanings codified in the music records travelled in its shades. Arguably, the first global resonances of hip hop were reflected in the musical performances of suburban French youths. By the 1990s France had become the second largest market for the production and consumption of rap music after the United States, with Maghrebi artists having an integral part in popularizing the form. Maghrebi rappers were elementary in the formative moments of French rap as their music set the bar high for other artists. This black diasporic form supported the raw material, represented by records, for the creative acts of Maghrebi DJs and MCs. The recent developments in the music technologies have facilitated the importation and reproduction of these texts on virtual turntables and mixers.

French hip hop has a rich history of trans-global connections with the United States. This appears not merely in the abiding influence of the latter on the former through media and cultural flows, but also in the physical journeys of hip hop artists between France and the United States. In the early 1980s, Bambaataa established the branch of his Universal Zulu Nation in one of the poor Parisian suburbs. Until the late 1980s his musical performances were a major influence on the nascent French rap scene (Prévos, 2001). Bambaataa's Zulu Nation paved the way for a pantheon of emergent rappers and emcees like Chagrin d'Amour, Dee Nasty, MC Solaar, IAM, Suprême NTM, Assassin, and Ministère A.M.E.R whose musical production evinced considerable proximity to the African American style in hip hop (Di Vita, 2016). For these early rappers, hip hop's "interventionist potential," having emerged in the context of grinding urban poverty and acutely truncated opportunity, was essential to their being drawn into the music culture. Many historical, structural, and aesthetic factors explain the re-composition of Maghrebi youth culture around a black stance, though this re-composition as I shall highlight involves a variety of innovative ways where Maghrebi performativity and local subjectivity make an input to what hip hop means in the French context.

French hip hop owes its existence to the social struggles in a larger political landscape where race has strictly defined the degraded the position of North African communities in the realms of education, waged employment, media representation, and criminal justice. The resort to hip hop was also dictated by the lack of expressive alternatives amidst the complacency of the French and the migrant Maghrebi pop scene. The existing music genres seemed inadequate to address the renewed political engagements and the demands for racial solidarity dictated by the postindustrial environment. The slackness of the Maghrebi migrant pop led the young generation mostly exposed to the experiences of racial disadvantage to shift its center of gravity into more oppositional cultural forms. In the struggle against racism hip hop, mainly rap music, supported a potent mode of political address whereby oppositional meanings and the experiences of racial subordination are articulated. The music tackled issues other pop forms only hinted at. The French producer De La describes his plunge into hip hop as inevitable in light of a dormant pop scene that is devoid of any significant political commentary: "It was everywhere in Paris and its suburbs in the 1990s; so I guess it was only a matter of time before I got into it. It was the perfect music for our environment back then". Similarly, MC 20 syl perceived of hip hop "as a voice for minority and forgotten people. It is also a good way to question myself and the world I'm living in. Musically and graphically, it's freedom; you have no rules, no boundaries" (as cited in Di Vita, 2016). Though other expressive means were available, such as magazines and dance, rap was far more preferable largely due to its ability for diffusion through radio, television and dancefloors. Being both cheap and accessible and requiring affordable equipment, it offered a more suitable medium for bringing elements from (sub)urban Maghrebi culture into the public consciousness.

Hip hop artists have been at the forefront of the French antiracist scene even as their prominence is submerged by mainstream organizations and the official hostility with which this black genre is usually countered in France. The music's heavy use of hypermasculine street codes where male violence, brutal sex and hostility to female counterparts are

common themes has engendered many animosities from conservative and liberal segments of the French society. However, by zeroing down on the testosterone-filled codes of hip hop, these critiques have failed to pierce into the more upfront and combative aspects of the music. One clarion example of this appears in the rap songs of Suprême NTM.

The political content of NTM's rap is overshadowed in the moral critiques lodged against the group by its hardcore and profane lyrics which emulate the avant-gardism of Gangsta Rap, a revolutionary variety of rap associated with the 1980s Los Angeles. The groups' machismo, encapsulated in its acronym (nique ta mère) hides many interesting insights about the group's advocacy of social and political issues immediate to the *banlieue*s. For instance, NTM's searing critique of police practices in the *banlieue*s which led to many legal battles with state authorities is written off the moralistic critiques that dismiss the group as the expression of debased street thuggery.

This is by no means to vindicate the hypermasculinity that permeates in the lyrics and in the larger hip hop culture. After all, machismo and male supremacy take broader and often more insidious forms in the wider French culture. For instance, Nicholas Sarkozy's profile as a "tough on crime" political figure both as a minister of interior and a president, embodied by his unbridled use of police force and his controversial declaration "to clear the scum"[5] is illustrative of the male aggression that brims in the quarters of national politics and culture. In this context, obscene lyricisms like NTM's "Fuck Your Mother" might be less of a nihilistic expression of seemingly profane *banlieue* youths and more of a *reaction* to the racial slurs and the harsh treatment colored youths receive from the authoritative police force that carry out constant haphazard campaigns of racial profiling against brown and black bodies in the *banlieues*. My argument is that a moral take on the riots might easily divert attention from the way the music is merely reflective of the hypermasculinity that permeates in the wider white culture. Despite its openly profane lyrics, NTM is widely celebrated as the mouthpiece of the general discontent with the "broken window" policies that have targeted poor suburban communities under successive governments led by the right and the left alike. The artistic productions of Maghrebi rappers—the epitome of the combative North African male in France—can be examined as a form of representation that has its own meanings.

Hip hop offers a medium for airing the issues most pressing and relevant to Maghrebi migrant youth community. Even as it lauds gang violence and extreme manhood, the music's pro-social commitments are widely acknowledged. NTM's oppositional stance contrasts with the conciliatory tones of mainstream antiracist groups. Its controversial hit "J'Appuie sur La Gachette" (I pull the trigger) (1993), which dramatizes the suicidal thoughts of its protagonist, bound to escape the drudgery of his limited existence and second-class citizenship, engendered significant censorship and boycott from leading French radio stations:

> J'ai les neurones affectés et le cœur infecté,
> fatigué de lutter, de devoir supporter la fatalité
> et le poids d'une vie de raté.
> Voilà pourquoi je m'isole, pourquoi je reste seul.
> Seul dans ma tête libre, libre d'être
> un esclave en fait battant en retraite,
> fuyant ce monde d'esthètes en me pétant la tête.
> OK, j'arrête net, j'appuie sur la gâchette. (1993)

Another group that has voiced similar antiracist concerns is Assassin. As a hardcore musical sensibility Assassin's raps are a denunciation of the authoritarian state practices, mainly the excessive policing of the poor suburbs. It's "l'État Assassine" (the State Assassinates) is a hard-hitting social commentary on police violence at the heart of the deteriorating police and community relations:

[5] During a visit to the police force in the city of Argenteuil in the wake of the 2005 riots, Sarkozy infamously declared "On va vous débarrasser de la racaille"(we will rid you of this scum). See Dix ans Après", 2015). Dix ans après. Le "On va vous débarrasser de la racaille" de Sarkozy. (2015). Retrieved from: https://www.ouest-france.fr/politique/dix-ans-apres-le-va-vous-debarrasser-de-la-racaille-de-sarkozy-3770713

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La justice n'a pas rendu le jugement
Que le peuple attend.
Voilà pourquoi, nous avons la haine
Contre leur système.
Shoot, shoot, le rythme suit sa route.
Plus de doute le posse Assassin fait partie des gens qu'on
écoute.
Qui sont les criminels?
Qui sont ceux qu'on enferme?
À l'école on nous impose des modèles,
Mais la vie me révèle le côté réel des fils de pute qui
nous gouvernent.
Pas un mot sur les crimes quand l'État assassine
On t'opprime, si ça ne va pas, on te supprime.
Pô, pô, pô, voilà comment la police s'exprime.
Personne d'entre nous ne veut finir comme Malek Oussekine.
Bing, bang, la police est comme un gang.
De l'Afrique Noire au Maghreb et de la Corse à l'Irlande.
Les minorités se lèvent, notre sang vient de la même
sève. (1995)

The anti-racist content of the music that takes the state institutions to task starkly contrasts with the preoccupation in mainstream racism with hate crimes and its reluctance to engage the more detrimental aspects of racial violence carried out by the state agencies, such as the police and courts. The premium placed by rappers on the systemic aspects of racism supports in my view a keen illustration of the robust strategies at the heart of what I call "grassroots antiracism," one that is shaped around black themes and expressions.

The antiracist efficacy of hip hop also appears in the music of Ministère AMER. Dubbed as the Public Enemy of France, the group rapped about the most pressing issues for the *banlieue* population. Their "Sacrifice de Poulet" (chicken sacrifice) is an attempt to capture and offer soundtrack for the popular fury over state-sanctioned violence expressed through street riots. A legal suit was brought by the Ministry of Interior against the group, pressing charges of promoting hatred and antipathetic sentiment toward the state's law and order agencies, albeit this attempt failed to put a ban on the song's sales. AMER's oppositional music also led major radio stations to deny them airtime, excepting one underground station (Di Vita, 2016).

The largescale riots that gripped the French suburbs in 2005 also include many aspects of grassroots antiracism. The official constructions of the riots furnish an extensive space for analyzing the racial discourse around Maghrebi lawbreaking. These riots will mark the cultural memory of French Maghrebi youths not only because of the tragic death of two minority youths in a deadly police chase but also because of the prominent role that rap artists had in those events. The national alarm caused by the revolts at which President Jacques Chirac declared a three-month state of emergency was paralleled inside the French parliament by an attempt involving 200 members to bring a legal case against Maghrebi rappers on grounds of producing music that fueled the riots. Similar cases involve the infamous 1996 legal suit leading three North African rappers to prison and the legal action against Algerian French rapper Mohamed Bourokba (aka Hamé) from rap group la Rumeur. After 5 years and two appeals in a case brought by Nicholas Sarkozy (then minister of interior) in which the rapper was accused for deriding police authorities, Hamé was acquitted in 2008. Overall, these examples are illustrative of the way hip hop supplied a circuit through which the anti-state synergies of African American rap groups like Los Angeles-based NWA (known for its controversial hit "Fuck Police" which led to many suits with the federal government) could be channeled to the daily conflicts with social control agencies in suburban France. Hip hop transmitted the struggle of America's black youths to the disempowered youths of suburban France whose experiences of

urban exclusion also converge with the fault lines of race. In ways unparalleled by other expressive genres, rap artists relish the success of stirring the official fury and thrusting the concerns of their grassroots communities into the fray of public debate and national politics. In the words of Moroccan-born DJ Cut Killer: "For an MC to be attacked by politicians just because they said 'fuck the system' shows the power […] but it is really a delicate situation. Some artists understand the situation and continue the battle in court. But some artists are really disappointed because they don't have the money to hire a lawyer" (as cited in Di Vita, 2016).

These episodes of state persecution of rappers are hardly known in mainstream antiracist organizations. Among many things, this suggests that the French state is tolerant to antiracist sensibilities as long as they adhere to a stubborn republican tradition where race as an analytic is dissociated from the politics of antiracism. Hip hop's anchoring in the history of black racial struggle unveils some overlooked cultural and political dimensions of these urban revolts and presents the rioting masses as essentially a "political community" rather than a spontaneous impulse. These cultural expressions contest the racialized explanations of the events while they offer a counter-narrative to contemporary race relations that pierce into the more intrinsic, devastating and far-reaching structures of contemporary racism. The music entreats *banlieue* dwellers as well as listeners across the country to consider the more corrosive forms of inequality usually obscured by mainstream parties' invocation of extreme-right racism and the French state's emphasis on the inconsequentiality of race in the French context. Doc-K of La Brigade rap collective comments on the 2005 uprisings as emblematic of a deep color line problem that also backdates to the history of the French empire:

France has to stop avoiding its minorities. What happened was the consequence of its colonial history. Today, France's republican discourse is in total contradiction with reality. The only time where you could see that many young people of minority background on television screens was because many of them were burning and looting things. Now that all the hype is coming to an end, we can't just act like it was taken care of. We have to launch a debate about discrimination. (as cited in Prévos, 1992, p. 18)

Rappers like Doc-K and Hamé are aware of the emancipatory possibilities condensed in the music. The privileged position which flowed from enjoying a public voice enabled these rappers to offer a soundtrack for community struggles but also to supply the forms of political mobilization and mass support. DJ Cut Killer expressed his identification and that of a whole generation with hip hop in terms of the existential dictates of being a colored youth on the margins of postindustrial white society:

It was really hard to live there. That's why the young generation was really angry, and when hip hop came we saw in this movement and this music how the United States, the urban people, the people of the streets, could manage this situation. This form of expression, the MCs, the graffiti, all of this movement, and especially the dance, it was really huge for the urban people of France. (as cited in Di Vita, 2012)

Rappers translate into lyrics and rhythm the dissident acts of their revolting communities. These meaningful instances of rappers' political agency are overlooked in the academic historicizing of these urban movements. The music's eminence in the riots adds an important "cultural" dimension to the events, blurring the line between politics and culture in understanding the forms of Maghrebi youth resistance and agency in contemporary France. Music is harnessed not only as an alternative media apparatus for airing social and economic grievances but also as a vehicle for mobilizing ethnic masses. I underline these aspects of youths' subversion of white repression by presenting them as meaningful, yet overlooked, instances of political agency that operate beyond Eurocentric inventories of political action, such as the institutions of representative democracy and the working class. The racial struggles mediated through the black vernacular of hip hop have decisively made an input into what antiracism means today. These oppositional meanings expressed through hip hop are encapsulated in Rose's (1994b) oft-quoted definition of the genre as:

A style nobody can deal with—a style that cannot be easily understood or erased, a style that has the reflexivity to create counter dominant narratives against a mobile and hosting enemy—may be one of the most effective ways to fortify communities of resistance and simultaneously reserve the right to communal pleasure. (p. 71)

A. Unemployment as Systemic Racism

Another area of racialized social relations addressed in the French hip hop is structural unemployment. Maghrebi hip hop in France has developed ways of coping with the chronic banishment of youths from the narratives of meaningful work and upward mobility. As in U.S. rap, French rappers (re)present an underground economy of drug trafficking, mainly

crack cocaine, as an alternative financial venue for *banlieue* youths, or in IAM's parlance "une économie parallèle" (a parallel economy) where traditional notions of minimum wage and gradual mobility are reversed. Criminality with which Maghrebis are often saddled in the ascriptive discourse of French racism becomes self-reflexively celebrated in hip hop. By thematically locating crime in acute poverty and racialized society the music challenges the commodifiable stereotypes of *threat* and *pathology* that turn *beur* communities and culture into a human spectacle. The following lines from NTM's song "Demain c'est loin" (1997) encapsulates these meanings:

> Tenter le diable pour sortir de la galère, t'as gagné frère
> Mais c'est toujours la misère pour ce qui pousse derrière
> Pousse pousser au milieu d'un champs de béton
> Grandir dans un parking et voir les grands faire rentrer les ronds
> La pauvreté, ça fait gamberger en deux temps trois
> mouvements
> On coupe, on compresse, on découpe, on emballe, on vend
> A tour de bras, on fait rentrer l'argent du crack
> Ouais, c'est ça la vie, et parle pas de RMI ici ici ici
> Ici, le rêve des jeunes c'est la Golf GTI, survet' Tachini
> Tomber les femmes à l'aise comme many
> Sur Scarface, je suis comme tout le monde je délire bien
> Dieu merci, j'ai grandis, je suis plus malin, lui il crève
> à la fin Évasion, évasion, effort d'imagination, ici tout est gris
> Les murs, les esprits, les rats, la nuit
> On veut s'échapper de la prison, une aiguille passe, on
> passe à l'action
> Fausse diversion, un jour tu pètes les plombs
> Princesses d'Afrique, fille mère, plastique
> Plein de colle, raclo à la masse lunatique
> Économie parallèle, équipe dure comme un roc
> Petits Don qui contrôlent grave leurs spots. (1997)

The urge to dodge racial barriers and adapt to the systemic exclusion from the world of viable work is explored overtly in the lyrics and less explicitly conveyed through personal narratives of commercial success. As a multi-billion industry, hip hop has become a niche for many aspiring youths around the globe. In the fashion of French Montana or Fat Joe in the context of the United States, French rappers like La Fouine and Rim-K recount stories of "rag to riches" and of their ascendance into international acclaim. Their transition from street artists in the marginalized underworld of the *banlieues* into world-class singers with artistic careers that compete on a global scale have set genuine models for personal success and provided the blueprint for many young *banlieusards* who aspire to rise from the conditions of urban poverty. Solo, one of the original black members of the pioneering French B-Boy crew, the Paris City Breakers, and a founding member of the Rap Crew Assassin, describes his hip hop career as an attempt to escape the stigmatized work reserved for colored people in France:

Here, society is made so you fit into one space. You cannot create a space for yourself […] For me, growing up, it was like 'Yo, what the heck am I gonna do in this world? Because what they're offering is to be either a fuckin street sweeper or to be a fuckin' mechanic or being a plumber, and I think I am better than that. And I have better things to offer than that.' But they made it so that me, my parents, or anybody like me or my parents, understands that we have to stay in that little gap that was made for us…that's what I felt, really. And it was hard to deal with. But, hip hop came and saved me. (as cited in Alim, Spadey & Meghelli, 2006, p. 56)

The unprecedented rigor with which questions of identity and ethnic affiliation, traditionally circumvented issues in the cultural politics of first-generation Maghrebi migrants, have been raised in public debates in France owes a great deal to the political discourse of dissidence instituted by the Maghrebi youth subculture. Rappers embody the steadfast commitment of second- and third-generation *beurs* to expose the failure of mainstream antiracism to engage race in questioning *le modèle d'intégration à la Française*. Algerian French Emcee Medine epitomizes this combative spirit and renewed migrant youths' interest in putting to task the received notions of Frenchness and integration:

People like me—the descendants of immigrants, whether Arab, Black or Asian—are turning to our roots and embracing our heritage, just the opposite of what our parents did when they arrived. My grandparents, for example, who came from Algeria to work and to build a better life, accepted the role of guests. They did everything they could not just to fit in but to become invisible. Calling attention to themselves usually meant trouble-endless ID and visa checks from police, racist remarks and insults—so they avoided that. They tried as much as possible to integrate, and in so doing shut away their customs, language and heritage […] But people from my generation are not shy from engaging questions of ethnic heritage, and, far from seeking invisibility, we're standing up to denounce the prejudice and injustice we face. (as cited in Alim, Spadey & Meghelli, 2006, p. 15)

Even as systemic racism retains center-stage within antiracist hip hop, contemporary racism is addressed across its ideological continuum. Neo-fascist groups are also a subject in the lyrics, albeit to a lower degree. French rappers have constantly been indignant of the reactive forces of French fascism represented by *le Front National*. For instance, IAM's 1997 Album *l'École Du Micro d'Argent* (the School of the Silver Microphone) is a blistering critique of the increased influence of Le Pen's *Front* in southern France embodied by the election of FN members to several urban centers in the South and the death of Ibrahim Ali, a member of B.VICE hip hop collective close to IAM, at the hands a FN extremist. IAM infused its music with vibrant anti-FN political activism by urging young people to vote so as to stem the FN's sweeping reach and participate in counterdemonstrations to object to Le Pen's visits to their southern city of Marseille. In collaboration with Madj of the rap group Assassin and *mouvement de L'immigration et des banlieues* (MIB) IAM produced the single "11'30 contre les lois racistes" (Eleven Minutes Thirty Seconds Against Racist Laws) which was intended as a fundraiser, netting 500.000 francs for sponsoring MIB's anti-FN campaign (Swedenburg, 2002).

B. Rap as a Mass Mobilization Strategy

The informality of grassroots anti-racism expressed mainly through the music culture (in contrast to the conventional vehicles of mainstream anti-racism) largely explains why this antiracist variety has escaped sustained critical consideration. The role of the music in organizing consciousness and generating mass support cannot be methodologically objectified partly because of the lack of sympathetic historiographical work and the vilifying discourse of the French media and other moral guardians who dismiss these expressions as a meaningless urban noise of culturally incompatible *banlieue* youths. However, the political import of music in mediating struggle and airing grievances to the societal mainstream can be inferred by assessing its reception by the various publics in France.

According to an ethnographic study of rap music in France, the rap public doubled between 1997 and the mid-2000s, with school youths born to managerial and professional classes accounting for almost one half (Molinero, 2009). The recent annexation of the French rap by leading US record labels, (e.g., the late Russell Simmons' *Def Jam*) would more likely have increased the rap public beyond these numbers. The intervention of black American labels has exposed black culture, and with it Maghrebi youth culture, to the societal mainstream. The prevalence of American record companies has created an independent market for producing and distributing music with race content, away from the voyeuristic gaze of the race-intolerant republican political culture. The dynamics of producing and consuming these forms extend far beyond these mundane market relations. The production and consumption of the music commodity hide the transmission and the reception of oppositional meanings, ideas and ideologies. The growing support of "*banlieue* cultural expressivity" [6] suggested by these numbers may be a powerful indicator of the unforeseen reach of the music to diverse audiences beyond the immediate context of the *banlieu*e where these sonic rumblings are created and imagined. Rap's capacity to mediate struggle and air the existential concerns of the impoverished *banlieue* constituencies across the social divides of class and race is summed up by American rapper Chuck D's definition of the music as the "black CNN" (Zaru, 2017).

[6] I derive this formulation from Tricia Rose's notion of "black cultural expressivity" to refer to the process through which the music forms (re)produced in the *banlieues* are mass mediated to a mainstream audience, often with a social and political content pertaining to these marginal areas.

The appeal of rap music to youths from more affluent white backgrounds might also be linked to the frustration with the mainstream pop scene that reflects an expanding middle class sensibility and appeals more to an adult audience. The captivating beats and rhythms of the new genre into which the political sensibilities and struggles of ethnic youths are condensed have not only offered an alternative for the white youths' consumerist predilections but also channeled awareness of the themes the music discussed, generating a sympathetic consumption of the music. Where rap is often denied airtime on major TV and Radio stations and is excluded from the official pop charts primarily due to its oppositional content, the emergence of foreign and independent artist-owned record labels have enabled rappers to forge a clientele/support base among white youths. The creation of trending independent radio stations also has enabled the political and social content of the music to reach mass audiences in various areas of the French society.

Interestingly, the *banlieue*-based dancefloors and basement studios which emerged as a response to the privatization of the public space and the banishment of visible minority youths from mainstream leisure space have been marked by the presence of white youths who increasingly share these places. However, such trends of cross-racial contact hosted by music settings have been obscured more recently by breakthroughs in music technologies where the consumption of the *banlieue* cultural expressivity may no longer entail physical presence in these peripheral areas. In ways unforeseen by the exclusionary forces of white supremacy within the French leisure and entertainment industry, these underground and virtual scenes open outlets into the dominant culture. The image of the *banlieues* and the stereotypes about their dwellers is shattered in the encounters enabled through these alternative leisure spaces as well as in the consumption of the music on digital platforms. Black elements are blended in the musical forms to create an antiracist mobilization in which sympathetic white youths are increasingly embroiled. French rappers synthesize black culture and politics into an antiracist mobilization that generates a wide base of support. Its channels of distribution, with the music as a strategy of mass mobilization and support, differ from the mass membership tactics at the heart of mainstream antiracist organizations.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has looked into the major responses to racism in France. It has attempted to highlight the ways the political culture of intransigent republican universalism has decisively shaped the way racism is perceived and antiracist agendas are fought. French mainstream antiracism is articulated in strictly color-blind terms; the dissociation of race from antiracism is assumed capable of dismantling racial structures and undoing the longstanding effects of white supremacy. In ruling race out of the public debate the French state and the French civic community organizations that have operated within its prescriptive frameworks have produced an ambiguous antiracism, one caught between a rhetorical rejection of race and racial thinking *and* a mere denunciation of racism (Taguieff, 1989). When denounced racism is invariably confined to crimes and offenses of racial bigotry and hatred. From Vichy to the more recent controversy around the phenomenal rise of the FN to the scene of national politics French antiracism has remained largely directed towards a response to neo-fascist movements. In that sense, the most diehard antiracists have remained essentially concordant with the most fundamentalist republicans.

However, the limitations of these antiracist models have been exposed more recently by a burgeoning ethnic mobilization that proliferated around black stances and meanings. An essential characteristic of these forces is that they have supplied new modes of political commentary and protest that mark a fundamental break from mainstream antiracism. Their festive yet combatant nature, unbound by institutional limitations and party politics, negotiates the received boundaries of what constitutes antiracist praxis. Hip hop has furnished a potent language for political mobilization and articulation, even as the radical potentialities of this youth subculture have been obscured by attempts to suppress it which oftentimes involved law suits.

The themes at the heart of this youth movement contrast with the narrow definitions of racism that have informed mainstream organizations and institutions. Here racism is of diffuse nature rather than the intentional behavioral aberration of marginal extreme neo-fascist groups. The emphasis on police brutality and exclusion from meaningful work extends the politics of antiracism beyond daily micro-aggressions and hate crimes that are the focus of the more formal strands. The music brings to the forefront of political negotiation the systemic and more pervasive forms of institutionalized and state-sanctioned violence while questioning the dominant representations and moral panics that lock Maghrebi communities in the ahistorical category of *culturally disruptive populations*.

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