The politicization of black identities and "agonistic democracy": a comparative analysis of France and Colombia

La politización de las identidades negras y "democracia agonística": un análisis comparativo de Francia y Colombia

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Abstract

The categorization of populations as black is an emerging policy tool in democracies concerned with multiculturalism and social cohesion. Under the paradigm of the fight against discriminations, policies have been designed in order to mitigate inequalities pervasive in race relations, thereby raising the question of how the Blacks, who have been constructed as a subordinate category in social representations and practices, may be specifically targeted by public action. France and Colombia here display very contrastive landscapes: while Colombia has adopted a multicultural constitution in the 1990s and publicly acknowledges ethnic minorities, France still very much operates within a Republican color-blind framework and uses territorial or socio-economic angles to target ethnic minorities. However, both countries offer a surprisingly similar situation vis-à-vis the positioning of the Blacks at the center of political discourses on cultural diversity and its issues, even though the difficulty to provide a univocal definition of Blackness relates to specific historical patterns of colonization and migration in each country. Both France and Colombia also tend to frame policies targeting the Blacks in terms of citizenship, often claiming to facilitate the inclusion of otherwise excluded groups in the demos.

Key words: Multiculturalism, Agonistic Democracy, Colombia, France, Blacks, Republic.

Resumen

La denominación "población negra" puede verse como una herramienta de los discursos políticos emergente en las democracias que se ocupan de la multiculturalidad y la cohesión social. Bajo el paradigma de la lucha contra las discriminaciones, se han ido diseñando políticas públicas con el fin de mitigar las profundas desigualdades fundadas en causas raciales, elevando así la cuestión de cómo los Negros, que han sido históricamente vistos y tratados como una categoría subordinada en las representaciones y prácticas sociales, pueden ser objeto de estas políticas públicas por parte del Estado. Francia y Colombia muestran paisajes muy contrastados con respecto a este tema: mientras que Colombia se ha adopto una
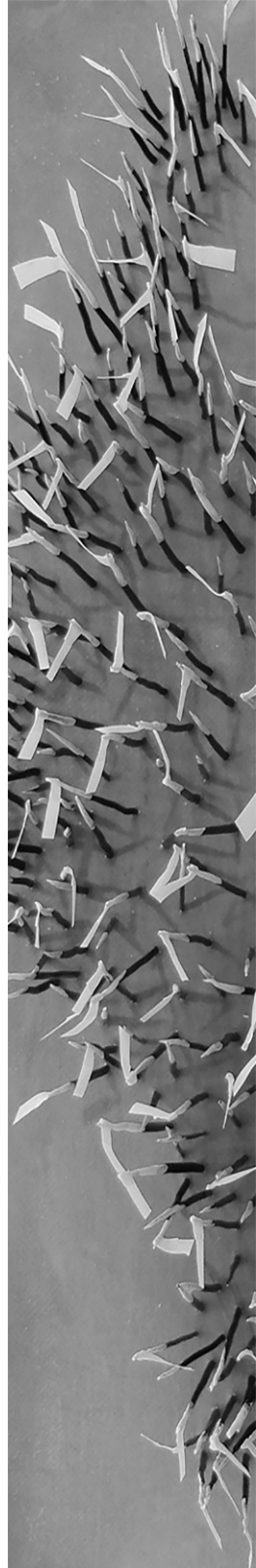
constitución multicultural en la década de 1990 y se reconoce públicamente las minorías étnicas, en Francia sigue operando un discurso republicano que se muestra ciego a la idea de incluir el color de la piel como un elemento de análisis social (daltonismo republicano) y utiliza ángulos territoriales o socioeconómicos para abordar el tema de las minorías étnicas. No obstante lo anterior, ambos países ofrecen una situación sorprendentemente similar con respecto al posicionamiento de los negros en el centro de los discursos políticos sobre la diversidad cultural y sus problemas. Así, pese a la dificultad de ofrecer una definición unívoca de lo que significa "ser Negro", en los dos países, esta cuestión se relaciona con los patrones históricos específicos de la colonización y la migración en cada país. Tanto Francia como Colombia tienden a enmarcar las políticas dirigidas a las poblaciones negras en términos de ciudadanía, buscando como objetivo primero la inclusión de los grupos excluidos de del demos.

Palabras clave: Multiculturalismo, Democracia agonística, Colombia, Francia, Negros, República.

Introduction

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The categorization of populations as black is an emerging policy tool in democracies concerned with multiculturalism and social cohesion. Under the paradigm of the fight against discriminations, policies have been designed in order to mitigate inequalities pervasive in race relations, thereby raising the question of how the Blacks, who have been constructed as a subordinate category in social representations and practices, may be specifically targeted by public action. France and Colombia here display very contrastive landscapes and in fact may appear to be opposite cases with regards to the accommodation of ethnic/racial minorities[1], the first often considered to be operating within an "universalist" institutional

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[1]   We do not subscribe to any essentialist definition of race, or ethnicity but treat them as categories of social representations and practices. Race and racial characteristics are born in situation of interactions, therefore they are not fixed once and for all on a given individual. Race as a category is commonplace in Colombian discourses yet is banned from French public discourses, where it is replaced by the euphemized notion of ethnicity. Our denomination race/ethnicity has been constructed so as to render visible the processes by which racial categorization becomes politicized and enters the realm of dominant public discourses.

framework while the latter has been increasingly equated with "multiculturalism" —both of these terms have entered public debates and have come to bear meanings rather distant from their conceptualization within social sciences. Actually, while Colombia has adopted an avowedly multicultural constitution in the 1990s and publicly acknowledges ethnic minorities in order to try and solve issues pertaining to socio-economic inequalities between groups, France still very much operates within a Republican color-blind framework and uses territorial or socio-economic angles to target ethnic minorities. Yet both these representations need to be complicated. While France seems to be the model case for universalist, color-blind Republicanism ever since the French Revolution, it has been demonstrated that racial politics were not absent from the formation of the nation-state and, correlatively, of "national identity" (Noiriel 2007). Colombia has been one of the first Latin American countries to include pluriculturality as an historical and cultural national patrimony. This shift, from a monocultural Nation-State (with a republican and Jacobin vision of the Nation), towards a multicultural one, has taken place with the Constitutional change in 1991. From this moment on, Black people, historically invisibilized, acquire the "right" to a political, social and cultural existence.

However, both countries offer a surprisingly similar situation vis-à-vis the positioning of the Blacks at the center of contemporary political discourses on cultural diversity and its issues, even though the difficulty to provide a univocal definition of Blackness relates to specific historical patterns of colonization and migration in each country. Both France and Colombia also tend to frame policies targeting the Blacks in terms of citizenship, often claiming to facilitate the inclusion of otherwise excluded groups in the *demos* —especially when in fact issues of redistribution are concerned. The history of Black people in both countries, like in many countries of immigration, is one of displacement, domination and subordination— but also of agency. In France, it is related to a centuries-old history of slave trade, colonization and migration, which, as we will see, are largely present in public debates. Yet one may argue that the current situation of Black people in France in fact conflates two

different histories: one of long-term colonization and incorporation within the French nation-state in the Antilles and one of post-colonial migration from Africa after World War II. This conflation gives birth to many ambiguities in discourses dealing with Black people, even if it has repeatedly denounced by scholars discussing the "Black question" (Durpaire 2006).

Despite the recent official tendency to portray France as a country of immigration since the XIX century with a long history of incorporating immigrants and their children within its institutions such as the National Education System, it has been argued that until the 1970s France ignored itself as a country of immigration (Noiriel 1988). Since World War II, France has encouraged and relaxed its national borders at different times, primarily in response to its changing economic and demographic need. In the 1950s and the 1960s, most of the people who emigrated to France came from South Europe —Spain, Portugal, Italy— to work in French firms which lacked workforce. From the mid 1960s on, a new wave of immigrants came from the former French colonies of Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, later of Asia. Black African migrants were incorporated in a Fordist mode production after World War II when they helped sustaining France's then booming manufacturing system, where they filled low-paying jobs. In 1974, the ban on immigration modified radically the socio-demographic characteristics of immigrants. Like other unqualified migrants, they were struck by the ban on legal immigration after the oil shock, and by new provisions for family reunification. Because family reunion was one of the few ways left to immigrate in France, the migrant population became increasingly female and younger, when the families of former "migrant workers" came to join them to live in France. Also the countries of origin became increasingly diverse and distant (Thierry and Rogers, op. cit.), with a rise in Asian immigrants (INSEE 1994). Black Africans, even though they represent a minority of immigrants, tend to be over-publicized in public discourses and are often described as irregular migrants or as taking advantage of lax family reunification policies. The turn towards a "knowledge-based society" during the current globalization era has further segmented the labor market, leaving

its ethnic nature untouched: labor markets are ethnically and sexually segmented. Yet much of the current debates on "African migrants", as we will see, deal with black French people of migrant descent whose integration is described as problematic. Despite the long-term existence of a Black minority in France, many issues described as parts of the "Black question" are in fact characteristic of migration, thereby indicating that, like many other non-whites in France, the Blacks are increasingly framed as aliens and unwelcome newcomers.

In Colombia, the history of Black people is also associated with a history of slave trade and colonization. The history of slavery, and particularly the moral and social wounds caused to Black people, have been the topic of many debates which have led to the recognition of Black people as social actors (as well as the Indians and Criollos) of the history of this country. During the last 20 years, academic, legal and political as well as civil mobilizations revealed the evolution of this population: passing from official slavery (XVII–XX century) to the abolition of slavery (1851). However, the abolition didn't erase institutional and social racism (to a large extent interiorized by the Blacks). However, despite the fact that the Black has been recognized by the law as a citizen after the abolition of slavery, s/he remained socially subordinate (Munera, 1998). Yet from the late XIX century on, the Black individual -born in Colombian territory or not- has been seen by the politicians of the time (Los Liberales), as a citizen. Later on, since the 30s, the communist left wing presented the Blacks (like the Indians) as people oppressed for social and economical reasons, far from the social-racial concerns that had structured the Nation-States throughout the American continent, and despite the relationship —still very often asymmetrical— with the other social racial components of the country (Whites–mestizos) in the first part of the XX century.

In the 60s and the 80s, the Africanist and Pan Africanist discourses, with the concept of *negrology* (Césaire, Fanon, etc.), among others, stemming from the Caribbean islands and the USA, circulated and generated a growing awareness that raised much interest among various anthropologists (N. Fridemann). Starting from this moment slowly

emerged the thinking that condemns the exclusion of the Blacks in education, politics and culture. However, civil society associations did not start their mobilization as fast as their academic "partners", since they were divided by diverging perceptions of "negritude" in a mixed country. This situation would change starting from the 1991 Constitution and the law 70 of 1993 (part 1). These dates mark the beginning of the progressive politicization of black identity, a process that until now has reached its "state-led institutionalization" by the means of *Affirmative Action* policies (strongly inspired by the North-American experience) and the programs of promotion and defense of the "Afrodescendance" (ethno-education, national celebrations for *Afro-Colombian heritage*, for the abolition of slavery, etc.), becoming an important element for national politics and bilateral politics with the United States. Even if this "top-down" approach to the incorporation of ethnic relations on the political agenda is present in both countries, we shall see that Black people have developed a political agency throughout their history and seized available political opportunities.

In both countries, we find that issues related to a "Black problem" are increasingly present in the public sphere. Such problems differ according to the local situation of Black people and are framed in terms varying according to the countries' histories, yet they address the same situation of measurable inequality, especially in socio-economic terms. While it should not be inferred that all inequalities from which Black people suffer in both countries are to be explained solely in class terms, but display multifaceted situations of intersectionality, socio-economic issues appear to be at the forefront of debate regarding them. Yet we are immediately confronted with the paradox that if evidence of a "Black question" is often of socio-economic nature, its discussion has taken an increasingly cultural tone in both countries, which public policies aimed at alleviating this situation tend to address through the angle of citizenship practices. Today, discussions of the civic integration of ethno-racial minorities are caught up in what appears to be an unsolvable ambiguity: on the one hand, minorities are seen as threats to the community (either of a cultural or of a political nature); yet their participation in the political system is seen as

evidence of its excellent functioning. The Blacks are therefore considered both as a problem and as a solution for both democratic systems, and their political participation both a necessary improvement in order to solve key issues in both societies and an achievement demonstrating their intrinsic qualities.

Our paper will focus on the politicization of Black issues in both countries: we will examine how the development of public policies aimed at tackling the "Black question" has allowed for a development of Black political actors that is actors mobilizing and intervening in the political sphere as Black. We argue that examining the definition of citizenship explicitly or implicitly contained in these public policies and discourses is essential to understanding the current politicization of Black identities in both countries. Actually, the paradigm of inclusion refers to a notion of citizenship in which it is seen as an element of social cohesion, not as the exercise of political rights in a pluralist and contested public sphere. We will demonstrate that policies aimed at mitigating discriminations against Black people and their socio-cultural integration end up co-opting so-called representatives of Black minorities into the policy process while marginalizing political actors critical of government policies. This in turn radicalizes the positions held by marginalized Black political movements or public intellectuals: they are silenced either by a dominant paradigm refusing to acknowledge the specificity of Black experiences in the French case or by other hegemonic political actors in the field of race relations, such as indigenous movements, in the Colombian case. These processes may be analyzed using the concept of the "ethnicization of race" which refers to the construction of racial characteristics borne by individuals as ethnicized elements likely to be politically mobilized. While racial characteristics here refer to the multifaceted and fluid construction of identities in a pluralist context, for us the ethnicization of race corresponds to the increased fixity of traits associated with race in order to frame them in political discourses and public policies. Using Mouffe's concept of "agonistic democracy", we will show that the construction of Blackness as a political category is intrinsically contentious and therefore leads to a heightening of interracial social tensions. However, such dissent, the

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mark of a truly democratic process, is repressed in both countries to avoid an ethnicization of political discontent – but it ironically re-appears in the form of opportunities seized by a variety of political actors, in a context in which ethnicity becomes a key dimension of politics.

1. Black identities at the top of the media and political agenda in both countries

1.1. In Colombia: debates regarding the implementation of affirmative action policies

A mini-debate about *affirmative action* policies in favor of "Afro-Colombian" people has been going on in Colombia for the last few months. Two events triggered this debate: first, the claims of a young woman who said she had not received a scholarship for "Afro-Carthaginians" because she was not "black enough"; then the assault of a young "Afro" woman a few days later. Unfortunately, the issue these cases raised, albeit relayed by local and national newspaper, did not receive the attention it deserves in the political, social and academic life of Colombia.

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The first case started with a letter of "denunciation" published by Mrs. Amor (a social worker) in Cartagena's local newspaper, *El Universal*, in which she reported having been ranked second in the selection process for the admission to a Master's Programme in Development and Culture, and said she had not received the scholarship for these studies because, according to her, she was not "really, really" Black. Clearly, Ms. Amor accused the organizers of this process of not selecting her as a recipient of the grant for Afro-Colombians because she was "not Black enough" (Amor, 2011).

The organizers of the selection process for the admission to the Master's program and the award of the scholarship responded by saying that the reason for which the scholarship had not been awarded to Ms. Amor was that she did not meet one of the criteria, namely the situation of "social and economic vulnerability" (Amor belongs to an "average" social

stratum). Although the fact that Ms. Amor is "Afro" was not questioned, she was not in a situation of economic vulnerability. In contrast, the other two candidates met this condition. Consequently, Martha Amor could register for the Master's program, thanks to her academic qualifications, but did not qualify for the scholarship.

In the second case, Yeni Castro, an Afro-Carthaginian woman, had been the victim, in Cartagena, of an assault (with air rifle shots) while she was out with some friends. The assailants were middle-class white young men and women. Ms. Castro was shot with rubber bullets, to the cries of *"dale dale a la negra ... ... tiro al blanco (...) inmunda negra te dio"*. This event provoked the indignation of many intellectuals of the city, surprised by the banality with which the media treated this serious and deplorable event.

The local echo was, here again, followed by a regional and national echo. A few days after the event, Ms. Castro's assault was reported in regional and national newspapers. Once again, articles in favor of and against affirmative action policies were published, criticizing on the one hand the excessive use of the racial component in the discourse of the Latin American left (such as Morales and Chavez), and denouncing on the other hand the drift to „racial and religious hatred imported from Europe and the United States (Cfr. Abad 2011 and López Hernández 2011).

The ethnicization of race through the construction of an "Afro" identity

The implementation of affirmative action policies has immediately been seen as a major political act aiming at remedying an inexcusable omission of the State of Colombia: the "invisibility" of the ethnic identity of indigenous groups and of Black people in Colombia and the damages that this "gesture" had caused to these two sectors of the population, by ignoring them and turning them into objects of social, cultural, political and economic inequalities.

This *mea culpa* began in 1991 with the new Constitution (CPC-91), which states in its article 7 that the "State recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation". This new situation means to *indigenists* the "reward" of a long history of seeking acceptance of Indigenous culture as an heritage, part of national identity, and provides for the first time, to the advocates of a Black identity, a transitional article in the Constitution (Article 55), stating that "Black communities that have come to occupy uncultivated land in rural areas bordering the rivers of the Pacific Basin [...]" should be respected in their cultural traditions. Through this transitional section (converted into Law 70, July 27, 1993), Black people, as an ethnic and cultural component, officially entered in the order of political and institutional representations of the Colombian nation. The new CPC-91, strongly influenced by political theories of multiculturalism, provides the legal instruments to promote the materialization of ethnic and cultural diversity, such as the recognition of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, as a collective subject, i.e. a subject that benefits from rights granted to the community as a unit, beyond the (individual) subjects that constitute it.

Law 70 of August 27, 1993 provides specifically the Black communities with the right to collective ownership of the territories they occupy (Act 70, 1993. article.4 Chapter III, 7), the protection of the economic activities they undertake and that provide for their subsistence (Act 70, 1993. Chapter VII, Article 47), the right to be consulted on the measures that may affect the right to exploit forest resources on their territories (Act 70, 1993. Chapter IV Art. 20, 23, 24). It calls to the inalienable right to an education specifically oriented by the ethno-historic particularity of the Black population, including, in the body of the Law, mechanisms to protect the "Afro" cultural identity in Colombia (Law 70, 1993. Chapter VI, Section 32, 44). In the political sphere the law happens to suggest that "In accordance with the Article 176 of the National Constitution, we establish the special circumscription to elect two (2) members of Black communities, thereby ensuring their participation in the House of Representatives "[Act 70, 1993. Chapter VIII, Section 66]. It establishes, in addition, the creation "in the Ministry of Government, of

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the Department of Black Community Affairs with a seat in the Council of Economic and Social Policy" [Act 70, 1993. Chapter VIII, Section 67].

Following the creation of all these instruments, a mobilization began to organize and implement a broad representation of the Black population of the country. Yet the problem caused by the reductionism in the definition of Black communities in Law 70 arose quickly, given that it confines them to a geographic area (Pacific Rim) and to traditions within the country-city relationship (Wade 1993, Cunin 2003, Hoffmann 2000).

Indeed, a large part of the Colombian Black population is scattered in urban centers and/or lives in the Caribbean coast of the Atlantic and in some cases, such as Cartagena, is integrated into the urban dynamics that go back the time of the colony (XVIIIth and XIXth century) and the formation of the republic (formation of the nation-state starting from 1811). In these cases, the people, their lifestyles and socio-historical experiences, do not correspond to those described by Law 70.

In this situation, it was thus necessary either to extend the features of the category of "Black community" offered by the law, or to create a new categorization, more inclusive, that would not lose sight of the dynamic and fluid nature of this identity. The second option was chosen. Thus, the mobilization for the recognition of a Colombian Black identity in the cities of the country was carried out through a process of *ethnicization of the Black race*, giving way to the more inclusive acceptance of the Afro" category. If cultural elements did not serve as the basis for affirmative action policies anymore, racialized elements took their place which were then ethnicized, that is attached to cultural traits supposedly characteristic of the newly extended "Afro" category.

From this moment on, we can say that the defense and promotion of Black identity in Colombia laid on two components:

1. On the one hand, there are the black communities of the Pacific, which correspond to the definition established by Law 70. They benefit directly from all the legal measures mentioned above.
2. On the other hand, there are people who are not located in that specific geographic area and can not "show" their participation to a

traditional way of life, and therefore had to create "Afro" associations: nonprofit organizations, with statutes and a legal personality, self-defined as consisting of "Afro-Colombians" women and men. These associations receive approval from the Directorate of Black, Afrocolombians, Raizales and Palenqueras Communities Affairs, within the Ministry of Interior and Justice, at the national level, and possibly the corresponding Consultative Commission for Black Communities that accredits them to present themselves to programs and projects of assistance or cooperation provided by the state or international agencies, targetted at, respectively, *"Afro-Colombian"* or *Afrolatin* populations. These associations, in turn, certify the condition of "Afro" of an individual, when he requires it to participate in grants or *affirmative action* programs.

Afrocolombian associations, in turn, make use of the *ethnicization of race* device. In the Columbian case, we mean by ethnicization of race a process that occurs when, in spaces of complex identities (interlinked or superposed, as in this case), takes place a shift of some of the symbolic characteristics (rituals, dance, music, etc..) which were initially (historically) related to (a) specific group (s) enrolled in a spatial-historical process of racializing socialization, a situation that led to their real marginalization, forcing them to strategies of resistance that entail retaining some symbolic features (Black people of the Pacific, descendants of slaves). These features are then attributed to a wider social group that has actually been of great cultural significance despite a heavy history of exclusion. Urban Black people in Columbia have seen, during this historical process, their survival mechanisms against the dominant culture imply a major real and symbolic acculturation in the twentieth century. Through mass audiovisual culture and the cultural industry of the late XXth century, this acculturation has contributed to generating a supranational and transnational culture (Carvalho 2005: 11).

This *ethnicization of race* process had already begun with Law 70 of 1993 - through the definition of "black communities" of the Pacific, assimilating them to an indigenous community (Gros, 2000: 80), but

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reached its greatest extent of refinement with the inclusion of the term "Afro". This term, "borrowed" from the African-American studies, has the double virtue of allowing, on the one hand, the inclusion of a large proportion of the Black people of Colombia, or self-defined as such, although they do not match the requirements of Law 70. On the other hand, it becomes a bastion of a "new" culture, mobile and preformative, around which one hopes to consolidate a *collective identity* (black), so that it would be assumed and claimed by the actual or potential members of the Colombian black ethnic minority. To achieve this, the term "Afro" should be carrying a collective project (cultural, political, lifestyle, etc., that will give unity and direction to the process of building this collective cultural identity called *afrocolombianity*.

While the term "Afro" was adopted relatively easily and has penetrated the legal, associative and academic jargons, making itself self-evident and in many cases used as a synonymous of *black people* (when it refers to a group) or *Black / Negro* man / woman (when it refers to an individual), it can also be ambiguous and cause discomfort. It is ambiguous because both the institutions in charge of implementing affirmative action policies and afro activists themselves use this term to refer *to someone with a black phenotype or who grew up in a culture of African descent.* Porosity between the racial category Black and the ethnic notion Afro causes discomfort, because the ethnicization of race process, implicit in *Afrocolombianity*, may be perceived as forced and unfair by those who do not consider as obvious the relationship between the ethnic category "Afro" and the race category "Black".

This is the position of part of the Colombian population, among them many Whites of course, but also the entire population who cannot or does not want to belong to the ethnic category "Afro", escaping it by falling into the category of *mestizo*, and therefore cannot benefit from affirmative action programs proposed by local governments and the national government; so, they feel forgotten by the State and its welfare policies and vulnerable. Such is the case of the people we call *historical poor.*

1.2. In France: framing a "Black issue" in a universal context

The current discussion of an "African problem" in France and educational failure[2]

Discourses on immigrants constructed through and in the media over the past dozen years in France have clearly singled out children of North African origin as the most prone to involvement in acts of violence, delinquency or drug-related behavior, not to mention school drop-out, truancy, and disciplinary action, and more recently gang rape. Such negative stereotyping now seems to have transferred to Black youth of Sub-Saharan origin, whose failure in the school system is often blamed on their parents' polygamy practices. This negative media coverage significantly contributes to their continued stigmatization, exclusion and vulnerability to discrimination. In many societal spheres, and increasingly in the media, explanations for the low educational attainment of migrants that are linked to their cultural background are often quoted, such as the size of migrant families, or their "unwillingness" to integrate. Black African migrants are here at the forefront of such stereotypes, since they are deemed to have too many children and to relinquish their educational duties.

　　In fact, the demographic changes affecting immigration flows have had a strong impact on migrant children or children with a migrant background, who were increasingly numerous in the French education system, since migrant children have the same rights and obligations to attend school than French ones, no matter their legal status. At the beginning of the 90s, foreign children accounted for 9.4 % of all children in elementary school in France, compared to 7.7 % in the mid-70s. The rise in the rate of foreign children at school until the mid-80s resulted from the policy of family reunion. Almost the totality of foreign children attend public schools: immigrant families tend to have a smaller income;

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[2]　This part draws from the results of a research project carried out in collaboration with Elise Féron, which compared the French and Danish situations with regards to discrimination in educational policies (Beauzamy and Féron 2011).

besides, adaptation classes for children who do not speak French well are for most part opened in public schools. Concerning children of migrants, the French school is highly open to them insofar as equal opportunities remain the rule. As a consequence, the French schooling system is, in principle, indifferent to differences, and puts forth an ideology of equality and secularism deemed to help creating citizens while ensuring a steadily rising level of education for everyone. This model has however been widely criticized following the seminal critique made by Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), which shed light on how the schooling system, by giving in the reproduction of the "culture bourgeoisie", de facto discriminated against children of low-income families. This led to a growing awareness of the discrimination against children of migrants for the past twenty years. But despite these critics and numerous educational reforms to improve the overall achievement of pupils, assessment procedures in the educational system have not changed much: they still unwillingly favour French native pupils. Besides Bourdieu's and Passeron's interest for the mechanisms of elite reproduction, there has been a growing concern for underperforming kids: numerous debates pertaining to the problematic evaluation of public schools indicate an ongoing concern for "school failure" *(échec scolaire)*, a situation in which pupils are many years behind schedule and exit schools without any diploma. Policies targeting underperformance were then designed following the same ideological basis as the array of social policies assembled under the umbrella denomination of *"politique de la ville"* (urban policy).

This challenge of underperforming pupils has been met by policy choices mirroring how the problem was conceptualized: here an explanation based on social class has dominated public discourses, yet has increasingly left way to "cultural" explanations based on ethnic belonging and ethnicity. Initially, school failure has been addressed by displaying additional resources to schools located in poor neighbourhoods instead of addressing the specific difficulties met by children of migrant origin in the French public school system. Today, educational inequalities related to language acquisition, socio-economic disadvantage and discrimination, and the problems these pose for the learner, the class,

the educators and the schooling system, continue to be addressed within these broadly-defined blanket policies. This may in part be attributed to the ideological premises upon which National Education in France was founded – uniform (universal), equal and secular education for all children - and the concurrent denial or repression of any and all references to differential treatment, be it in the interest of eradicating discrimination or inequalities, on the basis of 'racial', 'ethnic', 'religious' or 'national' origins. In the 1980s, the Ministry of National education has adopted a policy of positive discrimination in favour of priority areas, in order to reduce the impact of social inequality on educational achievement. Educational Priority Areas (ZEP) were created in 1981 for the benefit of all pupils —schooled in primary, junior high and senior (mainstream and vocational) high schools— living in socio-economically and culturally disadvantaged environments. Schools zoned as priority education areas are allotted additional staff, teaching and financial resources, intended to reinforce existing educational activities and facilitate the implementation of innovative locally-based initiatives.

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Later educational policies continue to define priority education in terms of target sites where the population is most at risk for schooling difficulties, failure or dropout, as well as violence, deviance and delinquency. Many of the schools which fall within priority education areas or networks cater to an overly high proportion of immigrant children and French children of immigrant descent, many of them Black (Lagrange 2010) : in fact, the high proportion of pupils of migrant origin has become a popular proxy for other factors – from school underperformance to insecurity. Paradoxically, however, the failure to recognise the "minority" status of these populations, while simultaneously deploying educational resources to improve their schooling outcomes, means that individuals continue to be exposed to implicit forms of discrimination (segregation, ethnicization and stigmatisation) that interact with educational outcomes without these factors being taken into account in official policy.

The Republican injunction regarding the provision for differential treatment on the basis of 'ethnic' or other origins meant that the policy had to be formulated in general terms – as addressing the educational

needs or difficulties of all children whose disadvantaged social, economic or 'cultural' situation hinders their achievement or integration within the schooling system. Yet the French schooling system is today faced with having to address the increased ethnicization of the difficulties associated with schooling migrants and children of migrants and the implications that this has for school relations (among teachers and pupils, teachers and parents, pupils of different 'ethnic' origins) and discrimination in education (segregation, orientation practices). Ethnicity is not only a salient element of pupils' identities —although in complex and multifaceted ways at odds with popular representations of black or Muslim separatism—, it is also a prevalent element of public debates concerning schools and how to improve their performances. The increased politicization of ethnic identities within schools and in public discourse creates a double-bind for educators and policy makers who cannot respond effectively to these issues without compromising on the basic principles of equal, secular Republican education. The Republican taboo on ethnic, religious, or cultural origins blinds the schooling system to an ever-widening gap between the principles underpinning National Education —equality, tolerance, non-discrimination on the basis of group differences— and the ordinary practices which take place daily within its 'jurisdiction'. Moreover, this taboo prevents the institution and its professionals from conceptualizing and addressing the question of discrimination as it takes place in education and within the school.

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Blame it on African cultures – or Black subculture?

Yet it does not limit the multiplication of discourses claiming to unveil this taboo issue or to point at the "state of denial" in which French policymakers are concerning migrants' issues, including educational underperformance and high crime rate. Such is the case of the latest book by sociologist Hugues Lagrange, *Le Déni des cultures* —the denial of cultures (2010). In this hotly debated essay, Lagrange focuses his analysis on the underperformance of Black pupils at school, and examines explanations for this state of affairs. His core thesis is that

cultural explanations have been rejected in favor of politically correct color-blind socio-economic approaches which have failed. However, far from obfuscating the uncomfortable truth as Lagrange implies it, studies on immigrants in Europe have already demonstrated that pupils and students with a migrant background tend to underperform in France (Wihtol de Wenden 1999). Several indicators show it: foreign students are clearly overrepresented in adaptation classes for people who do not finish the first cycle of high school and are oriented in professional classes and vocational training. In the second cycle of high school, they are also more likely to attend professional classes than general or technical classes. Foreigners living in France tend to have far fewer diplomas than French people: in 1990, 60 % of all foreigners declared that they did not have any diploma, compared to only 27 % of French citizens by birth. Immigrants fare generally worse as compared to native pupils because most of them belong to low-educated and low-income families. If these facts are publicized, the explanations given to them by most political actors —politicians and policymakers, but also NGOs and public intellectuals— however deny that the migrant origin of pupils might be at fault. Lagrange chooses exactly the opposite strategy, and goes as far as to borrow from American theses related to the "culture of poverty" responsible for the enduring underperformance and hyper criminality observable within the African-American community. Such theses claim that the majority society is not to be blamed for blatant racial inequalities, which are caused by the adherence by African-Americans themselves to cultural traits at odds with the dominant culture: factors related to family structure are put forth – especially the enduring thesis blaming the supposedly matriarchal structure of Black families in which divorce rates are skyrocketing. Lagrange however notices that most children of Black African origin do not live in "broken homes", even if their family structure clearly differs from the dominant French one, with more children, stronger inter-generational ties, sometimes particular —and illegal in France— forms of patriarchal structures such as polygamy. Yet despite these blatant differences, he imports debates on the "culture of

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poverty" in the French context where they resonate well with discourses blaming youth *"banlieue"* subcultures.

Indeed polygamy has been at the center of many debates regarding African migrants and is a much-used angle used to categorize them in a pejorative fashion. While experts on polygamy practices stress out the fact that it is a situated practice concerning only a small minority of migrants, polygamy has become a generic rhetorical tool in order to vilify African migrants as a group. It is connected in public discourses to an array of issues to which it is supposedly —and wrongly— a key element, such as social provision fraud, patriarchal domination and the decline in fathers' authorities. Polygamy has been blamed, for instance, for contributing to the eruption of the major riots of 2005 (Beauzamy and Naves 2006). Besides recycling traditional racist frames blaming the hyperfertility of groups "taking over" the endangered nation, polygamy as a theme has managed to bring together issues at the center of public discourses on migrants: seemingly feminist frames insisting of female victimization meet with conservative anti-youth ones, critiques of a lax Welfare state meet with law-and-order discourses blaming immigrants as factors for rising criminality and illegality. Because of the Republican disregard for ethnic, religious, or cultural distinctions, official discourses mainly put forward socio-economic factors in order to explain the low educational attainment of migrants and children of migrants. When migrant cultures are evoked, it is in their utmost 'traditional' and anti-modern aspects such as polygamy.

In discourses on polygamy, the characterization of the culprits varies from ethnological denominations (Soninké vs. Peul for instance) which remain very abstract for the general non-African public, metaphorical denominations abundant in Lagrange's essay ("peoples of the forest" which strongly echo the Columbian official characterization of Black people), vague geographical denominations (sub-Saharan or even African). Denominations evoking localities often serve as metonymies for Black people in general – for instance Lagrange, who warns us against the overgeneralization of cultural traits specific to certain African peoples to the whole group of African migrants, let alone Antilleans (p.166), often

derivates from localized ethnological observations to generalized claims about African migration. Many critiques of Lagrange have pointed at the danger of forcing a simplified ethnological approach of African peoples on Black French: claiming that they are French indeed is not denying cultural specificities deriving from their migrant background, but acknowledging that they have been profoundly reshaped by migration itself. Black French are therefore not African, even when they tend to identify in relation to their country or people of origin. Besides the obvious confusion between African and Antillean Blacks, which is so often denounced that it has become a topos of discourses on Black people, national, religious and class origins also help differentiating between various Black African identities. Yet we argue that this confusion is not a natural byproduct of the commonplace ignorance of African cultures, but a result of discourses framing the Black as impersonators of various social and cultural problems. It is an indication of an ongoing process of the ethnicization of race in which "Black culture" as a construct becomes the bearer of a number of fixed —and often pejorative— traits[3].

Discourses on education are therefore a good place to look at in order to understand why Black immigrants and children of immigrants have been recently framed as a problem. Changes in the explanations to migrant pupils' underperformances reveal the composite nature of integration policies as well as more general trends regarding the treatment of "visible minorities" in the public sphere. Socio-economic analyses have consistently pointed at the need for more resources for social policies, especially in areas where disadvantaged pupils are concentrated. Yet, arguments putting forward practices of discrimination have contributed to the critique of this color-blind argument and asked that educational institutions examine their own bias —intended or not— towards migrant pupils or non-white pupils. The recent prevalence of a paradigm of Otherism has led to an increasing tendency to blame migrant cultures for these issues: the ethno-racial (and gendered) categorization of pupils

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[3] The provocative title of the much discussed essay by Gaston Kelman, *Je suis noir et je n'aime pas le manioc* (I am Black but I don't like manioc)(2003) evokes this process by which racial categorization –Black– becomes equated with cultural traits which are forced upon individuals.

between the "integrated" and the "disintegrated" constructs this latter category of hopeless troublemakers. Cultural explanations help reify these categories since they assign an immovable ethnic identity which supposedly entirely defines behaviors and attitudes: although they have not yet found their ways into public policies, they dominate discourses and help undermining anti-discrimination actions since they clear the majority society from accusations of unequal treatment.

2. The politicization of Black identities

2.1. In Colombia: identity politics and the formation of "Afro-Colombianity"

Public policies: the politicization of cultural identity

- Pandora´s box

Legal and regulatory settings (CPC-91, Ley 70/1993, T-422/1996, Conpes 3310/2004) consolidate the politicization of the Colombian black cultural identity. Indeed, from these legal tools organizations and representatives of Pacific *black communities* and "Afro" groups in the country are going to promote cultural, social and economic demands, in support of the black population.

Examples are given by *affirmative action* policies for the "afro" people that have been implemented by way of public policies in several areas of the country, including programs such as "Employment in Action", "Youth in Action" "Families in Action, " "Paths to Peace", "Humanitarian Assistance", "Human Rights", "Transparency and Violence" and "Field in Action, among others. "

These programs are targeted at Colombians in general, but the Constitutional Court ruled in the sentence of the case 1410, 2000 that, in terms of access to limited goods —namely those for which demand exceeds supply—, "(…) in such cases it cannot be based on the assumption that all individuals, without distinction, are entitled to the limited good,

which makes it necessary to make its award based on reasonable criteria
(...)."Thus, in its application, are a priority "Afro-Colombian people that
are at extreme levels of poverty and discrimination and live in major
cities, that it to say, the population [of African descent] living outside
the Pacific Basin". We can see that a sort of "Affirmative Action" policy is
practiced indirectly, that, legally speaking, is not intended to contribute
to the construction of a cultural / ethnic *Afrocolombian* specificity, but
seeks to identify and promote the access of any citizen or Black people,
discriminated and vulnerable, to state-led social programs to improve
their living conditions.

Despite the regulations, as happened in the U.S., "Affirmative
Action" here has ended up becoming a theoretical and political argument
that involves racial and ethnic components that justify the fact that every
"Afro" feels, due to his condition of African descent (meaning a descendant
of slaves carrying a set of traditions that originate in these populations
"imported" as goods from the XVIIth century) with the legitimate
right to request priority and request redress from the Colombian State
historically driven by Whites , creoles and *mestizos*.

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- To rescue and to train

Take a specific case to see *affirmative action* policies in favor of Afro
"movements", such as the ethno-education which implies the setting up
of chairs of *Afro-Colombianity* in the context of programs for primary
and secondary schools (in public and private); it should not be limited
to the areas of greatest concentration of these populations, but should be
part of school curricula in order to achieve the main goal of contributing
to interethnic and intercultural dialogue, and respect for difference.

The extensive actual case law (provided via Constitutional rulings)
has contributed the discussion and helped to politicize the Black subject
as "Afro". The success in the "propagation" of the political effects of this
phenomenon of massive case law, allows us to affirm that the major
cities of Colombia (Bogotá, Cali, Medellin, Barranquilla and Cartagena)
now have a chair of *Afro-Colombianity* and a Commission for Black
communities. In these cities there are also "affirmative action" policies

that clearly establish a quota system and differential treatment (in all areas: health, children, gender, education, culture, sports, etc.) for Afro-Colombian populations as ethnic groups. In this sense, there has been an evolution on constitutional jurisprudence.

We are again facing the politicization of the "Afro" subject, by the means of the use of the vocabulary of *Afro-Colombianity* which has become a positive way to address Black issues. Around this speech of *Afro-Colombianity*, it has been built a civil society that identifies itself with its ethnic "Afro" belonging, and it has been strengthened to ensure their discursive autonomy with respect to indigenous organizations, their first allies. So, they ceased to be represented and defended by the Indigenous representatives during the Constituent Assembly (1991) to become true mobilizers of public opinion through the work of civil society activists, which are organized, and they converse with each other and with other groups, for example, the LGBT movement, the Affirmative Caribbean collective associates with *Afrodescents* Cabildo (Gavilaneo) and all of them holding that each other share their status as victims of social and political exclusion practices.

The scope of "Afro" associations is broad: these range from simple neighborhood organizations to political parties that regroup association members to become unavoidable political forces at all levels (local, departmental, regional and national). In some cases, the associations and the parties engage in transnational cooperation partnerships with Afro-American movements in the US, and the style of modern political negotiations, carry out lobbying in the U.S. Congress: such is the case for example of the Association of Black Communities Process (PCN) which has close ties of cooperation with human rights organizations like WOLA, Global Rights, an association of displaced Afro-Colombians USA (AFRODES USA), Afro-Colombian leaders living in the Metropolitan area in Washington, D.C., as well as certain congressmen. For example, in 2007, they met to discuss national and international politics affaires like human rights violation affecting people of African descent, related to the impact of Plan Colombia and the fumigations of coca plantations. In addition, national and local events organized to celebrate 2011 as the

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International Year of the African-descendants (65va UN Plenary Session in December 2009) and supported by the authorities and state institutions.

This situation means that the traditional parties and the government take into account the Afro-Colombian communities as political actors and potential partners in national electoral contests and bilateral relations. An example of this, is the creation of the Steering Committee under the Plan of Action on Racial and Ethnic Equality signed on January 12, 2010 by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia (Jaime Bermudez) and the Vice-Secretary of State of the USA (James Steinberg) representing their respective governments. This does not mean that before 1991 there were no political alliances with black elites, because, as explained Agudelo (2005), in areas of high concentration of black population, as the Pacific, there has been a Black elite since the XIXth century that maintained negotiations with the traditional political parties, particularly with the Liberal Party. The author devotes the fourth chapter of his book to this aspect, using the word *patronage* to explain that the elite has participated in *political action* in the region "understood this [political action] as a strategy of competition between groups " (Agudelo, 2005: 101); this means that the Black elite itself consciously participated in the fight for the conquest or the preservation of local political power, a fight that takes place through "political actors collectively organized in political parties or movements" (Agudelo, 2005: 101).

As we can see, the norm and the political discourse on the norm, which contributes to creating an 'Afro ideology', are two distinct issues. What we mean by this is not only the notion of a discourse that has a purely geographical sense ('Afro' implicitly refers to a historical and territorial origin: Africa) but also a discourse of ethnic identity, which gives it a historical (via the transatlantic slave trade), juridical (via the CPC-1), political and socio-cultural legitimacy, through the reality of social and material exclusion (Zizek, 2003:4).

Thus, it is common nowadays to speak about an *Afro Colombianity* or of an *Afro Colombian* ethnic identity, a notion often used in political circles, as well as social sciences and organizations. The shift from a geographical meaning to an ethnical, racial, political and juridical sense,

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has occurred softly and silently, trough – as Althusser would say – the use of ideological, ritual and institutional practices: for example the expressions of 'afro' folk traditions. Such expressions have been promoted from the top, by the state, channeled through cultural institutions. And before becoming the expression of the interiority of the pre-existing reality of the Black historical condition, these expressions have contributed to (re) creating this *Afro Colombianity*, which means that the latter accounts for the mechanisms that have generated it. With regards to the institutional side, public policies and the set up of specific political entities (such as the "Afro Issues Bureaus" (*"oficinas de atención a la población afro"*) are telling examples.

Our goal here is not to denounce the existence of this 'Afro ideology' as inappropriate, but to show how the ambiguous usage (and over usage) of the above mentioned categories generate tensions, that we name '*conflicts*', which should be overcome by the legislator's norm (when he refers to Colombia as a multi-cultural and multi-religious country, in 1991), whereas he tends to fear to have to be confronted to the agonistic aspect of democracy.

2.2. In France: debates on post-colonialism and racism open up the possibility for Black mobilizations

New debates on racism and discriminations and the racialization of debates

The French conception of racism has long been limited to intentional racism, and not to contextual, institutional or symbolic racism. Anti-racist mobilizations from the 1980s such as the "Marche des Beurs" (*March of the Arabs*) or SOS-Racisme put forth slogans insisting that France was a multi-colored, hybridized society: "Black Blanc Beur" (*Black, White, Arab*) addressed this call for fruitful coexistence in a positive and playful way. These mobilizations were mostly concerned with the risks they perceived in the rise of the radical right and more specifically its institutionalized wing, the Front National party, which

scored its first electoral breakthroughs at the same moment. Later, the diffusion of radical right discourses in the media and the progressive appropriation of some of its features by other actors (Beauzamy and Naves 2010) led to new concerns regarding this xenophobic turn of political discourses. While this concern for the increasing acceptability of racist discourses in the public sphere is still very much topical, it is no longer at the heart of debates concerning racism in France. In fact, attention has come to focus more on racist mundane actions rather than solely on racist political discourses and their translation in racist hate crimes by neo-nazis. When Michel Wieviorka directed the research project which led to the publication of *La France raciste* ("Racist France") in 1992, it uncovered – to the dismay of many commentators – the fact that the French Republican model of equality and non-discrimination based on the public disregard for race and ethnicity was in fact not working. A new theme arose, which pointed at the disillusion of young French people from migrant origin for whom the promises made by French institutions —such as meritocracy at school— were not kept, because institutions such as the police were themselves concerned with prejudices they were not addressing. *La France raciste* also opened up the Pandora's Box of addressing the existence of racist attitudes and actions perpetuated everyday by people who could not be easily categorized as fascist, such as recruiters or landlords, and contributed to the turn of debates from discussing racist hatred to everyday racism and institutional racism. Almost ten years before the transcription of the EU "Race" directive, it opened a debate which would then be framed in terms of discrimination.

It is commonplace to notice that the Europeanization process has led to a turn from "anti-racism" to "the fight against racial discrimination" in public policies tackling such questions since the late 1990s. The transcription of European directive 2000/43 of June 29th 2000, which defined "discrimination" in a comprehensive fashion in article 6, indeed put a lot of emphasis on uncovering unequal treatment in many situations where it was not necessarily accompanied or backed up by racist discourses. This turn was celebrated and in fact fuelled by anti-racist civil society organizations which were quick to propose new tools to measure

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discriminations such as "testing", a practice which helped uncover racist practices by provoking them. This focus on the measurement of discriminations, especially when they result from institutional designs and rules and do not involve the active agency of a racist actor, led to a focus of the debates on the problematic legality of "race statistics". While the many political and legal aspects of this question do not concern us here, one ought to notice that in order for statistics to be used to address racist prejudice or unequal treatment, they are to construct categories which will more or less correspond to the commonplace categorization as "Black"[4]. If some scientific and political discourses emphasize the role played by African cultures in explaining inequalities as we have seen, here "Black" is clearly defined as a category of social representations and practices with seldom any "cultural" content.

While this debate on the measurement of discrimination has led to fruitful discussions of how ethnicity manifests itself in social interactions, and especially in power relations, it has not been enthusiastically adopted by all people concerned with the implementation of anti-discrimination policies. For instance, civil servants tend to underestimate racial discrimination in public institutions and rely on the Republican egalitarian framework to deny that they might help reproducing unequal treatments. As a matter of fact, they too often consider that immigrants are simply not enough integrated, even when alleged victims of discrimination are indeed French citizens. Racism and discrimination are still very much intertwined in public discourses and many actors do not differentiate between them, which seems at odds with the repressive focus of anti-discrimination policies placing judicial courts at the center of the dispositive. Lastly, the focus on discrimination instead of racism has been suspected to fit into a multiculturalist agenda, which is deemed by anti-communitarians to give way to the birth of "ethnic quotas" and "race ghettos", Anglo Saxon countries being a negative mirror (Durpaire, op. cit.).

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[4]   Although the difficulties of linking an actual phenotypical appearance to this category have been noticed, for instance in the French context by N'Daye (2005).

While racism and discrimination are legally punishable crimes which have been addressed by a variety of public policies as well as civil society initiatives, the suspicion that the underperformance of Black people can be explained because of their own cultural traits justify why it could be legitimate to avoid them in certain circumstances. A recent scandal exemplified this issue: a meeting between high-ranking football federation executives was secretly recorded while they openly discussed putting unofficial anti-Black quotas into place for the selection in the national soccer team. They claimed that winning teams such as the Spanish one had no problem with their few Black players. When the conversation was publicized, it created a large turmoil, even though officials were quick to dismiss any rumors that legal action be conducted against the culprits. Despite the blatantly racist nature of the recorded conversation, many commentators openly asked whether it should really be treated as discrimination: in fact, they (and the football federation representative) claimed that what they had meant was that bi-national players were problematic because they were likely to opt for their other, African, nationality at the time of the selection. This shift from Black to African/alien was a good indication that anti-immigrant discourses have gained much credit in contemporary France, where they can openly be displayed in a variety of situations, even when illegal; and that the categorization of Africans as "Black" (in English) is characteristic of the current ethnicization and indeed racialization of anti-immigrant stances. As we will see, while Black political actors are often blamed for this ethnicization of the French political sphere, their mobilizations in fact fit into this racialized frame in which issues affecting the Black are increasingly addressed.

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Is racism against Black people a specific form of "Negrophobia"?

n parallel to contemporary debates on racism in France and the fight against discriminations, doubts have increasingly been voiced pertaining to the universal angle of such policies which aim at tackling all forms of prejudice. While proponents of the specificity of anti-Semitism have

insisted for its specific mention in legal texts such as the Gayssot law of 1990 prohibiting "racist, anti-Semitic or xenophobic public discourses", other argue for the necessity to distinguish anti-Muslim prejudice or Islamophobia, and also prejudice against Black people or Negrophobia. These new categories are somewhat of a puzzle in the French context since they address prejudices which are already prohibited under the umbrella of laws and policies fighting against racism and discrimination. Therefore their added value may be questioned, since they seldom aim at extending provisions against unknown forms xenophobic discourses. Islamophobia as a rising theme of debates regarding racism in France is mostly concerned with prejudices present in public policies and political discourses, especially around key issues of headscarf and minarets. It allows for the denunciation of racist prejudices hidden behind claims of secularism and republicanism.

Negrophobia, for its part, is mostly related to the public discussion of the French colonial past and of contemporary post-colonial Franco-African relations. As in the case of Islamophobia, what is addressed is not the everyday, mundane prejudice against Black people, but the treatment of Black history in public discourses and policies. The emergence of such category is in fact related to the increasing acknowledgement of the role performed by the French state in slavery and colonization: the Taubira law of 2001 acknowledged that slave trade was a form of crime against humanity and led to the creation of public commemorations of the memory and history of slavery. Far from ending debates regarding the history of slavery by transforming it into a matter of consensual, official commemoration, diverging voices managed to put an opposite view of Franco-African history on the political agenda. In 2005, the 23rd February law on the acknowledgement of repatriated French (French citizens who were displaced back to the metropolis after the end of colonization, especially from Algeria) stipulated that the nation was thankful to repatriated French citizens for their actions in the colonies and proposed that the "positive role" of colonization be taught at school. This occasioned a large turmoil, particularly among historians who in a petition denounced the political uses of their discipline, but also among

Black political actors, as we shall see. The discussion of Negrophobia was also revived by debates surrounding the infamous "Dakar speech" pronounced by President Sarkozy in 2007, in which he claimed that "The African man (sic) has not yet entered history". Many academics pointed at the gross oversimplification of his views on African history and several essays were published in order to correct them (see for instance Chrétien 2008, Mbem 2008, Konaré 2009). Negrophobia is therefore a category constructed to shed light on the specific form of Otherism performed against Black people, in which colonialism plays a key part: it is closely related to the perpetuation of post-colonial frames to interpret African situations and the colonial content of French-African relations. For instance Diop et al. pointed in their 2005 essay at the role played by the media in circulating stereotypes and false information on "Black" Africa.

As in the case of Islamophobia, defining Negrophobia a sub-category of xenophobia does not lead to a general questioning of the prevalence of racist attitudes and practices in France, but to the emergence of political cleavages opposing actors promoting diverging views of French history, institutions and society. Durpaire identifies in the group which he labels "anticommunitarians" extreme Republicans[5] for whom the increased denunciation of anti-Muslim or anti-Black racism is undermining institutions by undermining their legitimacy and by asking a preferential treatment for people labeled as victims: since, as we have seen, both proponents of the categories of Islamophobia and Negrophobia have centered their criticisms on public policies and official discourses, anti-communitarians might not be completely wrong about the fact that Islamophobia and Negrophobia were constructed to denounce racism contained in public institutions. Yet, interestingly, defenders of Republican institutions may also situate their claims within a general denunciation of xenophobia: such is the case of discourses protesting against the specific

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[5] We should be wary of not attributing the content of the contemporary Republican ideology to actors labeled as such, mostly by themselves. The turn of Republicanism from an ideology shaping institutions to a political identity should not obfuscate that many actors labeled as "communitarians" by self-avowed Republicans in fact adhere to most aspects of Republicanism, such as the fact that openness to migrants who want to become French citizens and the equal treatment of all should be the guiding principles of the French Republic.

anti-Semitism of Black people, which has led to cross accusations of "Black anti-Semitism" and "Jewish Negrophobia". Alain Finkielkraut, a radical Zionist public intellectual, has for instance strongly criticized advocates of "Creolization" as anti-Semitic: "there are people from whom we hear a lot constantly like Edouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Conflant. These ideologues of Creolity (…) I however fear that creolity might also be used to fuel not only the hatred of colonial France, but also the hatred of Israel, the Jewish state if you wish, that is a non-creole State, not hybridized"[6]. Here the conceptualization of Israel as a colonial state —a frame much used by pro-Palestinian activists but here appropriated by a Zionist speaker— is used in order to delegitimize creolity understood as a Black theory of race relations, even though it promotes the positive aspects of hybridity. Similarly, some Jewish public intellectuals have appropriated denunciations of anti-white racism characteristic of the radical right in order to point at the danger posited by Black youth for law and order. Finkielkraut again, in a much quoted interview given to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, described the 2005 riots as "anti-Republican pogroms" and emphasized the presence of black youth among rioters[7]. He also criticized the overwhelming presence of Black players in the national soccer team, a theme which ironically escaped the space of public discourses to settle in professional soccer discourses as we saw. Denouncing racial prejudice and xenophobia is therefore a rhetorical tool likely to be appropriated by a large array of actors, some of them political adversaries. The consensus in public discourses on the need to tackle xenophobia —overtly racist discourses being in any case

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[6] Extract from a radio show led by Elizabeth Schemla on Radio Shalom, 6 mars 2005, quoted on the "news website of the Francophone Black community" grioo.com. He was reacting to the aggression four days before in the Antilles of Black comic and radical anti-Zionist activist Dieudonné by three extremist French Jewish youth.

[7]   Such discussions of a possible antagonism between Jews and Blacks has led concerned activists to the creation in 2004 of the *Amitié Judéo-Noire* (Jewish Black Friendship). Yet it did not manage to put an end to the ethnicization of tensions between both groups. The creation by radical Black supremacist Kemi Seba of a movement called "Tribu Ka" was accompanied by a much publicized action in which a few dozens of activists shouted anti-Semitic insults to storekeepers in the heart of the historical Jewish neighbourhood of rue des Rosiers in2006.

illegal— does not prevent from conflict to arise within this very realm of discourses and policies.

The French discussion of anti-Black racism or Negrophobia is therefore connected to public debates on French history but more deeply to a criticism of the political appropriation of institutions dealing with Black issues by political actors deeply opposed to any form of multiculturalism. Sometimes under the banner of Republicanism, they oppose what they see as dangerous and insidious communitarian politics operating under covert multiculturalism (especially when quotas and discrimination are discussed) and putting forth undue claims for recognition and compensation. Yet two elements particular to the French configuration of this discussion of Negrophobia should be noted: firstly, they tend to address issues of creolization and hybridity as intrinsically positive and therefore do not point to any "pure" Black essence —as we will see, Black supremacists are a tiny minority of Black political actors. In this way, they fit perfectly within the dominant French discourse in which hybridity and *métissage* are key elements of harmonious social cohesion in a situation characterized by cultural diversity. Secondly, Negrophobia as a theme emerges while the Black are increasingly placed at the center of discourses on race relations and inequalities, as we have seen, which is a relatively new situation in a country which has repeatedly singled out the Arabs as its main Other. The Black may here emerge as a secondary category of Otherism.

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Black mobilizations and the politicization of ethnicity

François Durpaire, in his seminal study of French Black mobilizations (2006), examines how claims related to the memory of slavery were turned into public policies institutionalizing the commemoration of slavery, in a context where Black political actors multiplied their interventions in the public space on this theme. He notices that as soon as 1998, a collective, le *Comité Devoir de Mémoire* (Duty of Memory Committee - CDM), mobilized in relation to the commemoration of the 100th year anniversary of the abolition of slavery. The main topic for mobilization concerned the

light under which slavery and its abolition would be officially portrayed: the collective was especially critical of the failure to represent the resistance of slaves and their agency in their own liberation, in favor of a version of history in which freedom was granted to them by a benign French government. This first collective was followed the year later by another one, the *Comité Marche du 23 mai* (March of May 23rd Committee - CMM) which mobilized on the same theme —the name refers to a key date in slave revolt for freedom— but with a slightly different angle: where CDM was aiming at changing official discourses and institutions, CMM was concerned with reinforcing solidarity between Antillean slave descendants thanks to this shared memory of slavery considered to be the symbolic ground founding Antillean societies. As we saw, the Taubira law of 2001 was a marked shift in the official commemoration of slavery inasmuch as it officially associated civil society organizations deemed to represent the interest of slave descendants to the institutionalization of history and memory. It took the form of the creation of a *Comité pour la mémoire de l'esclavage* (Committee for the Memory of Slavery – CPMHE) composed of public intellectuals (including Durpaire). That all these organizations, public or private, used the same denomination of "committee" is an indication that such mobilization was elite-based and aimed at a quick institutionalization. Further debates occurred within and outside CPMHE around the date to be chosen for the official national commemoration of slavery and its end: once again a cleavage formed between the proponents of a version of the history of slavery privileging the laudable governmental decision to put an end to slavery and those putting forth the glory of slave revolts. It led to a further fragmentation of (mostly Antillean) political actors mobilized on this theme with the creation of the *Coordination Nationale des Associations et Personnalités Antillaises et Réunionnaises* (National Coordination of Antillean and Reunion an Associations and Public Figures – CNAPAR). The mention in the name of associations along with public figures, as well as Reunion an, indicated that the group aimed at widening its scope.

A key element to these mobilizations is the place they give to the category "Black" in their discourses. Some Antillean mobilizations such

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as the *Collective DOM* (DOM Collective named after the *Départements d'Outre-Mer,* Overseas Departments) insist on the specificity of the treatment of Antillean territories and populations and opt for a geographic instead of racialized definition of their constituency: actually, for them Antilleans are not Black but mixed-race or Creole. No mention of Africans is made since they, as migrants, are not concerned by the specific problematic of the Outre-Mer. Similarly, a vast ensemble of African associations and NGOs cater to specific constituencies, often on a national basis but which may deal with more general political issues, like the *Association Malienne des Expulsés* (Malian Association of the Expelled) which protests against the deportation of irregular migrants, often in collaboration with other associations such as the Tunisian *Citoyens des Deux Rives* (Citizens From Both Banks). African NGOs may either address aspects of migrants' lives in France —such as cultural ones— or propose transnational mobilizations on African issues. For instance, the *Association Afrique Avenir* (Africa's Future Association - AAA) puts forth a very general claim that it is "a space for exchanges and actions in favor of populations of African origin in France and in Europe": yet it mainly focuses on issues related to HIV prevention. In this case again, no interest is given to the "Black" dimension of the mobilization in a French context: if Black people only are represented on the website, one may also notice that they are generally female, a choice with matches the focus on HIV prevention and family. The "Black" dimension is not an intrinsic quality of the mobilizations of people whose racial category is Black: if it is not a salient dimension of the mobilization —like in the case of AAA— or if political actors actively refute that a "Black" identity be attached to them —like in the case of Antillean Creoles—, the label shall not be used in the mobilization. Other categories closer to the identity construction of the participants may be preferred.

Black mobilizations incorporate in their ideologies the idea that race, and more specifically its growing ethnicization, creates the conditions for a growing parallelism in the experiences of Antillean and Africans — who together form the vast majority of French Black or Black residents. Therefore a first major angle of Black political discourses is

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their focus on racism, since racists operate this very simplification and generalization of identity which ends up creating a "Black" identity. The *Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires* (Representative Council of Black Associations – CRAN) is the first major organization claiming a Black identity in order to address issues of inequalities. Its name closely mimics the one of the major Jewish community civil society umbrella organization, the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France* (Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions - CRIF), which has played a key role in publicizing and defending the interests of French Jews since the 1950s, and the CRAN, like the CRIF, holds an annual dinner with civil society representatives, politicians and public figures. The CRAN was deemed to be a dangerously communitarian initiative by Republican opponents —when Malian, Tunisian, or Jewish initiatives were not—, yet, as Durpaire aptly remarks, the accusation of communitarianism is hardly suited for an initiative bringing together people actually belonging to different communities. As he notices (p.221), this posture actually entails that frictions between Antilleans and Africans be silenced. Far from advocating separatism from the French state or the majority society, the CRAN borrows much of the universalism characteristic of the dominant institutional discourse, yet it critiques its current application: no true universalism is possible if the French Republic is unable to treat all its citizens equally and to address its deep-rooted inequalities.

Racism, in the French context, is often addressed using a post–colonial frame put forth by such political organization as the *Parti des Indigènes de la République* (Party of the Republic's Indigenous People – PIR), whose name directly refers to colonial categorizations and frame. Post-colonialism places the emphasis on the memory and commemoration of colonization and its end, but ties the common past to the present day by arguing that contemporary forms of exclusion, subalternity and racism actually reproduce colonial schemes which have been incorporated in institutions and have insufficiently been uprooted after the decolonization process. It also opens up the possibility to forge a common experience between all people victimized by post-colonial or neo-colonial policies and practices. Yet the specificity of Black experience is here missing (the PIR

is not a Black organization and for instance includes many Maghrebans). Framing Black experiences for political purposes has therefore proved to be a difficult process, even if Black political actors have managed it: forged in a shared history of colonization and/or slavery, it can however rely on this element only and political discourses expand to incorporate a theory of contemporary ethnic relations in France. In such process, they encounter the opposition of anti-multiculturalist Republicans, but also other minorities whom —such as the Jews— may be perceived both as a model for a successful challenge to universal, color-blind institutions and as competitors.

3. Agonistic democracy and the construction of « Blackness » as a political category

In this last part, we shall turn to the more theoretical discussion of how the concept of agonistic democracy may help us understand the current politicization of Black identities in both countries and explore the democratic potential of Black mobilizations.

3.1. Agonistic democracy and the centrality of conflict for the political

The work of Chantal Mouffe will enable us to re-think the situation of tension which is caused by the existence of cultural plurality, and more generally, of any collective identity, within democratic and republican Nation-States. In her book *En torno a lo político* (2007), the author explains what the thinking of the agonistic democracy's dimension consists in. According to Mouffe, to understand democracy in terms of agonism implies that one overcomes, on the one hand, the model of the unsolvable confrontation of the friend / foe equation as described by Schmitt (1932), who believes that a society driven by political liberalism is a society in which the individual is at the centre, and the fundamental referent, above any collectivity; in this context, any collective identity

is denied, which according to Schmitt unveils the limit of any rational consensus and the dead-end of politics. On the other hand, Mouffe does not believe in the relevance of a blind praise of the new deliberative liberal political paradigm (Habermas, Rawls, Arendt) which advocates the rational solution to every conflict (caused by individuals' antagonistic interests) through rational and reasonable dialogue, as if every conflict could unarguably be resolved and as if every society could be "pacified" thanks to it (Benasayag / Rey, 2007: 14-17).

According to the author, in both cases there will always be a non-impartial solution to conflicts: either through authority based on violence (real or symbolic) of the ones against the others (Schmitt), winners or losers, or through authority based on pervasive argumentation, the persuasion of the ones by the others; here again, the equation *us – them* ends up being favorable to the ones at the expense of the others.

Thus, Mouffe thinks it is important, to overcome this dead-end, to take into account an important aspect of the human being, which has been omitted both by *Schmitt's antagonism paradigm* and by the *deliberative liberal political paradigm*, namely "the collective identification", affects and passions. Thus, she suggests we transform the *enemy* into an *adversary* (who would encapsulate the collective identification) and to put the agonistic aspect back at the centre of democracy, using this forgotten aspect of the liberal political tradition. This way, she tells us that in her agonistic vision of politics (and indirectly the *agonistic democracy*), there are adversaries who confront themselves "within a democratic framework, but this framework is not perceived as something inalterable: it can potentially be redefined through hegemonic fight". Politics as agnosticism implies that one recognizes the contingency of "the hegemonic political and economic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a given society at a given time" (Mouffe 2007: 39-40).

Seemingly, according to the author, politics is necessarily linked to the actions of the hegemonic institutions, and in this sense, one must bear in mind the fact that we are frequently facing *politics as hegemony*. This point is very important as it expresses certain dimensions of social life, i. e. that the power's institutionalized practices —which imply separation,

distinction and exclusion— must not be eluded from theoretical debates (both in the right and left wing) on democracy today.

We believe that, since Mouffe, one can see that conflict understood as tension between adversaries (who in order not to end up confronting each other necessarily look for the physical, moral or symbolical elimination of their opponent) has to take place within a democracy which promotes the agonistic aspect of politics, and that its existence does not cancel the regulatory and social peace-making power which the deliberative paradigm advocates. It rather has to do with the building-up of an *us/them* that is compatible with democratic pluralism, which reminds us that democracy is not untouchable, given that it is not a completed project; this erroneous idea has 'authorized' the more optimistic analysts to say that we have reached the end of History in so much as we support a perfect model of politics. On the contrary, according to Mouffe, agonistic democracy must show us the ever perfectible aspect (or the permanent perfectibility) of democracy, and to re-think the stance of the left-wing today from that perspective, in order to bring a new dynamic to the left / right opposition in Europe and in Latin America.

Mouffe criticizes prominent theories of deliberative democracy (e.g. Rawls and Habermas) in order to show that they tend to exclude conflict from the public sphere and from the realm of politics. Therefore, dissent is acceptable to a certain level, but more profound disagreements —for instance those resting on matters seen as identity issues— cannot be negotiated within the boundaries of deliberative politics, because of this "fundamental tension between the logic of democracy and the logic of liberalism" (p.19). This debate cannot be closed, and therefore should be avoided.

3.2. Cultural diversity, the politicization of Black identity and hegemony

We think that the adversarial nature of the political theorized by Mouffe to understand the role of the left in a democratic context marked by the crumbling down of the Soviet system which made the hegemonic

advent of neoliberalism the only "reality" (Mouffe, 2007: 38) can be used to analyze the politicization of cultural and/or ethnic identities. For her, the "dimension of antagonism" in democracy stems from the "pluralism of values" (Mouffe 2005: 23). What we identify as objectivity in society is in fact the result of power relations. "This point of convergence — or rather mutual collapse— between objectivity and power is what we meant by 'hegemony'" (ibid.). Power is here seen as "constituting political identities": which in our case helps us study how Black identity is constituted through relations of power in both countries. Clearly, we cannot consider pre-formed Black identities which would in a second moment become politicized, but rather observe how the politicization of race relations in both countries enables Black identities to become political. Black identities emerge, as we have seen, on the ground of other identities which it strives to incorporate. "Politics aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity: it is always concerned with the creation of an 'us' by the determination of a 'them'" (2005: 25). Therefore politics has to do with the determination of boundaries and the definition of identities, described as different from and alien to one another. Within the perspective of agonistic pluralism, the "them" is not constituted of enemies but of adversaries whom we want to defeat but whose right to express themselves is not disputed.

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Revalorizing conflict as a normal and positive aspect of political life means that cultural and ethnic plurality should not be treated as facts that is in a way in which a consensus would be assumed and treated as the dominant paradigm, thereby preempting the possibility for political debate. Similarly, adversaries to multicultural policies should not be silenced as erroneous or as the bearers of an endemic racism characteristic of the kind of euro centrism in favor during the colonization era. Silencing the Other in such debates on multiculturalism —for instance when he or she dares questioning affirmative action measures for instance— while assuming the position of the defenders of the subaltern means denying the Other's existence as a legitimate political actor. "Victory" is here impossible if it means suppressing the Other: in a functioning democracy, proponents and opponents to multiculturalism must face the enduring

and necessary existence of their adversary, or face the possibility of seeing democratic *face-à-face* replaced with downright violent conflict.

This leads us to a critical re-examination of policies aimed at promoting Black subjects. Following Mouffe's critique of Schmitt, replacing the friend/fiend confrontation with a sacrosanct consensus is in fact not democratic: in our cases we saw that in Columbia it took the form of the official valorization of Afro-Colombianity, at the expense of addressing the complexity and multipositionnality of the Black, wh ile in France the traditional universal and color-blind anti-racism was increasingly mixed with policies aimed at the recognition of minorities through the problematic inclusion of their version of French history within the dominant discourse. While we do not make any claims regarding the intrinsic values of such important steps to tackle institutionalized forms of racism, we argue that these are hardly suited to acknowledge the agency of Black political actors. When, as we saw, mobilizations prepared and accompanied these turns of public policies, the official discourse tends to erase them and to treat new measures as evidence of society's consensus around a progressive and benevolent state concerned with the fair treatment of the Black. Even when the problematic ethnicization of politics and of race categories themselves was addressed by Black political actors, the defense of the Black subject by progressive voices took the form of the denunciation of his/her invisibility, exclusion, subalternity, etc. Consequently, they denied the legitimacy of conflictive interactions within political debates on these questions, thereby silencing both the voices of the opponents to these policies and those of more radical Black actors putting forth other claims.

We argue that it is essential to open up a space for agonistic interaction within theoretical discourses and political debates on cultural diversity. Even if the creation of new policies and institutions defending and promoting Afro-descendants (in Colombia) or cultural diversity (in France) may be seen as a discursive victory of the subalterns and as a sign of their increasing political, social and symbolic recognition, in both countries we identify a systematic negation of actual or potential conflicts deriving from ethnic and cultural pluralism – either because of

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a competition for scarce resources or because of the incompatibility of existing values. Therefore, striving at incorporating the historical Others into a larger but still hegemonic Us appears to be a dead end: the discourse on the need for a better recognition of Black people masks the fact that recognition, as an ideological tool, may be used in order to silence dissent and promote adhesion to conformity (Honneth 2006: 245-246), thereby reinforcing hegemony.

Conclusion

We think that the claims for *Afrolatinity, Afrcolombianity, Afrocarthagenity* (in Colombia), *Negrology* or the fight against *Negrophobia* (in France) fall into what could be called an intrinsic contradiction of racialized identity claims, in the sense that, far from escaping the conservative and binary vision of the *oppressed – oppressor* relationship, it reproduces this scheme of representation of relationships of domination that it intended to break. In spite of a shift in the discourse from the philogenesis of whiteness to a philogenesis of blackness, seen in its positive side under the concepts of "Afro" (Colombia) and "diversity" (France), once again both elements of the equation (White, Black) need each other to keep existing (there is no White without a Black and vice versa, there is no Negro/"*Afro*" freed from domination without a dominating White).

    With this "gesture", are we not participating in the perpetual return of the *oppressed – oppressor* equation? As if, by a strange Manichaeism, our spirit of solidarity would make us lose sight of the fact that the oppressed can negotiate with his oppressor or that he can, at the same time, be the oppressor of another oppressed. It creates an endless spiral of the logics of expansion of oppression through macropowers. For instance, in Colombia, in the XIXth century, a black elite emerged that was involved in the new government systems led by White *Criollos* (Helg, 2000), and the XXth century offers many cases of negotiations between oppressors and oppressed – a good example is given by the patronage networks established by political parties (Agudelo, 2005; Restrepo, 2005).

A similar situation occurs in France where the Blacks from the Antilles islands, historically victims of a colonial history, have been "favoured" by the system of negotiation with the white government of the metropole in some cases such as annual leave schemes in public service, compared to other sectors of the national population (including people with North African of Sub-Saharan origins).

If racialized identity claims contain an intrinsic contradiction, it has not prevented them to be increasingly placed at the centre of political debates in both countries. Black identities are shaped and mobilized to reinforce institutions through public policies aiming at addressing issues to which they are connected; yet designing new policies aimed at commemorating Black history or at a better redistribution not only preempts the possibility for more radical demands, they also contribute to tame the Black political subject they emphatically contribute to create by incorporating certain Black public intellectuals and politicians in institutions while rejecting the others as extremists and racists. Of course this does not prevent such political options for existing as the increasing publicization of racialized ideology opens a promising field for them: for instance, we argue that the choice made by French Black supremacist Kemi Seba to launch his Nation of Islam-inspired movement with an anti-Semitic direct action is a good example of such trend.

Certain key questions remain therefore open: how does the politicization of identity and the ethnicization of race affect the possibility for peaceful coexistence between communities? The existence of an "Afro-ideology" shaping public policies in Colombia and the enduring universalist claim of French institutions contribute to denying to conflict its status as a nodal aspect of the political. This fake suppression of conflict via the institutionalization of ethnicized identities does not lead to the expected social pacification and preempts the possibility for democratic debate on these themes, and identities are captured in the reproduction of the political sphere.

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