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French Postcolonial Nationalism and Afro-French Subjectivities

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Abstract
This research examines urban renewal in Clichy-sous-Bois, a suburb of 30,000 inhabitants located in the northeast of Paris. It studies the modalities of spatial racialization, nation building, and subject formation among Afro-French young men living in the city. It also builds on a world-historical perspective to explore the diasporic webs in which the lives of Afro-French are embedded. Taking spatial racialization as a point of entry, the study attempts to understand how governmental strategies and urban policies regulate lives and residential patterns in the city. Three lines of investigation are pursued: 1) an examination of Afro-French racialization and genealogies; 2) an analysis of narratives and struggles of these communities and their impact on neoliberal spaces; 3) an exploration of the various ways spatial governmentality constrains and/or produces Afro-Frenchness. The primary purpose of this ethnographic research is to comprehend the French colonial history and its impact on the racialization of diasporic Afro-French living in metropolitan France. For this end, the study proposes the notion of "Afro-French," an analytical

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concept that designates a constellation of groups from Sub-Saharan, North African, and Caribbean origins. The term provides a heuristic to comprehend the urban and cultural experiences of diasporic sub-groups who have different but overlapping genealogies. Second, the project helps understand why Afro-French living in Clichy-sous-Bois embody and at the same time transgress official narratives of the nation. It argues that France's nationalism, like other forms of European nationalisms, is facing a contradictory moment in the neoliberal conjuncture. On the one hand, discourses about liberalization of the economy involve the deployment of narratives that celebrate mobility and flexibility. This new dependence on a global neoliberal economy destabilizes national economies and erodes the state's structures. On the other hand, state actors diffuse identitarian and xenophobic discourses that blame ethnic and religious minorities for the socio-economic crisis. Third, the study argues that spatial governmentality and urban strategies enable certain aspects of Afro-Frenchness but constrain others: there is no homogenous or unified logic to regulate lives and spaces in Clichy.

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