

# **BREAKING THE SILENCE**

## ***The Emergence of a Black Collective Voice in France***<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

Since the turn of the millennium, French society has become the theatre of a noticeable Black agency. Few previous events have ignited the media's interest in a Black French agenda more than the Collectif Égalité-led "March for the dignity of Black peoples" and the formation of the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN). Through these newly-founded organizations, French activists of African descent have been challenging the hegemonic ideology of color-blindness, and heralding the claims, problems, and expectations of postcolonial African-descended people.

Informed by this ideology of so-called color-blindness, the academic literature in France has been slow to account for this new form of political expression. Moreover, as this article will argue, postcolonial African-descended people have not been recognized as political agents in the French literature. Few studies have attempted to correct this myopic view by analyzing the current political dynamic of postcolonial African-descended people. Due to the state-centered or institutionalist approach, these studies are more concerned with highlighting external and structural factors, such as racial discrimination, at the expense of endogenous determinants. They focus on what postcolonial African-descended people are denied in the French society instead of investigating the qualities these citizens actually possess that enable them to organize collectively. This article is intended to contribute to this new literature. It will pinpoint the different transformations that postcolonial African-descended people have undergone from the 1960s through the 1990s, examine the resources and skills under these actors' control, and gauge the contribution of these resources and skills to the emergence of a Black collective voice.

**Keywords:** AFIP, African, Activism, Caribbean, Collective action, Collectif Egalité, Colonialism, Color-blindness, Consciousness, CRAN, Postcolonial African-descended People

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2005, the French Assembly hosted an event with representatives of more than fifty associations of Africans and Antilleans supported by Basil Boli, a former soccer star; Manu Dibango, the world-renowned Makossa performer; several journalists; and a few political figures of African descent. At this

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meeting, they announced the official inauguration of the Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires de France [Representative Council of the Black Associations (CRAN)]. Thus far, the CRAN appears to have benefitted from the largest and longest media coverage in the history of organizations of people of African descent since the slow unravelling of the Fédération des Étudiants d'Afrique Noire en France [Black African Students' Federation in France (FEANF)] in the 1970s (Gueye 2001, 2006; Traoré 1985).<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of the CRAN is neither an isolated nor a unique event in France; it is part of a continuity in a politically-informed dynamic amongst people of African descent. The CRAN is probably the most visible, the most influential, and the most generalist organization of African-descended people. However, the CRAN can hardly be deemed the most representative of such organizations. Its initial objectives appear to be basically in keeping with and indebted to earlier organizational efforts in the construction and visibilization of a Black French group. Both its platform and core membership straddle generational differences and overlap with other organizations among African-descended people. Prior to the emergence of the CRAN, associations such as the Collectif Égalité, founded in 1998; Africagora, created in 1999; Cercle d'Action pour la Promotion de la Diversité [Circle of Action for the Promotion of Diversity—(CAPDIV)], founded in 2004;<sup>3</sup> and the 1985-born Diaspora Africaine were all committed to shaping a Black identity in France and to defending the interests and rights of people of African descent regardless of their territorial extraction, place of birth, social class, or administrative status (Gueye 2006).<sup>4</sup>

This study is intended to explore the social determinants of this politically-informed dynamic. The overarching question that guides the investigation is the following: What endogenous factors have made possible the emergence of this collective dynamic in the last ten years? In other words, what changes has the French population of African descent undergone since the waning days of the well-known Negritude movement? Given the space limitations of this article, we will tackle only in a preliminary way the related question of: On what grounds can a group identity labelled “Black French” exist?

From the outset, it will not be argued that the postcolonial African-descended people are immune from the wider societal disruptions or reconfigurations taking place in France. Without question, the problem of racial discrimination has had a profound impact on their collective dynamic. Nevertheless, I wish to focus more on the internal resources under their control, with their own characteristics to be analyzed. I will argue that the postcolonial African-descended population has undergone a significant transformation that has made possible in the last ten years the emergence of a collective Black voice in the French public sphere. This transformation is three-fold: (a) numerical, (b) attitudinal with regard to their presence in France, and (c) educational.

To account for this metamorphosis is not an easy task. The main reason lies in France's politics of race shaped by a two-centuries-old Republican principle which emphasizes and advocates for an “indifference to differences” (Simon 2008a,b) and claims color-blindness specifically (Bleich 2004; Calvès 2004; Chapman and Frader, 2004; Lieberman 2004; Sabbagh 2004, Sabbagh and Peer, 2008).<sup>5</sup> As a result of this ideological principle, any attempt to measure quantitatively the transformation of people of African descent in France is a real challenge, as the production of statistics identifying people on the basis of their race or ethnicity is strictly controlled and discouraged under current French law.<sup>6</sup>

To circumvent this legal impediment supposes the manufacturing of a tailored methodology. This methodology would be grounded in a segmented rather than a

holistic approach to the postcolonial African-descended population. This approach enables us to examine the compilation of scattered data pertaining to this population who, according to their place of birth or their initial citizenship, are separately categorized in the administrative nomenclature as: (a) residents of metropolitan France born in Sub-Saharan Africa, (b) French born of African immigrant parents; (c) DOM-TOMian-born residents of metropolitan France,<sup>7</sup> (d) residents of metropolitan France born of DOM-TOMian migrant parents. One has to bear in mind that such a methodological approach would not be exempt from criticism, for it is not able to give an exact measure of the postcolonial African-descended population, as it might exclude those who were born in France either from a second or third generation of African or Antillean settlers, or from a native French female and an African male who did not acknowledge having fathered a child. Furthermore, this methodology could include individuals of European descent, for instance, who were born in Sub-Saharan Africa or the French overseas departments. The first female candidate to participate in the second round of French presidential elections, Ségolène Royal, is one famous example of a White French person born in Senegal. Nonetheless, the exclusion or inclusion of these individuals does not call into question the relevance of this methodology and the results it carries, for the demographic volume they constitute is insignificant.

This article will, first, critically assess the state of the French academic literature on the activism of the postcolonial African-descended population and the race-based categorization that is currently under construction. Second, the article will examine respectively the effects of the changes undergone by this population at three levels—demographic, attitudinal, and educational—on the expression of a Black collective voice.

## THE ABSENCE OF BLACK STUDIES

To deal with the collective activism of African-descended people in post-colonial France is to enter a research field barely touched. To be sure, this population, either as a whole or as a segmented entity, has been recognized as having a certain leverage over the French government based on their lives and destinies on French soil. However, this recognition was arguably restricted to the colonial generation. Whereas Ndiaye (1962), Dewitte (1985), and Kesteloot (1991)—just to mention some paragons of this scholarship—have documented the contents and rationale of Black political/literary movements during the 1920s through the late 1950s in a general way, Guimont (1997) focuses more specifically on only one component of the post-war African-descended population, the FEANF, highlighting the political radicalization of Black African students and their permanent confrontation with metropolitan political authorities over the securing of African people's interests in a context of postcolonial relations (1997).

Unlike their predecessors, postcolonial African-descended people are not yet viewed as subjects seeking to change their social existence on French soil. A review of the French social science literature reveals a nearly complete absence of Black Studies, as the 2005 report by Joan Stavo-Debaugé on behalf of the CAPDIV points out. Yet, the lack of institutionalized “Black French studies” alone does not provide a full explanation. It appears that many French researchers have yet to come to terms with pre-existent and extant cases of the mobilization of people of African descent through organizations such as the Collectif Égalité, Africagora, the CRAN and CAPDIV.

First, in the well-institutionalized field of African Studies, a major epistemological rupture has occurred with the inclusion of postcolonial African-descended peo-

ple in the populations studied by Africanists. However, this field was originally shaped, and perhaps is still dominated by anthropologists. Most researchers in the anthropological field have tended to adopt the term “ethnicity” when studying postcolonial African-descended people or segments of this population. Yet, as Mamdani (2005) states, ethnicity is most often defined as a politically-invented identity rooted in the colonial era. This analytical approach can lead to a denial of the making of a community of fate among people of African descent since their ethnicization presumes that they share no commonalities as Africans, or rather that the group is composed of unbridgeable entities, each governed by a set of rules reflecting its own tradition (Mamdani 2005).

Second, researchers seem more preoccupied with gauging the cultural distance separating Africans from the rest of French society, even though a large proportion were born and educated in mainland France. Barou (1978) and Boudimbo (1991) both show that this sub-group, which is often designated either by ethnic categories (Bamiléké, Soninké, etc.) or national ones (Congolese, Cameroonians, Malians, Senegalese, etc.) is still presented as the embodiment of cultural otherness rather than as political subjects, even when they testify to their French citizenship. For example, in their comments on the 2005 uprisings in the Parisian suburbs which involved, according to media reports, mostly Arab and Black youth of French citizenship, notable French scholars and intellectuals, including Héléne Carrère d’Encausse, Alain Finkielkraut, and Jean-Claude Casanova, emphasize the reproduction of African cultural practices on French soil as the main causes thereof (Fassin and Fassin, 2006; Gueye 2010). Thus, the lack of connection African-descended people seem to have with French culture becomes paradigmatic.

Within the less-institutionalized and perhaps more marginal field of Caribbean Studies, the predominant approach is similar to that of African Studies (Pourette 2006). A French equivalent to *Black Skins, French Voices* (Beriss 2004a), an American publication which deals with the activism of the Caribbeans in the metropole, has yet to appear. Studies on this demographic segment have largely focused on its historical formation, its development, the reproduction of a Caribbean folklore in the metropole, the living conditions and logics of solidarity within this group, the representation of and the relation to the body, etc. (Anselin 1979, 1990; Giraud and Marie, 1987; Marie 2002a; Pourette 2006). Yet, as Beriss’ book suggests, the effort of cultural preservation does not exclude political action; it can even become the channel through which a group enters politics and develops activism. The Negritude movement is a historic illustration of this possibility in the experience of African-descended people.

The social movement literature is also a relevant body of knowledge to examine. This literature has starkly overlooked the collective dynamic of people of African descent. This may be explained by the predominance for many years of the Marxist paradigm which, as Gilroy (1987) argued nearly two decades ago, presents collective movement as a process shaped by class relations in the market place. However, in France, Alain Touraine’s (1977) break with this paradigm enabled the development of another trend in French scholarship as demonstrated by the works of Jazouli (1986, 1992), Lapeyronnie (1987), Wihtol de Wenden (1988), and Hargreaves (1995) to a lesser extent. These authors have attempted to come to terms with the protests of ethnic-based or nationality-based groups.<sup>8</sup> Catherine Wihtol de Wenden’s (1988) book is perhaps the most instructive. Over 400 pages long, this landmark study constitutes the first attempt to account for the political dynamic of immigrant populations in France in an exhaustive manner. Whereas the activism of Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, Turks, and Portuguese have been extensively documented, that

of African immigrants gains scarce mention. Only a page and a half is devoted to this population, briefly mentioning the name of the foremost African immigrants' organization, the Fédération des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire en France [Black African Workers Federation in France], and thereby implying a general lack of political consciousness among African immigrants. In fact, she argues that the emergence of this political consciousness is impeded by the Africans' reproduction of the culture of their native villages in the locations where they reside in France. Relying exclusively on the findings of Barou (1978)<sup>9</sup> who investigated the experiences of Hausa and Soninke immigrants, Wihtol de Wenden posits that Islam and a caste-driven traditional culture more specifically constitutes the major hindrances to the rise of an *Africanus politicus*.<sup>10</sup>

Wihtol de Wenden's analysis suffers from several other limitations. First, it dwells on a modernist bias that assumes the antinomy between Islam or caste and political participation. Yet the empirical evidence calls this bias into question. For instance, the Christian-dominated society of Chile has not fared any better than the predominantly Muslim society of Senegal in the 1970s in terms of political participation and democratic institutions. Second, caste-based societies such as the Athenian city of Ancient Greece or modern India have been among the most vibrant democracies. Third, Wihtol de Wenden's analysis embodies a severe contradiction in that it does not explain how and why Moroccan, Algerian, and Turkish immigrants who originate from historically Muslim-dominated countries have engaged in more politicization in France than African immigrants who come from Muslim communities in Africa, albeit ones that may have embraced Islam more recently in their history. Fourth, her analysis overlooks an entire set of political actions carried on during the 1960s and 1970s by African immigrant students within organizations such as the FEANF, the Union Nationale des Étudiants Kameronnais, and along side of African immigrant workers in Paris and Marseille through the collectives of *foyers*' residents [hostels for immigrants] (Gueye 2001, 2006).

Since the late 1980s, some alternative viewpoints have appeared in the French social science literature. The resurgence and high visibility of political activism among postcolonial African-descended people has hastened the inception of an entirely new literature that we could call provisionally "Black French Studies." This literature postulates the creation of a race-based group identity in France and will be considered here in two clusters of writings.

The first is composed of books and articles by journalists and members of the organizations of postcolonial African-descended people. Among the most noteworthy of titles are *Noir et Français* by journalists Stephen Smith and Geraldine Faes (2006), *Nous, les noirs de France* by Patrick Lozès, the sitting President of the CRAN (2007), *Noirs de France: les nouveaux Neg'marrons* by Rama Yade-Zimet, the current French Secretary of State for Sport and a former member of CAPDIV (2007), and finally "Who is Afraid of Blacks in France? The Black Question: The Name Taboo, The Number Taboo" by Louis-Georges Tin, spokesperson and current vice-president of the CRAN (2008). Partly autobiographical in some cases, and intended to inform and to testify to a French "Black" experience rather than to critically analyze it, these writings provide useful first-hand data for the understanding of the recent development of the activism of postcolonial African-descended people, and of the process of construction of a group's identity labelled Black.<sup>11</sup>

The second cluster is comprised of academic works concerned with analyzing specifically the collective dynamic of the postcolonial African-descended citizenry. The works of Durpaire (2006) and Ndiaye (2008) epitomize this incipient scholarship. Their basic merit is to have broken from the generalist and class-based approach

which, on the one hand, shuns the distinction between racialized minorities, and, on the other hand, dilutes racial specificity into a broader class analysis, as illustrated by Daniel Bensaïd's (2006) exposition on the Autumn 2005 uprising. However, these studies also suffer from important limitations.

François Durpaire's book, *France blanche, colère noire* (2006), offers an unfinished explanation of the emergence of a Black collective voice mostly because of its state-centered (or institutional) approach. It focuses on the racial discrimination mechanism at work in France, thereby accounting more for the institutional wrongdoing against people of African descent than the internal dynamics of this group that has led to its irruption into the public sphere. Clear evidence of this state-centered approach is Dupaire's heartfelt effort to display a wide range of governmental measures that would help view the postcolonial African-descended citizenry as being part and parcel of French society, and strike down discriminatory practices. However, although discrimination unarguably plays a considerable role in the emergence of a collective Black voice, it is not the only explanation. As shown in the works of Dewitte (1985), Gueye (2001), and Spire (2005), discrimination has been a constant variable in the relations between people of African descent as well as other racialized minorities and French society since the colonial era.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, one may wonder why postcolonial African-descended people did not storm the French public sphere thirty years ago instead of in the late 1990s. Herein lies the fundamental question: Why now?

The second part of Durpaire's book title, "*colère noire*," assumes a certain spontaneity in the activism of postcolonial African-descended people, overlooking structural characteristics within the population. Evidences for these characteristics are perceptible in many of the events of the past dozen years. For instance: the silent march organized by over 300 associations of Africans and Caribbean people in May 1998 to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery; the creation in 1998 of the Collectif Égalité which spearheaded two successful marches in 2000 and 2001, and pursued well-publicized lawsuits against the French state for the "dearth of images and the negative representation of Blacks in television" (Gueye 2010, p. 158); and Africagora's 1999 national campaign to raise awareness among African-descended people about the necessity to engage more actively in politics, and to call upon the French authorities for the promotion of this group in public decision-making bodies (Gueye 2006). An analysis that rests on the problem of racial discrimination as the determinant or single explanatory factor is too mechanical.

Taking into account previous contributions in the burgeoning literature on the "Black" experience in France, Pap Ndiaye's book, *La condition noire*, makes a major contribution without being immune from serious limitations. First, Ndiaye clearly acknowledges the current existence and specificity of a collective dynamic of postcolonial African-descended people. Nevertheless, the book fails to establish the social determinants of the activism of postcolonial African-descended people, even though the author is himself an important actor through his membership in CAP-DIV and the CRAN, the two most prominent associations engaged in the struggle for the civil rights of this population. Second, and more significantly, the book tries to demonstrate the validity and legitimize the use of the analytical category of "Black" as a group identity in contemporary France. To do so, it draws upon a remarkable historicization of the presence of African-descended people in metropolitan France. This effort culminates in the main argument that Blackness has become an identity shared by people of African descent regardless of their gender, geographical extraction, nationality, and class difference. Neither biological nor cultural in origin, it is rather a socially-constructed identity which stems from the social expe-

rience of being viewed as “Black.” Ndiaye coins the concept of the Black condition and defines Blackness thusly: “Are Blacks those who are perceived as such; [that is to say] is Black, *a minima*, a population of males and females whose shared social experience is to be considered Black?” (Ndiaye 2008, p. 48).

In comparison with other recent publications, *La condition noire* is to be credited with enriching the literature. Most of the literature about race in France has been greatly influenced by American scholarship on the problem of discrimination. As a result, the construction of a “Black identity” has seldom appeared as a question in its own right. For example, the edited volume *Race in France* (2004) treats racial identity boundaries as the result of state policies, rather than of everyday social interactions. Narratives about race and the racial policies of the state and its representatives pervade almost every chapter of this collected work (in particular Bleich 2004; Calvès 2004; Chapman and Frader, 2004; Hargreaves 2004; Lieberman 2004). One exception is Michèle Lamont’s excellent article which establishes how individuals delineate boundaries on moral and cultural grounds to draw some individuals together and others apart into separate “us” and “them” communities (Lamont 2004). Yet by examining only “French” worker’s efforts at constructing racial boundaries, and by specifically excluding immigrants from the analysis, Lamont’s contribution does not go far enough to distinguish her study from those falling under the established hetero-definition of (racial) identity (Poutignat and Streiff-Fénart, 1995).

Ndiaye (2008) in contrast emphasizes the importance of perception as the defining criterion of a Black identity. However, the phenomenological approach that Ndiaye adopts reflects an unwarranted dependence on the Sartrean philosophy of identity. Such an approach disregards the potential expression of an African-descended people’s agency. In addition to society’s perception of people of African descent, Black identity is also being shaped through two intersected dynamics within this population: the making of a group consciousness and the challenge to the French republican ideology of color-blindness by various organizations of postcolonial African-descended people. If we concur with Miller’s definition of group consciousness as structured around two main elements, identification with a demographic entity, and political awareness regarding this entity’s position and condition in society (quoted in Jackson 1987, p. 632), we can recognize this group consciousness among people of African descent in France during the period 1940 to 1960. Several years of dormancy appeared thereafter, due in part to the unravelling of pan-Africanist associations on French soil, the obsolescence of the original political project of African-descended intellectuals, and the constant influx of new immigrants of African descent. Thus, it was only during the early 1980s that a Black group consciousness would resurface in the French public sphere. Organizations such as Groupe Jonction founded in 1980 and its successor, Diaspora Africaine, which formed in 1985, would deploy a new effort to develop a group consciousness. More recent organizations, such as the Collectif Égalité, Africagora, CAPDIV and the CRAN, would carry this effort even further (Gueye 2001). Blackness or African-ness, two concepts used interchangeably in the narratives of most of the leaders of the 1980s organizations, was presented as a shared consciousness rooted in the cultural continuities and commonalities among various segments of the African-descended population, and in the similarity of their interactions with Europeans and other non-African people. The preservation of this group consciousness has been supported through the distribution of writings and the publicization of the individual struggles of prominent pan-Africanist intellectuals and political figures. Consciousness-raising organizations such as Diaspora Africaine, CAPDIV, and the CRAN converge in this strategy of creating a regular space for public discussion wherein postcolonial African-descended French people can be

introduced to the ideas of Cheikh Anta Diop, Aimé Césaire, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Alioune Diop, as well as to chapters in the history of Black peoples. Working from the foundations laid by *Diaspora Africaine* known for its series of public conferences, CAPDIV has set up a structured program titled *Université des Mondes Noirs* [Black Worlds' University (UDMN)]. Meeting on a routine schedule, the UDMN has become a consciousness-raising locus where, as one of its initiators put it during an interview:

The members of our community learn what we are, who we are, how much we have in common in spite of our differences (. . .) and the challenges we are facing as Blacks in this society [author's translation].

The annual commemoration of the abolition of slavery begun in 2006 is also contributing to this dynamic of group consciousness-making, although the various organizations involved have yet to combine their efforts. Slogans such as “slaves yesterday, discriminated today [because of skin color]”, invoke in the public mind a French historical continuity and confers common meaning on different historical experiences of African-descended people within France, laying the foundations for an ideology of difference which, as Paul Peterson demonstrates, fuels and legitimizes the sense of group identity (quoted in Jackson 1987, p. 633).

Parallel to the dynamic previously discussed, organizations of postcolonial African-descended people have been bringing into existence the category of “Black” as a group identity by challenging the official French republican ideology of color-blindness. The institutionalization of racial categories in the United States through a long history of slavery and post-abolition, government-sanctioned racially-discriminatory laws and practices combined with the systematic compilation of official statistical data on ethnic and racial groups in government documents, has unarguably been instrumental in the making of a group identity among African Americans (McAdam 1999; Morris 1984; Omi and Winant, 1994). In France, however, the African descended citizenry has had to create a group identity in a different context in which there is a historic lack of official recognition given to racial categories in French society and political discourse, in spite of the prevalence of race-based practices and discourses emanating from French national and local institutions<sup>13</sup> and in society at large. The *Collectif Égalité* is arguably to be credited with the pioneering actions in this regard. Through its lawsuit against the French state “for the dearth of images and negative representation of Blacks” and the May 2000 public demonstration known as the “*Marche pour la dignité du peuple noir*” [March for the Dignity of the Black people], the *Collectif's* political actions have clearly been intended to delineate the boundaries of the African-descended group, by raising awareness about the condition and position of the citizens of African descent in France as seen in the media. The organization has also been successful in pressuring the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel* [National Board for the Surveillance of the Media (CSA)] to commission an investigative report on the integration of visible minorities on French television. Conforming to the *Collectif Égalité's* demand, this report detailed along racial and ethnic lines (“visibly Black”; “visibly Maghrebi”; “visibly White,” etc.) the identities of hosts and participants seen on French television programs during an entire week.<sup>14</sup>

Soon thereafter, the CRAN would enhance this dynamic through its own actions. Among them is the CRAN's unorthodox survey calculating and making public for the first time the representation of Blacks in the French population, which as Tin (2008) convincingly argues is in itself an act of shaping the Black identity in France. Sub-



sequently, the CRAN produced a TV ad titled “La main” [The hand]. The advertisement was broadcast several times, free of charge, every day between May 8 and May 11, 2007 by TF1—France’s first private and most watched channel. The main content of this unprecedented campaign consisted of a brief biographical sketch of a French person of African descent, from his birth, to his schooling, to his first job search, and then concludes by highlighting his fate in French society. The character is seen confronting discrimination based on his skin color. The ad’s final message asks the television viewers to help the CRAN to assist French Black people. TF1’s decision to broadcast this ad free of charge is meaningful. It demonstrates an acknowledgment if not a subscription to the race-based classification of the French population. Moreover, in the wake of the efforts of organizations of African-descended people, a normalization of the use of “Black” as a legitimate sociological category for French society is underway. Since May 2007, French authors, journalists, and other media personalities increasingly speak naturally in public about Blacks without using quotation marks. Members of the French parliament defend the institutionalization of what the CRAN calls “statistics of diversity”—a jargon for statistics about visible minorities based on self-declaration. The French state has designated the CRAN as an “*association d’utilité publique* [association of public importance]”. Some trade unions now reserve seats to candidates recommended by the CRAN to run for professional elections [prud’hommes]. Finally, the CRAN is more and more frequently invited to participate in different government commissions. More importantly, as reported in an article published on February 2, 2007 by BBC Afrique.com, Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of Interior and soon-to-be President of the French Republic extended, for the first time, on January 2, 2007, his New Year wishes to the “Black community”: a symbolic and meaningful move in a color-blind society.

In the light of this new dynamic, the reduction of Black identity formation to a direct outcome of perception is highly debatable. Blackness as a social category results also from the agency of African-descended people such as those that the aforementioned organizations have been expressing in the French public sphere. The following three-part section will be devoted to unveiling the foundations of this agency and, by association, the emergence of a collective Black voice. Resources and skills secured by postcolonial African-descended people at different levels (especially demographic and educational), and the shift in their attitudes toward France, will be underlined as major elements of this development.

## NUMERICAL TRANSFORMATION

In a 1985 book, James DeNardo introduces briefly the idea that number fuels agency as he wrote that: “there always seems to be power in numbers” (p. 35). The literature on the political dynamic of people of African descent in the Americas has for a long time hinted at this idea. Morris (1984) and McAdam (1999) have shown in the case of the United States how the demographic increase and concentration of African Americans in Southern or Northern cities have been instrumental in the expression of a Black collective voice. In her research about Black mobilization in colonial and early independent Cuba, historian Aline Helg (1997) brings further evidence to this link. The interviews I conducted with mobilization entrepreneurs of the postcolonial African-descended population and their public discourse as reported in the media, demonstrate the relevance of this idea for the French case. During the first section of a two-part series of interviews, Calixte Beyala, Cameroon-born novelist and founder of the Collectif Egalité, stressed that she believed the time had come for postcolonial

African-descended people to be heard when they speak. Elaborating further, Beyala underscored that having witnessed the scale of their participation in the march for the commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of slavery, she became convinced that:

Our community has gained leverage; it has gained the critical mass that enables us to talk for ourselves, to be heard in this country, and to have things changed for us [author's translation].

During an informal discussion following a meeting of the executive board of the CRAN in the spring of 2007, a member of this organization, commenting on a disagreement between two participants at the meeting, echoed Beyala's sentiments in stating:

We Blacks are at a point where we can be taken seriously in this society. The rights that many groups have in France . . . and communities have been able to secure, we too are going to secure them because we are not a handful of individuals anymore. France now shelters a huge Black population, and because of that Blacks are now able to influence the direction of our country [author's translation].

To fully grasp these statements requires first that we assess their accuracy. The exact number of African-descended residents in France is not known to social scientists for the reason I have pointed out earlier. However, it is possible to estimate the size of the Black French population through various officially-recognized categories or criteria, namely migrants from "Sub-Saharan Africa" and "DOM-TOM" (French overseas departments) and their offspring. Indeed, there is clear evidence that both the population of mainland France originating from the French overseas departments and the population from Sub-Saharan Africa and their descendants have increased by more than a multiple of ten since the early 1960s. In 1968, 61,160 natives of two of the overseas departments, Guadeloupe and Martinique, living in the metropolitan territory were registered in the census, including 23,320 who arrived between 1956 and 1965 (Condon 2004). In 1999, the number of natives of the four French overseas departments and territories (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana and Réunion) who had settled in continental France and their offspring rose to 585,000 (Marie 2005). This figure's significance can be understood better if we compare it with the total population of the French overseas departments estimated at 1,667,436 in 1999 according to the 2005 Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (INSEE) census. Thus, the ratio of French Caribbean people living in the overseas departments to French Caribbean people living in the metropole is 2.85.

The recent growth of Sub-Saharan Africans in France is even more phenomenal. In 1962, their proportion in the total migrant population was officially only 0.7% (Borrel 2006). In 2004, it had risen to 11.63%. In gross numbers, this population has increased from 27,908 individuals in 1968 to 174,639 in 1990, and 570,000 in 2004 (Borrel 2006), thus increasing 6.5 times within a twenty-two year period, and 20.4 times over thirty-six years.

In a historical context of tension and power struggle between activists of African descent and the French authorities, disputed figures are being put forth by the former to assess the demographic contribution of Blacks to France. But through a nationwide poll, TNS-SOFRES, the leading polling institute in France reports that about four percent of the French population over eighteen years old are "Black" (*Le Parisien*, 2007).

The phenomenal growth of the African-descended population in France is accompanied by another important demographic trend, namely the spatial concentration of this group. Aside from recently settled Southeast Asian immigrants, the population of African descent has the highest rate of spatial concentration in the country. In 1999, the proportion of “DOM-TOM immigrants” living in the Parisian agglomeration was estimated at fifty-four percent (Marie 2002b). Making sense of this reality, the Caribbean scholar Anselin characterized, in a metaphorical way, the Ile-de-France region as “the third island” of the French Caribbean (Anselin 1990), while another Caribbean social scientist, Claude-Valentin Marie, designated the same Parisian agglomeration as the “fifth DOM” (Marie 2005).

The distribution of Sub-Saharan African immigrants in France measures up almost identically with that of the DOM-TOM’s. In 1999, sixty percent of the Sub-Saharan African immigrant population was dwelling in the Parisian region (Borrel 2006). One better grasps the level of this concentration by taking into account that the Parisian region represents about 1.8% of the total surface area of the metropolitan territory. There is a second level of geographical aggregation: the high presence of the Black demographic in social housings in France in general and in the Ile-de-France region especially. More than one out of two residents originating from the DOM is sheltered in this type of housing (Marie 2002b). Likewise, among Sub-Saharan Africans, on the national scale, more than one out of two lives in social housing (INSEE 2005).

As Pizzorno (quoted by Della Porta and Diani, 2006) shows, the potential effect of close proximity is to arouse collective consciousness and a group identity—something that both scholars and activists of African descent have labelled as Blackness. Indeed, by aggregating in a small area within a society where they are a demographic minority, postcolonial African-descended French people become visible to each other as they are visible to the rest of the society. Similarities in their respective individual living conditions are more likely to become perceptible to each of them. Geographical proximity increases the chances for each member of this group to directly witness and draw comparisons with the treatment received by his/her counterparts interacting with the rest of society. It also offers recurrent opportunities to confront one’s own socio-economic achievement with that of one’s counterpart among people of African descent or of other origins. From this stems a feeling of common identity, and simultaneously a community of fate, that is likely to produce symbolic boundaries.

Several elements in my interviews and participant observation notes provide evidence of the contribution of geographical proximity to the formation of racial consciousness. For instance, I attended a meeting of about eighty people of African descent held in March 2007 at Calixthe Beyala’s home at the request of Beyala and Luc Saint-Eloi for the purpose of sounding out Blacks’ inclinations toward the different French presidential candidates and attempting to organize a common voting strategy. Following speeches by Beyala, Saint-Eloi, and Nji Mfenjou, a lawyer, the attendants as they broke into small groups expressed their opinions including those about the rationale behind the meeting itself. In one group that secluded itself in one corner of the lobby, the exchanges revolved around individual experiences. The common thread of the discussion was the collective Black predicament in France. One attendant pointed out that he lives in a neighbourhood where:

I cross the path of Black males and females all around, in the corridor of my building, on the street corners (. . .) from Antilles, Mali, Congo, etc., Some have never finished high school, some have a masters degree, some have a Ph.D. That

is the case of a neighbor living on the same floor as me; a Ph.D. in chemistry. But none of them is affluent, all of them [are] rotting away in the neighborhood. I see all this diversity of origin, of education, and wonder what's the point of undertaking a Ph.D. dissertation now. Furthermore, I ask myself 'why is it so that we are all bound to the same misery: no job, or a job at the lowest position, in spite of all our efforts to conform to the requirement of excellence . . . of scholarly success?' I have come to the conclusion that it is a problem to be Black in our country, and we [Blacks] need to change this situation. If we don't, nobody will do it for us. Calixthe [Beyala] understands this, and that's why I admire her, even though I have some issues with her [author's translation].

As this excerpt suggests, geographical concentration can elicit an awareness of a common predicament. This reflects the social assessment of the phenotype of people of African descent rather than a sentiment of sameness generated by the underachievement of postcolonial African-descended people.

### ATTITUDINAL METAMORPHOSIS

In addition to its numerical transformation, the postcolonial population of African descent has also undergone an attitudinal metamorphosis with regard to its presence in France. Historically, the presence in this society of both DOM-TOM and Sub-Saharan African immigrants in France results from the same pull factor: the opportunity to fill vacant jobs in France whose extinction would force them back to their native (is)lands, or into early retirement. The conspicuous in-flow of DOM migrant workers started roughly in 1962 with the institutionalization of the Bureau des Migrations dans les Départements d'Outre-Mer [Office for Migration of the Overseas Departments (BUMIDOM)], a state-managed institution whose objective was to recruit candidates for migration in the DOM to fill a manpower shortage in sectors of the metropolitan economy. In the same way, the French government intended to cut off the rising discontent resulting from a dying local economy in the DOMs. In 1959, in Martinique for example, an uprising of workers in the plantation economy of the islands occurred in response to a situation in which workers were no longer able find jobs in the local banana industry due to competition on the world market from cheaper produce from neighbouring Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. In subsequent years, the sugar industry in Martinique also faced tough competition, first from Cuban sugar producers and then from European sugar beet farmers (Condon 2004; Marie 2002a). As a result, the migration of more than 85,863 Martiniquans and Guadeloupans was organized and authorized by the BUMIDOM between 1961 and 1983 (Condon 2004).

A parallel migration began to take place between Sub-Saharan Africa and France. By the late 1960s, the ailing economies of new-born African states drove many African youth migrants out of Africa in search of employment and better wages. During this period of the so-called "thirty golden years" in France, these former colonial subjects were welcomed as an important supply of much needed manpower. As southern European economies grew more rapidly in the 1960s and ideological and legal barriers continued to bar citizens of communist Eastern Europe from moving freely westward, the ethno-racial criterion in France's immigration policies<sup>15</sup> was adjusted to allow for the influx of Sub-Saharan African workers.

However, the attitude of African-descended people towards their presence in metropolitan France is not reducible to an economic or instrumental factor alone.

France has become more than a country of economic prospects. Some macro data point to a strong process of settlement, not just migration, as reflected in the feminization<sup>16</sup> of this population, the rising proportion of French-born people of African descent, and the increasing proportion of Sub-Saharan African migrants choosing to become French citizens.

First, the gender distribution of DOM immigration has shifted between the early 1960s and the end of the twentieth century. Whereas, forty-one percent of immigrants recruited through the BUMIDOM between 1963 and 1981 were female, in 1999, the share of female immigrants in the total DOM population—which was already significant—was slightly higher than that of males: 51.9% to be precise (Condon 2004; Marie 2005). A similar development has been underway among Sub-Saharan African immigrants. In 1968, the sex ratio in this immigration featured an over-representation of males: 4.9 male migrants for every single female migrant. In 1999, a balance had been reached, with about forty-eight percent of the population being female (Gueye 2006).

Second, there has been an overall increase in the number of Black households in France. In the past, for many African male migrants the search for money that needed to be sent home to families in Africa tended to promote a bachelor mode of living among these migrants in France. When it came time to marry, many African male migrants opted for a union with a fellow citizen from their native land who lived in Africa. However, since the 1980s, the formation of couples on French soil has become the dominant option. In 1999, there were in metropolitan France 97,102 immigrant families headed by a person born in Sub-Saharan Africa (INSEE 2005) and 98,000 families of Martiniquan or Guadeloupan origin (Marie 2002a).

Third, there has been a dramatic and unexpected increase in the proportion of French-born African-descended residents. In 1999, the Antillean sub-population included an estimated 158,000 children under French law (Marie 2002a). In general, the increased size of the DOM-TOM population in the metropole is due more to procreation by established immigrants than to the arrival of newcomers. For example, in 1999, out of the 585,000 residents originating from the French overseas departments, 337,000 were born of Antillean families; which represents a ratio of 1.7 (Marie 2002b, 2005). A relatively similar trend was noticed in the Sub-Saharan African population. In 2003, for instance, sixteen percent of the French population between birth and sixteen years of age, who are descendants of immigrants, have at least one parent originating from Sub-Saharan Africa (INSEE 2005).

Fourth, Sub-Saharan African immigrants, more specifically, have been showing yet another sign of their presence in France by becoming settlers rather than just temporary migrant workers. Even though they are among the most recent immigrants in France, as compared with Italians, Portuguese, or Maghrebis, Sub-Saharan Africans have the highest rate of naturalization, almost equal to that of Southeast Asians. Between 1990 and 1999, thirty-four percent of them held French citizenship. This figure reveals a significant evolution by comparison with the period 1968–1975 when their rate of naturalization was only 8.7% (Fougère and Safi, 2006).

The aforementioned figures are all relevant indicators of the rootedness of African-descended people in France and a collective awareness of this rootedness among postcolonial African-descended mobilization entrepreneurs is clearly perceptible through their writings and interviews. This self definition has undoubtedly played a decisive role in the current Black movement in France. On January 3, 1998, for example, during a conference held by *Diaspora Africaine*, Calixte Beyala, the soon-to-be founder of the Collectif Egalité, presented her rationale behind efforts to build a Maison des Peuples Noirs [House for Black Peoples]. She said:

This community, our community is the only one that is not organized. I don't understand why—given the fact that we are the community where mankind first appeared—we are not organized. Today, in France, with regard to the Black population, there is nothing, while Arabs, Asians and many others organize themselves. Time has come for us to organize. We the Afro-French will never go back to Africa. France has become our home. It is here that we have raised our children. Now that we know that, the question is 'what shall we bequeath to our children?' That is the question that made me decide to join you this afternoon and to invite us to mobilize so as to build here in Paris, at the heart of the capital city, a House for the Black Peoples, we dream of: the House that we will show and bequeath to our children, and of which they will be proud [author's translation] (Gueye 2001).

Many of the interviews I conducted echoed the sentiments expressed by Beyala. For example, the forty-two year-old founder of the Association pour Favoriser l'Intégration Professionnelle [Association for the Promotion of Professional Integration (AFIP)], who came to France from Benin at the age of ten, of Beninese parents, and the mother of a six year-old boy, Carole Da Silva explained to me the reasons for her activism in this way:

I am the daughter of two immigrants and an immigrant myself, who had seen her parents turning grey in a country where they were not born but had made it theirs through their own free will. It was difficult for me to achieve certain goals here [in France] because of my skin color, which I am now passing on to my son. And the idea of seeing my own child going through the same hardship, the same humiliation, just because he is Black, awakened me. I came to the conclusion that the joyful choice of motherhood that I made four years ago implies a cost. I am bestowed with the responsibility to fight for the betterment of my country as much for the benefit of my own child as for the children of others [author's translation].

These two excerpts are interesting in many regards. First, we have testimonies from two female founders of organizations providing evidence of the feminization process taking place in the postcolonial African-descended population. Moreover, they epitomize quite clearly how French women of African descent have been making inroads in what was historically a male privilege, namely community leadership. Second and more important, these excerpts suggest that parental responsibility is a major factor of agency. The responsibility to protect one's offspring becomes a necessity that is likely to motivate one's capacity to publicly stand up for ideas and principles. Researchers who study social movements have failed to pay heed to the impact of parental status as an actual if not a socially-viewed element of action. Yet, one is struck by the almost constant reference to parental responsibility in some of the most famous speeches in the history of human rights, outside of the French geographical spectrum. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech bears witness: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

On a macro-level, it appears that beginning in the 1990s, parental responsibility became a reality in the African-descended communities of France. The Sub-Saharan African and DOM populations comprise a significant number of individuals who are likely to be exercising this responsibility. Among Sub-Saharan Africans in France,

the share of the age group twenty-five to forty-four years old is 52.8%, including almost thirty percent of individuals between thirty-five and forty-four years old (INSEE 2005). The average age among the DOM population in the Ile-de-France region was thirty-eight years old in 1999 (Marie 2002b). Given the fact that, in 2000, French residents on average had their first child at twenty-nine years of age, the African descended immigrant population is in all likelihood predominantly one of parents. As stated above, there are 98,000 families of Martiniquan or Guadeloupan background in 1999 as compared with a total DOM population of 585,000. As for the Sub-Saharan African population, it was composed of 138,799 families out of a total population of 570,000 people (INSEE 2005).

Parental status is worthy of mention because of its potential to impact on people's geographical mobility. The probabilities for postcolonial African-descended people to move from France to another country in search of a better life dwindled significantly during the period 1960–1970 when they were mostly single and childless immigrants. During the period 1990–2005, however, far more people among the African-descended in France attained the status of parents. As a consequence, the desire for an improvement in social conditions becomes a goal to be achieved more successfully by publicly voicing their expectations and discontent on French soil rather than through re-emigration or exit, to quote Mancour Olson (1971).

## EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The making of a collective voice is also to be understood in the light of an educational transformation underway in the postcolonial African-descended population. To speak out collectively and publicly is the result of a process, including the definition of goals and strategies that necessarily supposes control over, or appropriation of, a certain set of resources. Among these resources is education, which is fundamental, and whose ultimate function is to provide people with means and skills through which they assess practices, norms, and ideas structuring their own environment and existence, and which help them to hew autonomously collective tools so as to meet their goals. In a modern country such as France, the relative formalization and centralization of the educational system leads one to look first at individual or group level of representation in the school system and at different rungs of the system.

From this perspective, the African-descended population can be said to have secured a fairly significant set of means and skills that enable them to assess the discrepancy between their own scholarly efforts and achievement and the level of their social, political, and economic condition in a country that prides itself on a practicing meritocracy. To be sure, the data accounting for this discrepancy are only partial, since complete statistics are not available on the distribution of the DOM population in mainland France in the three rungs of the post-primary school system (secondary school, college, and university). As for the Sub-Saharan African immigrants, it turns out that they are among the most educated populations of immigrant extraction. In fact, a much larger proportion of this population is represented in the highest level of the French education system than its overall representation in the total French population. Moreover, the educational attainment of Sub-Saharan African immigrants has significantly increased over the years. Whereas during the 1960s and 1970s this population was reported to be overwhelmingly composed of illiterate or primary school drop-outs, in 1999, forty-two of them had some level of university education, including twenty-seven percent who held a university degree (INSEE

2005). Such an evolution stems from the over-representation of student inflows starting in the mid 1970s. Although the French-born children of African parents are reported to fare a little lower than their peers in non-immigrant groups, their level of education is still fairly high. The composition of African-descended activists in France clearly reflects these characteristics. None of the executive members or founders of the organizations mentioned earlier that are still or were active in the movement of postcolonial African-descended people holds a degree lower than a university degree, and a majority hold a Master of Arts or Sciences at least, with the exception of Dieudonné Mbala whose highest degree is a baccalauréat (the equivalent of an American high school diploma, albeit more competitive since it is based on a national examination).

However, educational attainment among Sub-Saharan Africans in France contrasts strikingly with their socio-professional achievement. In 2002, they had one of the highest shares in the unemployment rate: twenty percent of these immigrants were unemployed, as compared with the national unemployment rate of eight percent (INSEE 2005). Sub-Saharan Africans under work contracts were concentrated in the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder: thirty-eight percent of them were thus classified as *employés* [employees or clerks], another thirty-eight percent as *ouvriers* [workmen], and only nine percent as *cadres ou professions intellectuelles* [managers or executives] (INSEE 2005).

To make sense of these figures, one must contrast the professional achievement of this population with that of other immigrant groups such as Portuguese, Italians, Spanish, and Maghrebis, the DOMians, or the non-immigrant populations. The distribution of Italians and Spanish in the French job market are of some interest in this regard. In 1999, for example, twelve percent of Italians in France held a management position, twenty-seven percent were clerks, and thirty-four percent were workmen (INSEE 2005). However, the Italian immigrant population includes a much lower proportion of highly educated members in comparison with Sub-Saharan Africans. Only twelve percent of Italian immigrants held a baccalaureat degree and sixteen percent held a university degree. There is a similar trend among Spanish immigrants: eleven percent of this population held a baccalaureat degree and fifteen percent, a university degree. In terms of job placement, nine percent of the Spanish immigrant group in France have secured a management position, thirty-three percent, a post as an employee, and thirty-two percent were classified as workmen (INSEE 2005). For the DOM population, studies undertaken by sociologist Claude-Valentin Marie on professional distribution point to an underlying commonality with the Sub-Saharan Africans. According to Marie, two features characterize the DOM immigration. First, although this group enjoys an employment rate comparable with the national average, DOM youth, regardless their place of birth are seriously affected by the unemployment problem: an average of 26.1% of them were out of work during the 1990s compared to the French national average of sixteen percent for their age group. Second, the active immigrants from the DOM upon arrival were “over-represented in the public sector [where they] are confined in the least qualified positions. Since, then, no improvement of their qualification is noticed. Mainly, they have remained agents of B or C categories” in a sector in which five categories are ranked in the following order from bottom to top: C, B, A, A+, and finally A++ (Marie 2005, p. 173).

The abovementioned statistics show that employment equity dwindles as one moves from one extremity of the demographic spectrum epitomized by the European-descended population to the other one represented by the group of African descent. The more African-descended residents conform to the meritocratic injunction which



values a high level of education, the less they seem to benefit from the rewards that education is supposed to offer. However, the discrepancy between educational attainment and professional promotion appears to be less pronounced in the case of European-descended immigrants. Unarguably, this difference between Whites and Blacks reflects a certain form of discrimination against African-descended people. As the theory of rising expectations among African Americans has shown, this gap between expectation and gratification for one group is more likely to heighten consciousness about injustice, and therefore ignite a dynamic of resistance (Abeles 1976; Chandra and Foster, 2005).

Of course, the contribution of educational levels to raising the consciousness among African-descended people about the mechanisms of discrimination, then leading to the vocalization of their discontent is very difficult to measure. I have noted above that a postsecondary level of education is a common characteristic among all mobilization entrepreneurs of African descent in France today. However, as strong as this evidence may appear, it could still be questioned due to the small size of this group. An account of the life-stories and narratives by these mobilization leaders and their followers can provide a supplementary measure of the linkage between education and the making of a Black collective voice. It is a common assertion in the African-descended movement that for decades in France both the state apparatus and union propaganda have succeeded in impeding the public expression of Black discontent, by exploiting the illiteracy of the African-descended population in order to place them under the tutelage of White working-class leaders. A member of the executive of the CRAN who had been previously involved in the Communist Party student organizations of Paris stated that:

Our difference when compared to our elders and parents lies in our knowledge of France's complex societal organization. It was easy to dupe our parents with inflated empty words like 'liberty' and 'equality' since they were illiterate. Because they were illiterate, they were led to believe that France had done them a great favor by offering them jobs that most of the time our White fellow citizens did not want. This trick cannot work anymore, for we are made from the same clay as the best of our compatriots. We went to the same universities, read the same books, and the same French law in the original texts as they did. We are able to identify any specific right that is denied to us. Ironically, this knowledge of which we are grateful to the education system of our country is what enables us today to rise up, speak for ourselves, and be heard. You cannot discredit what you have contributed to create without discrediting yourself. Today our compatriots cannot denigrate us, for they know that we are speaking from a common intellectual spirit, that is, from the words, ideas, principles, and the rhetoric that the university system bestowed on all of us [author's translation].

As the previous lines suggest, the growth of an educated postcolonial African-descended citizenry and the increase in the level of education within the same group has provided this population with the means and the skills to exert social and political leverage. As they have risen up the educational ladder, postcolonial African-descended people have attained an insider's understanding of the structure of French society. Furthermore, they have also acquired the tools and the skills that enable them to articulate their own different voices so as to craft a common claim reflective of the expectations of their own group. It is in this regard that educational transformation is to be credited for contributing to the manifestation of Black agency in France during the last decade.

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of a collective Black voice has triggered media attention in recent years. From the left to the right ends of the French national media spectrum, and even internationally, as demonstrated by articles published in the *New York Times* and the Francophone Swiss daily *Le temps*, journalists have been attempting to pinpoint the causative factors and the rationale of this dynamic. However, French society has remained for a long time silent and reluctant to acknowledge the racial dimension of the social relations in France. This reluctance is based mostly on ideological grounds that a good many sociologists, including Dominique Schnapper (2008), laud as virtuous, arguing that an acknowledgement of race would lead to a reinforcement of racial and ethnic consciousness in a society like France that has always sought to preserve a color-blind principle. Many French intellectuals, such as Pierre-André Taguieff, are quick to chastise anyone proposing to act politically based on a racial or ethnic consciousness as someone guilty of trying to invent for France what is an un-translatable concept of *communautarisme* [communitarianism]; that which is said to characterize American society. In spite of this strong opposition, a small number of scholars have incorporated the understanding of the dynamic of race in their scientific agenda, and attempted to account for the manifestation of what is being now called a “Black activism” in France. However, the state-centered approach of these studies has failed to provide a thorough explanation.

This study has sought to demonstrate that the political dynamic of postcolonial African-descended people in France arises from the intrinsic resources and skills acquired by this group. The demographic increase of this group, which is explained in large part by the transition from a population of temporary migrants to one of settlers and French-born natives longing for the same benefits and privileges as their fellow countrymen, is of decisive contribution to the “Black activism.” This numerical change, and the skills garnered by the citizenry of African descent whose level of education has risen tremendously, are turned into factors of leverage. These resources and skills have made discrimination assessable and decipherable by people of African descent and have enabled the definition of strategies and tools to address their unequal treatment in French society. To make discrimination the unique and original explanation of the current political dynamic, as some researchers do, is to explain the development not by what the postcolonial African-descended population possesses but what it lacks. Activism is built on resources and skills.

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## NOTES

1. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and comments. Many thanks, also, to my friend Yuusuf Caruso whose touch has helped to make this article much better.
2. Perhaps, only the 1996 *sans-papiers*’ [undocumented immigrants] movement could be credited with an equivalent echo in the national media.
3. As an association, CAPDIV is a member of this federation. Many of its key adherents are also involved in the CRAN, in whose foundation they have been very instrumental. The strong intersection of resources and claims of the two organizations has misled many observers of the dynamic of African-descended people, including one reviewer of this article, to the extent that they state that CAPDIV has eventually transformed into the CRAN. But, in fact, CAPDIV is still extant and develops its own agenda and activities

- parallel, not in opposition to those of the CRAN. It has, and manages its own website; its current President is different from that of the CRAN.
4. The former organizations echoed much more the social expectations of the educated proportion of the African-descended people as shown by their diverse actions for the integration of Blacks in the apparatus of the major political parties, the ranking of Black political candidates at eligible positions during election contests, and the promotion of Black journalists in the public and private media, just to mention a few examples.
  5. Chapman and Frader (2004) summarize the origin of this position thusly: “To understand French aversion to discussing race in the manner to which Americans are accustomed, it is helpful to reflect on the history of France and especially on the impact of the French Revolution. The founding myth of the Republic as ‘one and indivisible’ emphasized the unitary, universalist, and inclusive nature of the Republic as a polity based on individual rights, with little if any room for the recognition of group differences. The revolutionaries of the 1790s attacked the entire framework of corporate privilege and provincial autonomy that served to structure the social order of the Old Regime, and in its place they asserted the centrality of individual citizens, equal before the law (p. 1).
  6. There have been some exceptions to the 1978 law banning the publication and collection of statistical data on race and ethnicity. These include: Michèle Tribalat’s controversial book, *Faire France* (1995) and the large scale surveys conducted by researchers at the Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (INSEE) and the Institut National d’Etudes Démographiques (INED), under the program Enquête Trajectoires et Origines (TeO).
  7. This acronym stands for Département d’Outre-Mer-Territoires d’OutreMer, and refers to the French overseas departments and territories.
  8. As the American literature on ethnicity shows, the difference between the ethnicity and the nationality of immigrants is hard to determine. The original nationality of immigrants has become, in most cases, a proxy category to indicate their ethnicity (Alba and Denton, 2008; Poutignat and Streiff-Fénart, 1995).
  9. Interestingly this author uses notions such as tribalisation and hypertribalisation to portray the social organization of Hausa and Soninke who epitomize, in his view, the African immigrant population.
  10. Even though Carrère d’Encausse comes from a completely different ideological background than Wihtol de Wenden or Barou, her interpretation of the 2005 uprisings could fit easily in what I call a *hyperculturalist paradigm*. By this notion I mean an explanatory scheme in the French social sciences through which practices and actions by people of African descent are viewed as entirely governed by the laws and rules of a tradition regardless of the loci in which they take place, the generation, and the socialization of the individuals involved. In some instances, this *hyperculturalist paradigm* is applied to the Arab population of France.
  11. Tin’s classification of this set is much less easy to justify in comparison with that of other publications. Indeed, although significantly autobiographical and informative, this article raises and grapples with rigorous sociological questions such as on what grounds is the current collective of citizens to be deemed Black?
  12. One of the most conspicuous pieces of evidence reported recently by French newspapers is the French state’s decision to “crystallize” or freeze the war pensions of veterans originating from Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. The decision was justified on the ground that the living standards in these former colonies are lower than those in metropolitan France. Challenged by some associations, and currently under revision by the policymakers, it poses the question of its ethical and egalitarian orientation since a similar differentiation is not made between war veterans living respectively in metropolitan cities of unequal living standard.
  13. Beriss (2004b), Lamont (2000), Hargreaves (1995), and Spire (2005) demonstrate that this racializing process uses proxies like culture, or administrative, or territorial categories.
  14. A whole segment of the journalistic profession castigated the CSA for having legitimized racial categorization in France through this report issued in October 1999. In reaction to this criticism the CSA postponed *sine die* the distribution of the report.
  15. On the discussion about the racialization of immigration policy in France, see Spire (2005).
  16. We are aware that this trend reflects a general evolution. Sassen (1984) has convincingly documented the feminization of migration and settlement in Western countries.

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