



Ethnicity in young people's lives: From discrimination to new individuations in French and British societies

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Abstract:

Riots in poor urban districts of France and Britain are often regarded as touchstones of national models, leading observers to conclude that either Assimilationism or Multiculturalism has failed. Based on a qualitative study among young people living in working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods of Paris and London suburbs, this contribution investigates how national models impact everyday constructions of ethnicity. Rather than looking for the failure of one model or the other, it shows that respective contradictions of both open space for young people to articulate new forms of individuation. Faced with tensions between a « colour-blind » ideal of universality and discriminatory and segregative practices, young people from Paris *banlieues* struggle to conciliate a high sense of citizenship with reinvented cultural heritages. Their British counterparts, who tend to understand discriminations and racism as individual and moral problems, call for the fulfilment of the ideal of tolerance and still claim working-class identities.

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1. Introduction

In contemporary European societies, ethnicity, through interrogations on immigration and national identity, has become a focus of political anxiety as shown by the renewal of populist political parties. Young people from working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods are at the centre of this political attention: riots in Britain and France are recurrently regarded as touchstones of France and Britain 'national models'. Everyday practices, sociability and identifications in poor and immigrant neighbourhoods land under political and media scrutiny; they are at stake in national debates about 'community cohesion' in Britain or '*laïcité*' in France. How could these everyday young lives in peripheral and deprived neighbourhoods endanger something supposedly so profoundly anchored as national philosophies and ideals?

Constructivists perspectives on ethnicity, that following Max Weber and Fredrik Barth understand ethnicity as a process of boundaries making (Barth 1969) based on 'the subjective belief in [a] common descent' (Weber 1968), give us hints to understand that behind the denunciation of a 'minority problem' lies an inquiry about the majority. They are both sides of a unique process of boundaries building. So '*minoritization*' of young people from deprived immigrant neighbourhood questions the definition of the state and its nation. Researches about ethnicity give us various tools to examine this link.

Weber stated that the first ethnic group was the state, insisting on the political dimension of ethnicity; his idea prevails today through understanding of States as 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991). A large field of literature therefore investigates the impact of historical processes of nation-state building on contemporary ethnicity: from ideas of citizenship (Brubaker 1992), integration (Favell 1998), toleration (Walzer 1999), to concrete politics and legislations that impact everyday life of minorities (Garbaye 2005; Joly 2007; Lapeyronnie 1993).

But ethnicity isn't shaped by macro-structural processes only. As other types of social identity, ethnicity results from processes of categorisation and identification (Jenkins 1996) that people mobilize in specific contexts (Okamura 1981) to assert, contest, resist, negotiate, give meaning to their place in society. Numerous ethnographic researches, noticeably among stigmatised communities, have well exposed these micro processes of strategic identity. Micro and informal interactions, when happening on a repeated basis, can foster structural and long-lasting representations of one's place and belonging (Joseph 1984). This literature about 'new ethnicities' is nevertheless less present in France than in Britain (Alexander 1996; Back 1996; Baumann 1996). Still, most of these ethnographic studies of everyday ethnicity focus on one national case and then make it difficult to link micro processes of resistance and negotiation with structuring processes at the national level.

Contemporary research tries to put face to face national models and philosophies and individual identity strategies. Comparative works by Michèle Lamont on de-stigmatization strategies track national patterns of symbolic boundaries building through individual narratives (Lamont 2002; Lamont and Mizrachi 2012 forth

coming)¹. The choice for interviews rather than direct observation prevents though from grasping the structuring power of national models on everyday interactions (instead of individual narratives only).

Geographical perspectives on 'everyday-life' encourage us to focus on territorial units where local structuring of ethnicity is a good lens through which to perceive how national models are lived and contested (Amin 2002; Clayton 2009). Contemporary research on ethnicity actually resorts to this research strategy (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea 2008; Wimmer 2004). Focusing on spatial units² seems to be the better way indeed to examine at the same time bottom-up and top-down processes, and therefore to get closer to the 'full circle explanation' of ethnicity, from macro structuring processes to micro resistances and negotiations, that Andreas Wimmer call for in his multi-level process theory (Wimmer 2008).

This is this interplay between macro structures (national model) and micro processes (everyday narratives and interactions) that I try to grasp through a comparative research focusing on two spatial units: the city of Bondy in Seine-Saint-Denis and the London borough of Newham in East London. Through mixed methodology, I explore the role of ethnicity in young people's everyday life in these two working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods. Chase for similarities and differences should reveal how national models construct and constrain (through mediation of local contexts) young people's representations, sociability and identifications.

After a short presentation of British multiculturalism and French assimilation as national models in transition, followed by some precisions about both local contexts, this paper endeavour to reconstruct opposite national systems of ethnicity from an analysis of the various socialisation spheres young people are engaged in through their everyday life: the neighbourhood, peer groups and youth culture, family, and school and local institutions. Each of them participates in the emergence of divergent narratives about citizenship and belonging. We'll thus see that French Republican model nurtures among young people in Bondy a sense of common destiny as young "immigrants" combined paradoxically with a high politicization of cultural practices and identity issues. In Multicultural Newham, separation between ethnic groups goes with a relatively de-politicization of ethnicity in favour of socioeconomic issues. But both sides of the

¹ Sophie Duchesne too confronts French national philosophy of citizenship with individual narratives about it. But her work isn't comparative Cf. (Duchesne 1997)

² More generally, focusing on spatial units of observation has numerous advantages for the study of ethnic boundaries making. It helps to avoid presupposing the location, meaning, salience, nor even the existence of ethnic boundaries. It makes possible to observe the interplay between ethnic boundaries and other type of social boundaries ((Baumann 1996; Wimmer 2004)). At last, if combining interviews and narratives analyses with ethnography, observation and statistic analysis, it give the chance to analyze both symbolic (representations, categorizations) and social (relationship network, structures of inequalities) aspects of boundaries ((Lamont and Molnar 2002)).

channel, the contradictions of these systems open space for young people to challenge them and to invent new types of individuation.

2. National Models, local contexts

2.1. National models in transition

If national models reality, unicity and stability should be definitely questioned, we can assume, following Adrian Favell, that collective belief in these models, path dependency mechanisms and ongoing process of intellectual harmonization give them real influence over policies, practices and representations (Favell 1998).

France is a long-term centralized state where republican ideal bans every intermediary between the state and the citizens. From this follows the pre-eminence of individual rights over collective rights; cultural specificities are contained to the private sphere which is strongly separated from the public sphere (Schnapper 1991). United Kingdom on the other hand is multicultural from its origins as it encompasses, under the domination of England, different nations and cultures. British State recognizes minorities and gives them collective rights.

Politics in colonial Empires³ reflected these divergent philosophies; so do post-colonial immigration status of after World War II. The British national act of 1947 granted British citizenship to people born in either the UK or the Commonwealth, practically transforming New Commonwealth immigrants into ethnic minorities. This hasn't be the case in France; Maghrebi immigrants and their descendants, even when have acquired French citizenship, are still called "immigrants".

When family reunion replaced economic immigration, Britain developed important legislation against racism, whereas local multiculturalism tried to ensure equal opportunity and equal access to services and provided political representation for ethnic minorities. France has no specific policies targeting minorities but after the first riots erupted in the 1980s, it has developed compensatory policies targeting deprived territories: '*politique de la ville*'. Still, the pertaining fear of "*communautarisme*" maintains a genuinely low political representation of minorities in local politics.

These two divergent philosophies have also an impact on statistic tools available for policies and research. Ethnic group is a category of the British census since 1991 and is widespread in administrative statistics, whereas collecting ethnic data is unconstitutional in France.

³Britain used to rely on traditional local authorities to assert its dominance. It recognized local cultures, religions and languages (Feldman 2011). On the contrary, French Republic wanted to civilize the colony by giving them French culture and French language (Goheneix-Minisini 2011).

But recently, there have been some convergences (Garbaye 2005; Joly 2007) as after September eleven, public discourses about immigration focused on Islam and on the fear of religious extremism in both countries.

This favoured a roll back of multiculturalism in the UK. The tightening of anti-terrorism measures restricted the autonomy of Muslim organizations in Britain and the visibility and recognition previously accorded to Islam. After 2001 riots in northern cities of England, the Cantle Report concluded on the necessity to reinforce 'community cohesion' and to strengthen the sense of citizenship. Conservatives' victory in 2010 elections confirmed this political shift: after the riots this summer in London, David Cameron rejected social and political explanations to stress a 'moral problem' and the failure of multiculturalism.

In France, 2004 saw the creation of la HALDE⁴, an institutional body in charge of fighting against discriminations. A political and scientific debate about ethnic statistics was launched, while organisations claiming an ethnic identity appeared in civil society (the CRAN, 'representative council of black associations', claims to represent French black people and black groups). But at the same time, public and political discourses became ever more restrictive and even xenophobic since Nicolas Sarkozy came to power in 2007. National debates on '*Identité nationale*' and '*laïcité*', targeting Islam, failed to slow down the rise of the extreme right. After a ban on Hijab in school in 2004, a ban on Niqab in public space was passed in 2009.

2.2. Two local contexts in transformation

When it comes to these two national models and their transformations, working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods of Paris and London are subjected to enhanced scrutiny.

Through history, working-class people have been regularly regarded as a source of danger (Chevalier 1958) and exposed to 'racization' (De Rudder, Poiret, and Vourc'h 2000; Guillaumin 1972). This "otherness" is even more salient when immigration from former colonies imports to metropolises ethnic boundaries heretofore contained within overseas empires. Besides, today immigrant neighbourhoods became the host of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Bhabba 2007) that transnationalist researchers analyse as the main current challenge to the Nation-State.

Seine-Saint-Denis and East-London are two traditional working-class areas where different waves of immigration have been settling from long time ago. They both knew harsh de-industrialisation during the 1980s. They both are undergoing nowadays great demographical, economic and urban changes.

⁴ In accordance with the European Racial Equality Directive [2000/43/EC](#).

Bondy is a middle city of Seine-Saint-Denis (53.311 inhabitants in 2006) that main indicators situate in the mean of the district. But Bondy is characterized by an urban fracture. The northern part is classified as a priority area for compensatory policies (*'Zone Urbaine Sensible'*). Constituted by massive public housing projects built in the 50-60s to accommodate European population repatriated from Algeria, it concentrates today social difficulties, youth unemployment (36,2% of 15-24 years old people in activity as opposed to 27% for the whole Bondy⁵) and immigrant population (26,8% of foreigner as opposed to 18,6% in Bondy as a whole⁶). Separated by a canal and a highway, the southern part of Bondy concentrates facilities and equipments, detached houses and middle-class families. It's still highly heterogeneous and comprises derelict projects too. But Bondy, a historical socialist municipality, is undergoing great urban changes. A huge urban renewal project is transforming the north of the city: derelict or problematic high rise blocks are put down and give way for more diversified housing. The extreme South sees the building of close residential areas to attract middle class people.

Newham is a large (243,891 inhabitants) and young borough. One of the poorest of Britain (it is the third most deprived local authority out of 326), it is also the most ethnically diverse one. Newham is characterized by the absence of ethnic majority. 2001 census counted a big third of Asian people (35.8%), another third of White people (34.2%) and a small third of Black people (24.9%). But Newham is becoming even more multicultural with the recent diversification of immigration, marked by refugees' and East-European workers' presence. Newham territory is highly heterogeneous. The Western part, close to the Lea valley where used to settle industries, has been severely hit by de-industrialization. It is today a deprived part that contrasts with the more residential Eastern part. The South still hosts white families who used to work on the docks. It used to be a bastion of the BNP and so was for a long time a no-go area for ethnic minorities who until today are concentrated in the Northern part. In recent years, the redevelopment project of the 'Royal Dock' area in the south is cause of major urban and economic changes; as is the preparation for the 2012 Olympic Games Newham will host this summer.

During a long-term involvement in the two neighbourhoods, I carried out individual semi-directed interviews, participant (as a volunteer youth worker) and non participant observations (in various community organisations) and focus groups (in 6thForm colleges in Newham and 'Lycées' in Bondy) with young people aged 15 to 25 from different backgrounds and trajectories.

3. In search for national systems of ethnicity

Grasping the impact of national models in young people everyday life requires considering the major socialization spheres where young people are engaged in and where they incorporate ethnic representations and categories: neighbourhood (perceived through the lens of "local consensuses" about

⁵ 1999 census.

⁶ Idem.

boundaries), peer groups, family, and finally school and local institutions. Each of these spheres promotes specific systems of social and symbolic boundaries that quite diverge between Bondy and Newham. These divergences can often be related to national models specificities mediated by the characteristics of local contexts.

3.1. Local consensus: the economy of main ethnic groups versus outsiders

In each of my fieldworks, I have observed a minimal common system of boundaries making, that all inhabitants of the local place share. These 'local consensus'⁷ about symbolic and social boundaries lean on distinct territorial representations (about the neighbourhood and its relation to the urban space); group formation is indeed closely intertwined with territorial construction (Poche 1996)⁸.

In Bondy, there is a clear division in people's mind between the '*banlieues*', seen as poor, immigrant and young and Paris, seen as white, old and rich. This representation is backed up by the urban structure of Paris, which is very centralized, with a clear urban separation, '*le périphérique*', the ring road that encircles the centre of Paris and actually separates Paris from suburban municipalities.

A similar multidimensional division is to be found at the local level. Bondy inhabitants oppose '*Bondy Nord*' to '*Bondy Sud*', reifying the relative difference of deprivation and of immigrant presence between the north and the south of the city. Rap crews from the north proudly turn round the expression in '*Nordybon*'⁹, whereas social worker and local civil servants explicitly ban its use to counter the stigmatisation of the northern part of the city and of its inhabitants.

This multidimensional division (urban, social and ethnic) reinforces a symbolic and social closure system in term of a dual opposition between 'immigrants' (that is to say Blacks and Arabs) and 'French

⁷ The idea of 'local consensus' comes from Les Back who identifies divergent 'community discourses' between Riverview and Southgate. These discourses about the locality define communities and their boundaries through a reconstructed history that gives meaning to current local transformations. Cf (Back 1996). It also comes from Andreas Wimmer who describes 'cultural compromises', that is to say 'a shared set of categories to describe and evaluate the social world as well as a set of expectations of solidarity', or again 'a shared understanding of who belong and who does not' Cf. (Wimmer 2004) P.6

⁸ I follow Bernard Poche (1996) who defines territoriality as the "spatial extension of the material world elements on which a group defines itself". He stresses that relationship to the space is not a geography but a topology. It is not ruled by geometric distances, but by contiguities and breaches, by heights, that incorporates symbolic dimensions, and plains of ordinary everyday-life. Social distance, symbolic violence and memory significance arrange, organize the territory and circulations displacements. They may closely link remote spaces and erect frontiers between neighbouring places. (p.123)

⁹ About the mythology of the 'north' in rap and youth culture, Cf. (Lepoutre 1997) Chapter 1, 'Les modes d'appropriation de l'espace'.

people' (actually designing white families and then European immigrants). This replicates national philosophy of Republican integration which opposes 'French people' to 'immigrants' (Lamont 2002). This is also a heritage of local history of immigration and housing policies. At first excluded from social housing, immigrant families had progressively access to the poorest part of the stock, as soon as French families could progress to better houses and better neighbourhoods. Virtually very few non immigrant families stayed in the most derelict estates. Discrimination in housing (Sala Pala 2005; Simon 2001; Tissot 2005) and employment (Silberman and Fournier 2006), associated with no concrete policy to tackle it, prevented local competition. As it follows, immigrant children in poor neighbourhoods, Maghrebis then Africans¹⁰, grew up sharing a common experience of disadvantage and stigmatization. This fed a collective memory built around the idea of an 'immigrants' common destiny (Boubeker, Paris, and Demanget 2007).

The urban fabric is more complex to read in London where urban, socioeconomic and ethnic division are not so clearly superposed as in Paris case. London is less centralized and its rich neighbourhoods may be equally peripheral or central, whereas high concentration of ethnic minority people doesn't always indicate deprivation¹¹. This is especially obvious in Newham where the axis of deprivation, from East to West is actually perpendicular to that of minority presence, from South to North. Some of the more derelict and stigmatised housing projects, especially in Canning Town and Royal Docks, where until recently almost entirely 'white'.

This situation - a salience of ethnic groups without any obvious neither economic nor symbolic hierarchy - can be explained by local history of violent racism, multiculturalism and housing policies in the context of harsh socioeconomic violence working-class neighbourhoods have been subjected to under Thatcherism. In the 80s, Asian families in East London were excluded from social housing and at the same time experienced a particularly violent racism that drove them to withdraw from the public space and to turn to home life and to Asian community structures (Bowling 1998); they found support in the implementation of local multicultural policies. At the same time, poor white families, not able to leave the district, were blocked in virtually all white, but deprived estates. They felt unfavourably treated by antidiscrimination policies and despised by liberal elites that stigmatised school dropping-out and teenage pregnancy rates of 'culture-less' working-class families (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006). This stirred resentment and competition from both side. If black families settled later in Newham, urban riots of the 1980S had already fixed the image of

¹⁰ It looks like African immigration, more recently arrived, has entered a similar cycle as maghrebi immigration, following parallel career and ordeals. For an analyze in terms of segmented assimilation, see (Safi 2006)

¹¹ And the other way round: Barking and Dagenham, a district with one of the highest concentration of 'white people' ('White British people' represented 80% of it's population in 2001, as compared to the 60% on average for the whole London region), is also one of the poorest (the district was ranked the 22d most deprived local authority in England and Wales whereas the less deprived of London district is classified 285th). Datas: Neighbourhood Statistics, ONS.

young black males and of a black community as undermined by drugs, violence and family disintegration (Gilroy 1987).

Present-day situation inherits from this a three-cornered competition between Asian, White and Black communities. In fact, more than one local consensus, one can distinguish three different sub-consensuses. Asian, White and Black Communities have distinct references and collective memories, as well as distinct territoriality: Black families often have connections with relatives living in Hackney or in South London; Asian Families look towards Redbridge were better-off Asian families tend to settle; as for white Families, they usually look forward to joining friends and folks who already moved to Essex.

This general opposition between Bondy and Newham – a multidimensional opposition between ‘immigrants’ and ‘French people’ on one side, a three-cornered competition between Asian, White and Black community on the other side – is though not always true locally. Residential segregation may foster limited peculiar sub-consensuses about social and symbolic boundaries. For example, in the poorest part of Bondy, Paris Council has housed together in a derelict tower block an important number of Immigrant African families arrived recently in France. Teenage black boys from these families are virtually excluded from the local community club - situated though at the bottom of the block - which is taken over by long-time neighbourhood residents Maghrebi families who see African families as spoiling the neighbourhood. In this case, residential segregation combined with different time of housing and scarcity of resources nurtures competition and favours the salience of a local boundary opposing Black and Maghrebi families.

Now what is similar in both cases is a classical effect of social closure of the old-established against newcomers (Elias and Scotson 1997). Asian immigrants in Bondy, Somalian refugees and East-Europeans immigrants in Newham, are always described as outsiders and have no real place in local collective memories and territorialities. The same happens with, if one can say, ‘traditional’ outsiders, as stand Jewish and Gypsy families in Bondy.

These two different local consensuses represent the general and dominant patterns of ethnicity in my fieldworks. Now, specific socialisation spheres as peer groups, family and schools, that young people are engaged in through their everyday life, reinforce or alter these patterns, in part similarly and in part differently on the two fieldworks.

3.2. Peer groups boundaries system: reworking “Black”, “White”, “Asian”, “Rebeu”, “Renois”and “Céfrans” categories

Peer groups are decisive socialisation spheres for teenagers and young adults. They share these local consensuses on social and symbolic boundaries, but they rework it through youth cultures.

Ethnic categorizing is omnipresent in peer groups indeed. It is used to identify people and is especially pervasive in informal discussions, like jokes and jibing. Young people among themselves resort mainly to large racial categories that we just described in local consensuses: that is to say ‘Black’, ‘White’ and ‘Asian’

in Newham, 'Rebeu', 'Renois' and 'Céfran' in Bondy (the slang translation for 'Black', 'Arab' and 'French'). These two ethnicity triptychs gather together the categories used by racism as well as anti-racism campaigns¹²; They are defined nationally and that are linked with history of colonization and of post-war, post-colonial immigration. They represent the way ethnicity is understood nationally. This extensive use of ethnic categorizing is ambivalent though.

On one hand, ethnic categorizing reproduces the experience of discrimination and conveys the heavy weight of hetero-identification. Peer groups, who have an intensive (practical and symbolic) use of neighbourhood territory (Blokland 2003), experience a multidimensional stigmatization in public space as young people, as boys, as working class, as minority ethnics. This daily experience of stigmatization makes sense in regards with numerous scenes of racist incidents and discriminatory practices recounted by folks or relatives that fill collective memory.

On the other hand, intensive use of ethnic categorizing shows cultural resistance and autonomy of peer groups and youth cultures. Actually youth cultures rework dominant categories through identity and cultural '*bricolage*' (De Certeau 1990; Levi-Strauss 1962), giving them new features and new meanings. If these identity *bricolages* have been well studied in Britain (for instance about young black people see (Alexander 1996; Back 1996)), they're still somehow unexplored in France. But both sides of the channel, peer groups *bricolages* pick in various and quite similar cultural *repertoires* to make sense to what it means to be Black, Asian, White or Arab in Newham and Bondy today.

"This is what it means to be Asian. You have to listen to certain kind of music, you have to use the same kind of language when you speak, you have to, you know, behave in a certain way."

Boy, 30 years, PhD student, father retired manual worker. Newham

American cultural industry and especially Black cultural industry is a major inspiration for youth cultures. Hip hop and R&B culture influence outfits from clothes to haircuts (Rihanna's haircuts are amazingly widespread in Bondy as in Newham), the mythology of the ghetto give meaning to ethnic and urban relegation experiences whereas history of the civil right movement and its political actors offer positive figures to identify with. "Our ancestors, they had to sit in the back of buses", as an Arab teenage boy told me in Bondy, endorsing the black American experience.

These *bricolages* also resort to various world cultural industries and especially popular music and movies from Africa, Asia or the West Indies that are appreciated by immigrant Diasporas. This is the case for Bhangra – a music from the Indian Subcontinent but often produced in the US or the UK – and diverse contemporary African and Caribbean urban dances very popular among young people (Kuduro, kizomba, coupé décalé, bashment, reaggae, dancehall...). All these musical genres are often mixed with R&B music

¹² The winning T-shirt of an anti-racist competition in a local youth centre in EastHam, Newham, figured side-by-side a White, a Black and an Asian faces. It's again this national ethnic triptych that is mobilized when in France, after the World Cup, people praised the '*Black, Blanc, Beur*' National Football team.

and rhythms to give birth to new composite subgenres like *zoukn'B* (zouk + R&B) or '*raïn'B*' (raï + R&B). They are strongly associated with local ethnic categories. In Bondy, a high school student with East African background complains about the predominance of Dancehall, that she identifies as a 'Black' music, at a school party; that was unfair for her Maghrebi friends:

"I could see them, they were sitting and making fun of me. They would say: « Oh, Black people, enough, stop it ! ». They were joking but it's true that it was unfair.

- I think all in all, there has been only two « Rebeu » songs

- It wasn't even « Rebeu », it was « Rai&B fever!" [Laughs] It means that it's Black people singing with Arabs, so there was still Black people in. They should have understand that there wasn't only Black people in the room. [...] Eventually, put something that appeals to everyone, like US rap or whatever!"

Girls, high school students, Bondy.

At last, youth cultures dip into local references, memories and practices. Being Asian, Black or White in Newham also means going to chicken and chips shops after school and watching *Eastenders* on the telly; being *Rebeu* or *Renois* in Bondy means eating Greek sandwiches, speaking the local slang and spending summer holidays at the '*bled*' (parent's country of origin). These "bricolages" are moreover time specific: "Rebeu" figures of the 2000s sharply differ from the figure of "Beurs" in the beginning of the 1980s, built around rock music and the march for equality.

Thus, these local and present-day *bricolages* firmly inscribe young people in an urban multicultural modernity. This becomes obvious by looking at boundaries that peer groups draw towards the countryside and towards parents' emigration countries. Countryside is described as mono-cultural, narrow-minded - if not racist - and boring. Young people clearly oppose it to multicultural, modern and open-minded Paris and London where they appreciate the 'fast moving'. At the same time, parent's countries of origin are favourite subjects of jokes and jibes between young people who make fun of each other's origins. In a youth centre I studied, young people used to spend a lot of time laughing and looking at pictures they posted on internet, like at one named "Nigerian Ipod": it showed a young man, in a remote and rural part of Nigeria, walking with an enormous and out-dated music amp on his head. By these mockeries that pop up again and again, peer groups exhibit their distance with parental emigration country and parental practices, which they consider as archaic and backward-looking, if not exotic. Peer groups assert themselves as members of the contemporary modern West, Paris and London.

Now, a major divergence between Bondy and Newham, is that peer groups *bricolages* unify a common culture of the '*banlieue*' in Bondy, whereas separated Asian, Black and White subcultures may be observed in Newham.

In Bondy, young people identify different ethnic styles: some haircuts, some outfits and some musical genres are designed as 'Rebeu', 'Renois' or 'Cefran', as we saw in a precedent quote. However, these categories are more a fact of discourses than of practices: young people listen to various musical styles no matter their backgrounds. Rebeus, Renois and Céfrans local young people are embedded in a very similar youth culture, with shared references. Differences in family socializations are counterbalanced by local collective socialization and sociability.

It's not exactly the case in Newham where among the local organizations I've observed, some were dominated by a 'Black' subculture and some others by an 'Asian' subculture, revealing a segmentation of socializations and sociabilities.

A youth centre where I've been volunteering was dominated by a 'Black' subculture. The music listened to was 'black': Hip hop and R&B, Caribbean Bashment, African music. Despite the majority of young people and staff being from African background, Caribbean and American black cultures were central references. When planning an end-of-the-year party, it was quickly decided to ask for a Caribbean food delivery as everybody was supposed to just 'love' it. References to Christianity were frequent. All young people weren't Black, but there was hardly any Asian. More generally, references to 'Asian' culture were considered exotic. When an Asian song was on the radio, young people would make fun of it, as they were used to make fun of Bangladeshi salesmen's accents. Islam was seen as very 'bizarre'.

In a 6th Form College, 'Asian' references predominated. Bhangra music, Bollywood films and Asian soap operas were common references. Negotiations with tradition and religion within family nourished conversations as well as the opposition to black and white families seen as too much permissive. Discussions about racist slights and everyday Islamophobia were habitual.

I haven't observed any "white place"; I generally met White young people in local organizations dominated by a 'Black' subculture. Still I could through interviews have hints about a 'White' subculture gathering cousins and friends from white families living from long-time in the same neighbourhood or street, going to local pub, supporting West Ham¹³ and listening to pop music.

Nonetheless, these subcultures are not cut off from one another. Neither are they attached to one's skin colour. They rather depend on the peer group young people are part of and on local organizations (school, youth club, leisure centres...) they frequent:

"The culture I've been growing up in, it was Caribbean: the music, and... Even almost none of my friends are Caribbean, but our culture, that me, and my Asian friends we were in, was. (...) cause just culture in general here was caribbeanized. (...) Reggae and Bashment felt like mine. Whereas Bhangra, it still feels like foreign music to me. I don't know why that is. I think, probably just because it wasn't into the mainstream as much. (...) Any of my friends. My Bangladeshi best friend, (...) She never listen to Indian music, Bhangra, or so. There was no one who. She lived black."

Girl, White, Master student, 23 years old, Newham.

Therefore, when moving house and entering a new school, young people may experiment a change from one subculture to another one, as for this Asian girl, between secondary school and College:

¹³ West Ham United, the local football team had glory years during the 1960s and 1970s. It was also known during the 1980s for his fans' hooliganism and for the British National Party (BNP) recruiting at the exit of the stadium. Nowadays, on match days, neighbouring streets fill up with white people coming from Essex - 'this is danger' an interviewee commented.

“Before it was just Bashment, R&B, Slowjams. Here, it’s just Asian music. But it didn’t really influence my taste, personally, I just hear it more. But I can’t really hear much Bashment. Before I was updated on Bashment and stuff. But here, like no one listen to anything like that, so it’s more... I’m more updated on the Asian things.”

Girl, Asian, 17 years old, 6th Form student.

Processes of cultural ‘bricolage’ and reworking of ethnic categories in peer groups are very similar in Bondy and Newham. They show the creativity and autonomy of youth cultures. But they also bespeak the impact of discrimination and ethnic categorizing on young people experiences. Indeed, the tendency for a unified *Banlieue* youth culture in Bondy versus segmented ethnic youth cultures in Newham in part reproduces local ethnic consensuses described above.

3.3. Family boundaries system: negotiating with displaced categories in transformation

Large racial categories mobilised and reworked in peer groups make no real sense in the family context. When young people refer to their immigrant parents and to family relationships, they use ethnic categories imported from the country of origin: nationality; city, region, village of origin; religion, caste... (“We Algerians and Moroccans are very close. Tunisians are different” (girl, 24 years old, no qualification, no employment); “My origins are Fulani, but Fulani, they are nomads. And nomads they are compared to Gypsies, sometimes, you know in France. So they stuck to Soninke ethnic group. And over time, we became Soninke. Today, if I speak with someone from Mali and if I tell him my family name and that I’m Soninke, he would says ‘no, you’re not a Soninke, you’re a Fulani” boy, 24 years old, youth worker, no school qualification). Families resort to these categories to distinguish themselves from other immigrant families and to assert family status inside the Diaspora (“never trust Sylheti people” boy, 22 years old, student, family from Dhaka, Bangladesh). These categories symbolic closure is often thought in terms of culture and decency; they are articulated to specific relationships between gender and generations and to religious practices.

These categories are nevertheless transformed through the migration. They are redefined in interaction with family members who stayed in the country of origin and more notably through relationships with family members established in the same country if not the same city. Above all, these categories are reworked through interactions with immigrant communities in the neighbourhood. Young people play an important role in transforming boundaries.

By virtue of their socialization in contemporary French or British society, young people have divergent conceptions of social and symbolic closure. Making sense of national, regional, caste identifications is sometimes challenging for them. They often disagree with their parents about relationships between men and women and between generations (“For us, Soninke, parents don’t speak so much with children. Again this idea of pride or I don’t know what” Boy, 24 years, youth worker). They also disagree about the social closure of the group. For example, interracial friendships and dating in peer groups contradict strong

marriages limitations in the family. This results in everyday negotiations inside families. By their questioning familial practices, young people participate to redefine them.

Religion is a striking example. Many young people contest religious traditions and practices of their parents that they find odd, backward and irrational. In Bondy as in Newham, 'traditional' Islam or African churches are often slammed for their superstitious beliefs. Young people, also through the influence of local religious organizations, 'modernize' their parent's practices. In order to invalidate parent's traditional practices, young people in Newham and in Bondy stress the difference between culture and religion. This can go in both directions. Muslim girls often stress that inequality between men and women is cultural but contradicts Islam. At the same time, Asian girl would teach their mothers that showing one's arms is a cultural thing but is prohibited by religion. That way, young people sometimes contribute to a return to religion, supporting a shift of family identification from ethnic emigration categories to religious identification.

Accounts of negotiation processes inside families are quite similar between my interviewees in Newham and Bondy. Still, the main difference is the support Newham families find in local religious and community organisations in teaching young people about their cultural heritages.

This is not always conclusive, especially when the teaching displayed by these organizations seems at odds with young people's everyday experience in Britain. Hence this Sikh boy who converted to Islam at the age of 21. He explains the origins of his conversion – apart from the shame he felt at school by being one of the few to wear a turban - by the fact that he was fed up with weekly Sikh religious school where he was only taught how Sikhs were persecuted by Muslims throughout History. He felt much more at ease in Muslim scout camps where he sometimes joined some friends and where they learned to be nice with people and to respect nature and wildlife.

Such organisations are far less present in Bondy. Above all, and as we will see below, republican philosophy of integration makes much more difficult to conciliate immigrant cultural heritages with French identity. Paradoxical injunctions towards assimilation make cultural negotiations inside family very painful; especially when parents themselves consider their children as being different from them. Indeed, young people in Bondy often report their parents telling them that they are French, and then, different. This often conveys parents' hopes that their children may claim better jobs and a better life. This is the case for this father, working as a dustbin man, who told his son that he can't accept similar jobs, because he is French.

3.4. School and local institutions boundaries system: becoming French, becoming British

The impact of national models and philosophies are conspicuous in relationships between young people and local institution, especially school.

School, a central sphere of young people's socialisation, promote divergent symbolic and social closure in Bondy and Newham.

French school is conceived as a fortress: it should be exactly the same everywhere, no matter the urban and social environment where the school is located. Moreover, for the republican ideal, school should help young people to distance themselves from their family, their neighbourhood, their cultural particularities, in order to become citizens. At last, meritocratic ideal combined with a high degree of cultural elitism bring more discredit on young people's cultural resources and environment. From this follow conflicts around heritage. Being part of the larger French society is thought as contradictory with young people's cultural heritages.

Immigrant cultural heritages don't have any place neither in daily school life nor in school curriculum. Pupils complain a lot about the slim place given to colonization, slavery and independence wars in history programs and the lack of objectivity with which this part of history is taught (*'They don't show us movies about Algerians who have been killed, they don't make France cry about it'* Girl, 16 years old, Bondy, about the compulsory reading aloud of Guy Moquet's last letter at the start of the new school year). Some of them also contest the ban on *hidjab* at school that they interpret as contradictory with their individual freedom and their interpretation of *'laïcité'*.

This conflicting relationship with school parallels a widespread suspicion towards local institutions. Young people often see the latter as domineering and colonial powers. Republican paradoxical exhortation towards assimilation and fear of *'communautarisme'* are in part at fault. Several studies have shown how left working-class municipalities failed to incorporate in political life young people with immigrant background (Masclat 2003). I've observed many interactions indeed where young people accused local facilities of seeking to 'educate' or 'assimilate' them. Young people feel they are looked down; they are always considered as immigrants and suspected of bad assimilation. This is the hidden transcript of many interactions between young people and local institutions – for example when Amin, youth worker and practicing Muslim, at a buffet in the city hall, ostensibly and provocatively asks for pork meat.

Contempt for their heritages, which young people perceive when they interact with local institutions, is a real grief when it comes to their parents. Immigrant parents are commonly under suspicion of tradition, conservatism and archaism. This constant distrust fuels the sense of parents' humiliation throughout immigrant life in France – 'My parents had a rough time' is a recurrent sentence among young interviewees in Bondy.

Relationship between school, families and local community is different in England. British citizens should be good members of their family and of their 'community', therefore schools aren't cut from their neighbourhood. Volunteering is strongly promoted. A secondary school in Newham organises afternoon tea for elderly people of the neighbourhood where pupils' musical band plays. In particular, by volunteering in a project for the 'local community', 6th Form students may gain supplementary marks for their A levels - and then have better chance to enter university. Besides, multicultural teaching displays information on pupils' cultural heritages and religious traditions. Major religious festivals are thus declared school holidays in Newham (Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-UI-Adha, Diwali, Guru Nanak's Birthday, Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Monday). Moreover, school curriculum offers a greater place to variegated cultural practices that easily mix together popular culture, traditional practices and classical culture. So identity and cultural *bricolages* of

young people find much easier a place in daily school life in Newham (as in British cultural industry in general), than in Bondy. Conflicts around cultural heritages are far less strained than in Bondy:

“Even in the school, the children they get education of every religion, every culture, festival, everything: what they wear, what do we have to (...) when you see outside a woman wearing scarf, what does it mean. If a man is wearing a head scarf, what does it mean. (...) From culture to religion, they educate us and teach us everything around us. It helps you to choose what do you wanna practice.”

Girl, college student, youth worker, 21 years old, Somalian.

“The British are really insecure of their past, because they have done so much harm. Anything that pops up, they need to be there, to show they are doing something. But it all comes down to letting go of the past and forgive and forget, they have been forgiven for. Or I think most people have forgiven them for the past, for trouble they have caused. (...) If the British accept that the past is the past, they can move on.”

Boy, 6th Form student, 17 years old, Ghanaian.

As a consequence, young inhabitants of Newham tend to be less suspicious of local institutions than their counterparts in Bondy. Maybe the specific dynamic of the borough policies towards young people comes into play, as Newham used to be the ‘showcase’ of New Labour policy toward young people. All the more so since as a large district, Newham has higher financial means than a small municipality as Bondy. Nonetheless, local policies of multiculturalism and especially the early public concern towards institutional racism and the recognition of cultural traditions and family heritages by local institutions have surely a positive impact on young inhabitants’ self-esteem.

Still, young people are sometimes critical about a multiculturalism that stresses a quaint conception of family heritages and gives predominance to a local and cultural community in which they don’t recognize or to which they don’t want to belong. Actually, major complaints young people addressed to institutions, concerned socioeconomic deprivation, social control and violent policing towards young people¹⁴. For instance, this 6th form student, involved in a local community project, ‘The East London Communities Organisation’, is very critical about a local environment that she’s longing to leave.

“Even TELCO, if I didn’t had to do it, because I want to look good for my university thing, I wouldn’t be part of TELCO. Like, to me, personally, I cannot give back to the community, cause really, community hasn’t done anything for me. Like, so... I’m not gonna give back something that hasn’t been given to me, so why I’m giving back? So... there’s a lot of things government need to think.”

Girl, 6th form student, Newham.

Thus, as opposed to Bondy informants, young people from Newham when confronted to institutions, mobilize boundaries in terms of age and social class rather than cultural heritages.

¹⁴ As a direct consequence of anti-terrorism policies and of ‘gang and knife crime’ moral panic.

4. Divergent narratives about citizenship and belonging : National models faced with their contradictions

Through everyday interactions in their neighbourhoods, in peer groups, in families, at school and local institutions, young people assimilate and articulate ethnic categories and representations. They often have to negotiate with conflicting social and symbolic boundaries. Faced with these dilemmas, young people articulate specific narratives, about citizenship and belonging that demonstrate at the same time the impact of national models and their contradictions.

Informants' narratives in Bondy are characterized by the articulation of issues about discriminations and about deceptive French Republic Ideals. Young people indeed experience a harsh contradiction between Republican discourses that praise universality, and practices of segregation, discrimination and stigmatisation. We saw that this contradiction nurtures among young people a sense of common destiny as young 'immigrants' and fuels a sharp opposition to local institutions. This nurtures also abundant narratives about French nationality and citizenship. Being or not being French is a crucial issue on which young people constantly have to take a stand. Be it either to claim their belonging to France (*'I'm French from Jeanne d'Arc to Nicolas Sarkozy'*) or to reject it. The shade of colonial heritage is often present in the background. Hence this boy from Zairian parents who turned 18 and just got the French nationality; showing his ID card in his hand, he exclaims: 'Look, look, they had got us, but now we've got them!'). Deceptive ideals of French Republic are then grievous topics :

« Some events in my life made me aware that shit, I'm French but people don't recognize me as French. Why? Because I'm a bit more tanned than the norm! What the fuck?! Because I'm more tanned, I'm more stupid than the other girls, maybe?! (...) My political commitment, what makes me stand up every morning is to think that I live in a country like France, that is supposed to embody Human rights and there still is injustice! »

Girl, high school student, Bondy.

But young people's adherence to republican values and meritocracy is contradicted by the lack of recognition – if not the stigmatisation - of their family heritage in society and institutions. They feel always obliged to prove their 'integration' if not 'assimilation'.

This paradoxically leads to a high politicization of cultural and religious practices of young people. Wearing the *hidjab*, supporting the Algerian football team, claiming to be Black is seen as a political stance. Cultural or religious specificities, instead of being contained to the private sphere, are then constructed as a political problem.

In response to this dilemma, many young people articulate innovative discourses that combine national republican narratives with a political reinvention of their cultural heritage. History of colonization, political history of Africa, Civil right movement in the US, minority or third world political figures (Malcolm X, Martin Luther king, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Thomas Sankara...) give sense to their experience and help them stressing a positive identity as Arab, African or Muslim. This is quite new and sharply differs from young Maghrebis' identity constructions during the 1980s when young '*beurs*' used to reject family and minority heritages. Today young people claim them. As a consequence, they challenge ethnic closure of French

society by blurring boundaries. They contest secularism discourses in the name of secularism, republican consensus in the name of republican values. They invent and promote new French identities: being French and Muslim, and African and Black. They proclaim that there isn't any contradiction. In a word, they really universalize French identity.

In Newham, less ambitious political discourse combined with more concrete practices against discriminations, make young people's relationships to institutions less strained. Discriminations, rather perceived as individual problems, foster separation between ethnic groups instead of a sense of shared destiny. As opposed to Bondy, issues of citizenship are not conflicting: 'citizenship'¹⁵ doesn't really mean something to young people who consider British passport essentially in practical terms (*'It's just a red passport, nothing else (...) I'd prefer a rainbow passport'* Boy, 16 years old). Some states they would prefer to be American, rather than having to support Britain 'rubbish' weather (Girls, 6th form students). More generally, many informants have difficulty giving meaning to the word "British" that they still associate only with white people. They don't really place value on it:

"I don't know, I just can't define the word "British": I say "I'm half British".

- I'm born here, my parents are born here as well, it's just their parents that came over like in the 60s, but I don't feel British. I don't feel British at all, to be honest. I just feel like me.

Girls, high school students, Newham

I don't know if it's just us in particular. I don't know. There's a lot of people who are proper British, like their parents are British, their parent's parents are British. Maybe they more feel like, They have a sense of belonging to England, in general or something. But I don't think we, we, we really have that, that link with England. It's like, If we had to move, like it wouldn't have been England that we gonna miss, it would be our friends and things like that. It doesn't really mean anything to us like. It's not... that doesn't define me as an individual. I could live everywhere.

St Angela and St Bonaventure 6thForm, Newham.

Thus, in multicultural Newham, culture and Identity issues seems somewhat less politicized and young people adopt a more individualistic stance. Even if they contest the hypocrisy of multicultural policies that have been unable to make racism disappear. But if they condemn racism, they accuse of it more individuals than institutions. Some adopt a moral stance and call for a society characterized by '*pure love, biblical love*' (Girl, 6th Form student, 17 years old). However, these young people often call for the accomplishment indeed of British ideals of tolerance and of individual autonomy. Those young people who don't know how to define themselves (they find restrictive to define themselves by belonging to a community, be it cultural, religious, or national; they find equally odds to refer to themselves as 'british'), condemn the extensive use of ethnic categorisation in everyday life. '*In this country, they always seem to want to know what colour your are*' as a girl, 6th form student in Newham, tellingly puts it. Through their daily life in the most ethnically

¹⁵ Despites the new importance of this theme in political agenda and in school curriculum, since the 'active citizenship' campaign launched by John Major in 1991.

diverse district of England that even experience a reinforced diversification of migrant origins with settlement of refugees and East-European workers, administrative categories seems ridiculous to them, senseless and out-of-date. Young people denounce the impossibility in the census to be 'African' without being 'Black', whereas the last categories 'Chinese and others' (*'what Alien are you?'* Girl, 6th Form student) is either absurd or racist. Above all, they wonder what are these questions needed for (*'Why do they need to know? I really would like to know, actually'*). They breed more discrimination and feeling of discrimination than they oppose it. In an era assumed to be postmodernist, young Britons refuse to be categorized.

"I remember, in year ten, my friend and I were applying for work experience and he ticked that he's white European, when he's actually a Black Ghanaian. And when he showed up at his workplace they asked him: "why did you tick the wrong box?" and he says "oh, that's because I think I'm from there". And then they found it difficult to accept why he had picked this. They called the school. They stopped him for the whole day at work. And then at the end of the day they decided just not to call him to work the next day, because they didn't want him, because they thought: "oh, there must be something wrong with him". And then when his mum rang up the work place, she asked them: "what does it really matter to you if he thinks that he's white European?" (...). And then, at the end of the day, what does it matter to you what people think they are?"

Boy, 6th form student, Newham

On the other hand, issues of social class and economic exclusion remain predominant in young inhabitants' representations. Working-class is a major identification and opposition to middle-class people a clear boundary (*« Middle class people literally chill in front of a computer screen, and sit there and earn money. And they're just sitting there! »* Girl, 6th Form St Angela). This became very clear during the 2010 elections won by the Conservatives and the Liberal democrats.

"He said: 'you know, I'm gonna vote Conservative'. I said : 'listen, but you're forgetting that we're all working class over here yeah (...) Everything's going, NHS¹⁶ is going, travel is gone, all these EMA¹⁷, all these benefits that we're getting now, that are helping us, to live and survive, they're gonna be taken away from us and you're happy with that? (...) they favour middle class and not working class (...) Labour was good for us. Labour was very good for us. They actually supported the working class. They encourage us (...) I'm just so unhappy. The Conservatives shouldn't be in power."

Newvic 6th Form college

As working-class people, young inhabitants of Newham share a common experience of disadvantage and hardship that neither Prime Minister David Cameron nor even sociologists can understand.

"They're a lot of intelligent working class people out there, and they never think you know, I don't think he ever think, David Cameron, because he can't... The reason why he's doing what he's doing is, because he never had to understand what it feels like to be a working class person, and because of that, he doesn't know that there are people out there, young people out there who are bright intelligent, who could make this economy so much better, and other

¹⁶ National Health Service

¹⁷ Education Maintenance Allowance, cancelled in 2011.

things like that. (...)

- You know, we're doing poverty sociology yeah, and we're going through those causes, original causes and thing, and they say: the boys weren't into education and blablabla. And that's not our fault. It's because we're put down, they're putting us down, and they're making us think working class people can't do anything, so therefore we're just ok, fine, I'll back up, why should I lose my time in school when I can't go and get into a good uni? When I can't get a good qualification?

- I'm gonna get into a great university, and I'm gonna get good qualification, I'm getting a good job, I don't care, I don't care."

Girls, 6th Form students, Newham

We stressed national divergences a lot here, whereas a multiplicity of narratives exists and one can find a wide range of discourses in both fieldworks. Nevertheless a dominant pattern of narratives about citizenship and belonging emerges that is strikingly at variance with national models: politicization of cultural and identity practices in Bondy contradicts French Republican discourse, whereas social class politics remain essential in Multicultural Newham.

5. Conclusion

The exploration of young people's practices, sociability and identities in Bondy and Newham reveals the importance as well as the complexity of ethnicity in their everyday experience. Different processes of ethnicity construction are at play in different socialisation spheres and these are both macro and micro sociological. The choice for a methodology combining observation and interviews, making possible to confront practices and representations, was essential and heuristic. We could see how everyday interactions are informed, encouraged or constrained by macro structures.

We first described local consensus shared by inhabitants that delineate major ethnic groups, define their position in local hierarchies and distinguish them from outsiders. Here national models impact is closely intertwined with that of local history and local policies. We then saw how peer groups and youth cultures rework these dominant ethnic categories through identity and cultural 'bricolages'. This can be assimilated for a part to playful appropriation, for another to symbolic resistance. It's a different type of categories that is at stake in everyday negotiations inside immigrant families. At last, school socialization and relationships with local institutions foster divergent relationships between individuals, state and communities. They define the place given to young people's identity and cultural 'bricolages' and to their familial heritages inside French and British societies.

Beyond national specificities, that we have been stressing a lot here, these processes of ethnicity construction display many similarities between the two fieldworks. They show that issues of ethnicity aren't so differently shaped in Bondy and Newham. Both sides of the Channel we can see young people faced with discrimination, segregation and socio-economic deprivation, who fight for autonomy and claim to be recognised as individuals. We see young people, living in culturally mixed neighbourhoods, who invent ingenious youth cultures while struggling with generational gaps and learning to become young Britons or young French at school.

But still, the frame in which they do it, the resources and support they get, hitches they face, are different in Bondy and Newham and derived in significant parts from national models. British multiculturalism is more welcoming to young people's cultural 'bricolages', whereas French republican ideal put them under strict scrutiny. This is conspicuous in divergent narratives about citizenships and belonging that young people from the two fieldworks articulates. They reveal one of the most striking result of this research, the unexpected and counterintuitive effect of national models and especially of the French one that, contrary to its republican ideal, lead to a high politicization of young people's religious and cultural practices.

But at the same time, these contradictions between ideals and practices open a space for young people to contest and challenge these old models and invent new identities and new individuations. In Seine-Saint-Denis, young people combine republicanism with cultural and religious diversity, whereas in Newham, they combine cultural tolerance with universalism. Finally, young people from stigmatised neighbourhoods who bear the major burden of ethnic categorization are maybe the most suspicious and distrustful about national ethnicity; they claim their right to universalism and individuality. One can still question the impact that those identity renegotiations have on British and French societies in general. Do they manage to transform representations and categories used among other social classes? Or in other words, to what extent do they participate to redefine national models and philosophies?

The specificity of my fieldworks comes here into play. If we can assume that ethnicity is peculiarly salient in these environments, we need to compare how it works among different territories, social class and familial backgrounds. We need especially to examine if the processes described here are common to a certain age or generation, prone to identity 'bricolages' and willing to assert themselves as individual and citizens (Muxel 2000). Maybe are they also inscribed in wider social changes (demographic, economic, ideological...) that rends existing categories and representations progressively obsolete as well as in general progress of individualisation and globalization that may tend to disqualifies national ethnic systems of categorisation. All this needs further examination.

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