

WHERE WE COME FROM AND WHERE WE ARE GOING: NEGOTIATING
IDENTITY POLITICS IN HAALPULAAR MAURITANIAN
COMMUNITIES IN PARIS, FRANCE

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: We Come From and Where We Are Going: Negotiating Identity Politics in Haalpulaar Mauritanian Communities in Paris, France

This thesis examines first generation and migrant Mauritanians' negotiations of their identities and heritage in Paris, France. It is based on 3 months of ethnographic research, funded by the Center for the Study of Women in Society, the Center on Diversity and Community, and the Slape Fellowship. The theory on "third way" of transnational identity argues that migrants' and first generations' identifications with their heritage can protect them from discrimination. I explore situational identity, gender, life stages, and the third way in suburban Paris. I find that, due to discrimination, the first generation may choose to identify with their culture, ethnicity, or nationality of origin. Contrary to French politicians who claim that culture prevents assimilation, I found that ethnocultural identity and community may serve as a professional resource for first generation women. On the other hand, first generation men and women may prefer to reject ethnocultural identification.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Overview.....	2
Methods.....	19
<i>Era ngo Debbo</i> , Voice of the Women: The Associations of Migrants of Djeol, Mauritania in Noisy-le-Sec, Paris	30
II. “A LITTLE AFRICAN GIRL IN PARIS, OVERWHELMED:” DISCRIMINATION AND STEREOTYPES OF AFRICANS IN PARIS.....	37
III. “IN MAURTANIA, CHILDREN LISTEN TO THEIR PARENTS!”: GENDER, SOCIALZATION, AND CULTURAL VALUES	51
IV. “IN PANTS OR IN A COMPLÈTE, I AM COMFORTABLE IN BOTH WORLDS”: GENDER, IDENTITY, AND ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE.....	72
V. CONCLUSION.....	107
REFERENCES CITED.....	119

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mouna, a 24-year-old chemistry student who was born in Djeol, Mauritania and moved to France when she was 9, and Abdoulaye, a 27-year-old business student also from Mauritania who has completed all of his college studies in France, are getting married on this summer evening, in June, 2011. Tonight, Saturday night, their families and friends will drive or take the banlieue (suburb) train to the home of one of her uncles, in a home 40 minutes away from the center of Paris.

Sala, a classmate of Mouna's and my roommate, has invited me to attend the wedding, knowing that it will give me contacts among the Haalpulaar (Pulaar speaking) migrant community for my research on discrimination and cultural transmission. She lends me a fancy complète (a 2 piece African dress) to wear, and we walk together to the train station, attracting admiring and hostile stares from passers-by.

Saturday night is the time in France when African migrants celebrate joyous occasions, and the train station platform is crowded with groups of men or women wearing fancy, heavy fabrics. One woman in a yellow complète, pushing a baby carriage, approached us to ask, in Pulaar (the language of the Peul, who live in many countries in West Africa), if she was waiting at the correct train platform. She knew that Sala is Haalpulaar because Sala has the two small scars on either side of her forehead that indicate her ethnic Pulaar origins. Though the woman did not tell us, we know that she could not read the French sign labeling the platform above us; we told her that she was waiting at the correct platform.

Among Africans in their dressy clothing, young French men and women of African origin, wearing trendy jeans, stilettos, or Adidas sneakers, wait for the train to arrive, texting friends, gossiping, or laughing to each other. Immigrant men, wearing the uniforms of custodians, prepare to go to their night shift at the airport or at large offices. An Indian family, the mother and daughter wearing saris and the father wearing a suit, also wait for the train.

The train arrives, and 40 minutes later we get off. This banlieue is peaceful and green, and a wide, sparkling river runs past cobblestone streets and newly constructed homes. Sala calls a friend to ask which bus to take, and soon we arrive in a cul-de-sac where a crowd of women in complètes, men in bubus (a long tunic and pants), and suits are milling outside a home from which Mauritanian music is blaring.

Sala jumps out of the car and into the arms of other young women in similar dresses. Living at relatives' houses scattered all across the various banlieues of Paris,

they have not seen each other since school let out a month ago. Many have traveled at least an hour to be here today.

The women attendees, immigrant mothers and grandmothers, children, and a few first generation (French-born or raised) young women who are friends or cousins of the bride, have gathered in one home. The men attendees, immigrant older men or young immigrant students, but very few or nearly no first generation (French-born) men, are gathered in the home across the street.

Music is blaring from speakers, and women wearing shimmering fabrics in a rainbow of colors are dancing in groups in the center of the room, or sitting on chairs and couches. Mouna, the bride, walks into the room, wearing a two-piece, white, fitted and elegant dress that has been artfully sewn by an African tailor. Her hair is twisted in an intricate bun, and she has glittering clips woven into it.

“Tonight we’re washing your hair, Mouna!” an older woman says to her, in Pulaar. “That fancy salon hairdo will be washed away!”

Here, she is referring to the custom at Haalpulaar weddings, where the older women of the household of the bride prepare the bride to go to her husband’s home. They wash her body and hair, sing songs about weddings and marriages, dance, and dress her in her mother’s clothes and shoes--a simple, white outfit--and cloak her in a swath of fabric, which she will use to modestly cover her head during the first few days in her husband’s home.

“No, you’re not washing my hair!” said Mouna to the older woman. “I’m going on a Honeymoon to Tunisia tomorrow, and my hair is staying like this for the trip!”

“Ko aada, It’s tradition!” replied the woman.

“It’s a new generation, a new reality. We’re in France—our traditions are different!” Mouna replied.

Overview

This thesis examines issues of cultural transmission, migration, gender, and transnational identity formation among migrants and their French-born children, specifically explaining how migrants and their children cope with discrimination and maintain and adapt cultural traditions—such as this wedding--in the suburbs of Paris,

France. The research focuses specifically on Mauritanian Haalpulaar migrants, such as the woman in this vignette, and the first generation of Haalpulaar, such as Mouna. I use “first generation,” in this thesis, to refer to children who were born in Mauritania but spent formative years growing up in France, or children who were born in France.

As this vignette indicates, African migrants have moved to France for a variety of reasons. Some, like Sala and the groom, Abdoulaye, have come to complete higher education. Others, like the waiting migrants on the train station platform, work as custodians, guardians, or in factories throughout the many, sprawling banlieue suburbs surrounding Paris. Though migrants to France in the ‘70s were primarily male, many have brought their wives to France and are having and raising children in France. Many, like the woman who is eager to wash Mouna’s hair at her wedding, work hard to maintain cultural traditions for their children.

The first generation, navigating many forms of discrimination from mainstream French society may find some of these Haalpulaar cultural traditions and values useful to their day-to-day lives in France. But also, as indicated by Mouna’s comment to the older migrant woman that “our traditions are different,” they do *not* find some of these traditions and values useful to them. As indicated by the presence of first generation Haalpulaar women and the absence of first generation young men at this wedding, cultural self-identification for these young people is gendered.

Background on Population

My work focuses on Mauritanian migrants from Djeol, Mauritania (a conglomeration of small, rural villages in the Senegal River Basin) and their French-born or naturalized children. Mauritania is a country in West Africa. It is inhabited by those who call themselves “Black” Africans and those who call themselves “Moors,” or “Arabs¹.” Ethnic groups who make up the Black African group are the Peul, the subject of this thesis, the Soninke, and the Wolof (Fresia 2009). The Peul are also called the “Fulbe,” “Toucouleur,” Fulani” and “Haalpulaar,” and live in many countries in West Africa in addition to Mauritania.

Many Peul of the Senegalese River Basin in Mauritania and Senegal refer to themselves as Haalpulaar; in this thesis, I will refer to this entire group as “Haalpulaar.” The Peul society is made up of a highly stratified caste system that includes occupational castes; these castes are further classified as either slaves or nobility. Though slavery has been abolished in Mauritania, noble or slave status has not been forgotten. Through last names, jokes, and parental lineage, Haalpulaar are aware of and remind each other of their statuses as slaves or nobility. Historically, nobles have not been allowed to marry slave and vice versa; this practice is still widely followed today (Ngaide 2003). Indeed, the term “Haalpulaar” makes reference to this caste system: “Haal pulaar” means “speak Pulaar,” and those who are called Haalpulaar are said to be descended of slaves, who were captured by the “noble” Peul and told to “speak Pulaar.” (Interview with scholar Jamal Sow, July, 2011). Now there is another emerging meaning for “Haalpulaar” that is

¹ There is also a third group of people, called the Haratins, who were historically the slaves of the Arab community (Saleck 2000), but this subject is outside the scope of the thesis.

meant to be more inclusive, uniting all these castes. That is, referring to “Haalpulaar” as “speakers of Pulaar,” a blanket term for all the castes that speak Pulaar (Interview with Ibrahiima Sarr, July). Most of the individuals with whom I did research in France refer to themselves as Haalpulaar, which is why I will use it throughout this thesis.

In April of 1989 in Mauritania, violent conflict between Arab elites and Black landowners over land ownership forced 120,000 Black Africans to cross the international border into Senegal and seek political asylum as refugees. This international incident is representative of the sentiment that the Mauritanian government has been under-representing and discriminating against certain ethnic groups since the country’s independence. In the 1960s, several of these underrepresented Black African ethnic groups—Soninke, Haalpulaar, and Wolof (Fresia 2009) –formed a political coalition called FLAM (Forces de Liberation des Africains de Mauritanie). This coalition was designed to protest the racism they have experienced from what they call the “Pro-Arab Regime” that holds power in Mauritania today, and to agitate for greater Black African political representation. The events of 1989 exiled members of FLAM to other countries and gave them an international audience for their protests (Fresia 2009, Kinne 2001). The more recent wave of Mauritians that have moved to Paris are often refugees who have gotten political asylum in France for protection from this conflict.

Haalpulaar in France

The first *ressortissants* (migrants) of Djeol moved to France starting in the 1970s and have migrated to France more recently as political refugees. Mauritians and other West African immigrants first moved to France to work in factories in the 1970s. They

settled in the *banlieue*, or suburban neighborhoods surrounding the heart of Paris. Immigrants from West and North Africa settled in the same *banlieues*: to this day, they are relatively multi-ethnic. Through the Family Unification program, many immigrants brought their wives to France, and had children (Keaton 2006).

The *banlieue*, the multiethnic residence of immigrants and their children, do not receive the same resources or privileges of the neighborhoods in the heart of Paris. Many residents and scholars argue that schools are underfunded, housing projects abound, unemployment is high, and public transportation is spotty and slow (Keaton 2006, Tevanian 2009). Immigrants and their children, including the Haalpulaar and their descendents, face these challenges in the banlieue. In general, the media defames these areas as the hotbed of riots and angry youth who refuse to “assimilate” to French cultural norms and cling tightly to their parents’ cultural norms (Lapeyronnie 2009). This thesis strives to tell a different story that is overlooked in French media: I show residents’ appreciation of the banlieue as a multicultural melting pot, and as the place where they can raise their children with others of their ethnic group. Rather than telling stories of crime and unemployment and discrimination in the banlieue, I tell success stories, as residents describe themselves.

Research and Questions

My research was carried out through 9 months of preliminary research via Haalpulaar Facebook contacts and websites, and 3 months of fieldwork spent in the *banlieue* of Paris, France with Haalpulaar migrants and their French-born children. My research questions are the following:

1) What forms of discrimination (systemic and unconscious) do Haalpulaar migrants and their French-born children face in the banlieue of Paris, France? How are these experiences gendered?

2) How and when do migrants and their children maintain, adapt, or abandon Haalpulaar cultural traditions and values? Through what contexts are these traditions maintained or adapted? How are these experiences gendered?

3) When does the first generation find Haalpulaar cultural traditions and values useful, and when do they reject them? Can these traditions or values help the first generation navigate discrimination? How do these traditions, and the context of discrimination in France, affect the identities of the first generation?

The literature on migration sometimes refers to immigrants as the “first generation” and their children, born in the new receiving country, as the “second generation.” Other times, the first generation is those who are born or raised in the new generation, i.e. “first generation French.” I refer to the “first generation” according to this second definition. I chose to do this because my interlocutors refer to themselves as “first generation French.”

It is also important to note that “first generation” may include individuals who were *born* in France or simply *raised* in France but born in Mauritania (often, these individuals are referred to as the “1.5 generation (Smith 2006).” I observed, and my interlocutors told me, that one can be born in Mauritania and raised in France, yet still be considered a first generation French person, as one was not socialized during ones

formative years in Mauritania but rather *by* Mauritians in France, and within French schools.

Literature Review and Theoretical Concerns

This ethnography emerges from and intends to contribute to the body of knowledge on gendered transnational identity formation for immigrants and the first generation, in the context of discrimination and transnational linkages (Nina Glick Schiller 1994, 2011 *in* Smith 2006, Levitt 2010, Smith 2006, Timera 2002). I offer ethnographic insights into gendered cultural transmission from immigrants to their children via Hometown Associations, ethnocultural community events such as weddings and baptisms, and social media networks (Facebook and cultural or linguistic Haalpulaar websites.) I use these lesser-studied sites of social media and Hometown Associations to contribute new insights into the roles that transnational identity can have for immigrants and the first generation, in the context of changing globalizing technologies.

Nina Glick Schiller et al. explored the role of the “third space” of transnational identity formation for first and subsequent generation migrants. According to these studies, immigrants were cultivating new patterns of migration and new types of “multi-stranded social relations that linked their societies of origin and settlement” (p. ix, 1994). These “transmigrants” were developing social relations that spanned multiple countries. Their identities also reflected these transnational relations.

They found that immigrants and first generation migrants may identify with their parents’ hometown while living in their “new” country, creating a “third space” for their

transnational identity formation. This “third space,” she argued, can provide cultural and social resources to these migrants and the first generation, providing them protection from discrimination and inequalities in the settling country (*in* Smith 2006). Gutierrez (1999) calls the third space a space where identity formation “between” or independent of dominant national identities can form. For example, he used this terminology to refer to the Mexican neighborhoods in the US, where Mexican immigrants and their children of lower socioeconomic status could consume ethnic media and cultivate Mexican identities. These pass times, in some way, protected them from the discrimination they felt from Mexicans of a higher socioeconomic class who could “assimilate” into mainstream US society, and from the discrimination they felt from mainstream US society (Gutierrez 1999).

Though the idea of the “third space” provides a powerful lens into how migrants and subsequent generations can use transnational identities to protect them from discrimination, other scholars argue that the third space is not universally meaningful to migrants and the first generation. Michael Courtney Smith (2006) found that the first generation enters into certain life stages where transnational identity becomes more meaningful to them. For example, among first generation Mexican Americans in New York City, the adolescent years become an important time for these youth to explore their Mexican heritage. Timera (2002), working with first generation Africans in France, pointed out that ethnic community identity and transnational community identity can also be frustrating for the first generation, who feel pressures to conform to values that, to them, feel contrary to their national identifications as French.

My project adds to this body of knowledge by studying the first generation of Haalpulaar in France who, thanks to new technologies such as Facebook and other internet resources, as well as their parents' strong associational life networks, have a particularly rich store of ethnocultural resources and community networks at their disposal.

This research also builds on a rich body of work studying immigrant Hometown Associations, from Africa and elsewhere. Migrants from Latin America (see Smith 2006 Levitt 2001) or Africa often unite in the receiving country to pool resources. They can use these resources to help each other, sending home immigrants when there is a death in the hometown that they must tend to, or serving as bank accounts or credit societies for migrants without legal documentation (Kane 2002).

They also use funds to implement projects in their hometowns. Abdoulaye Kane explained that the first generation of these migrants, who came to Europe in the 1970s, focused on religious projects, building mosques or cemeteries in their hometowns. The newer wave of migrants has been educated in schools in either Africa or Europe, and thus they take a different approach to these projects in the Hometown, partnering with NGOs and governments to carry out development projects, such as installing electric lines, water systems, organizing health caravans (flying doctors from Europe to carry out specialized surgeries in Africa for low prices or for free), and building hospitals. Kane argues that these associations have, in many ways, replaced the absent state in Senegal and elsewhere, providing services that local governments no longer provide in the context of neoliberalism and neocolonialism (2002).

Little research has been done to document the roles of women or the role of the first generation in these associations. This lack is partially due to the fact that women more recently started coming to Europe from Africa, through family reunification programs in the 1980s and 90s. Family reunification policies in France limit the work opportunities that wives receive, often not allowing them to have work permits (Rassiguier 2010). Haalpulaar men therefore often act as the wage earners, and women, without discretionary income or the time to participate in these Associations, fill the role of cooking for meetings (Kane 2002). Yet, now, growing numbers of women are taking the opportunity to work outside the home, especially as the first generation of migrants are retiring from their factory jobs and their children are growing older.

With their new salaries, many of these women are now forming associations for their hometowns. I carried out research with members of *Era ngo Debbo*, “the voice of the women,” which is an example of this type of association. Made up of immigrant and first generation women from Djeol, Mauritania, they have partnered with the Djeol men’s Association and the French government of Noisy-le-Sec (a banlieue outside of Paris) to carry out development projects in Djeol.²

The first generation, Kane and Timera (2006) have observed, do not always participate in these associations, as they were often not born or raised in Africa, and therefore do not feel the same connections to their parents’ hometown as their parents (Kane 2007, Timera 2002). Yet, through my observations on Facebook, I noticed that first generation Haalpulaar seemed to be forming cultural associations, celebrating the

² This partnership is part of the French government policy that focuses on developing the hometowns of migrants in order to stem migration (Millen 2012, African Studies Lecture Series, University of Oregon).

cultures of their parents, or adhering to hometown associations.³ This thesis explores this growing phenomenon: several members of the first generation of the Djeolois Haalpulaar Mauritians in France now run *Era ngo Debbo*. Though I cannot accurately gauge the commonness of first generation participants in associations such as these in France or in Europe overall, many interlocutors mentioned that they had observed this phenomenon elsewhere, among other associations. These associations thus can serve as an important “third space” for these first generation Haalpulaar at certain times of their lives, as I will demonstrate in this thesis.

With emerging social media technologies, scholars have called for new research on the intersections of ethnic identity formation through internet resources and social media (Kim 2011, McKay 2011). Furthermore, *ethnographic* research related to these new technologies, such as this thesis, is sorely needed. Much scholarship on online ethnic identities focuses solely on the online experience, neglecting, as Youna Kim put it, “the actual conditions of people’s transnational lives” (p. 134, 2011). Indeed, when scholars overemphasize the unlimited access of the Internet or romanticize borderless communities, they fail to take into account the isolation and ambiguities that individuals of diasporas may feel related to their everyday experiences of ethnic community and identity (Kim 2011). The Haalpulaar are a particularly suited community for studying this issue, as many immigrant and refugee Pulaar language and culture activists are creating websites (such as Mbiimii.com, pulaagu.org) that serve to educate people on the

³ Indeed, I was originally going to study one such cultural association. However, I found upon arriving in France that it had disbanded; many of these associations, interlocutors told me, are run by charismatic leaders who later abscond with the funds that the Association has raised for its activities, closing down these associations abruptly.

Pulaar language and culture.

As I will explore in more detail, I found that the first generation of Haalpulaar immigrants may keep in touch with family members in Mauritania, Senegal, and elsewhere in Europe and the U.S. through Facebook. They may also use Facebook and other sites to explore their Haalpulaar heritage, observing videos posted by Pulaar activists. They are also using the internet to affirm their identities as *French* of Haalpulaar origin. Rappers such as Daaande Mayo, for example, use the Internet to launch songs with social commentary about the trials of the life of a first generation Haalpulaar in France. Other first generation Haalpulaar have started Facebook pages celebrating their unique lens into both French and Haalpulaar culture, as well as the commonalities of French of Haalpulaar origin, forging internet links with Americans and Europeans of Haalpulaar origin. The internet, linking Haalpulaar communities in Europe, Africa, and the US, thus also serves as an important “third space” for many of these first generation individuals, as a site where they can both explore the culture of their parents and affirm their own unique cultural identities.

Conditions and Challenges in France

France is a particularly important site for studying first generation identity formation, gender, and discrimination because of its unique model of nationalism: secular Republicanism. France’s republican ideology claims to be “colorblind,” stating that France is a “raceless” society because all French citizens are first and foremost French, and supposedly seen as equal before state laws (Hine 2009). Within this ideology, race and ethnic differences among people living in France “do not exist” (Tevanin 2009, p.

184). Indeed in the 1930s and 1940s, many Harlem Renaissance intellectuals fled to France to escape racism and segregation in the United States because of this Republican ideology.

Since that time, however, residents of the “raceless” republic protest that the republican ideology is a myth, and discrimination based on heritage and ethnicity occurs, for both immigrants and their French children (Keaton 2006, Tevanian 2009).

Historically, the French government has made it illegal to gather census data on race or ethnicity; this refusal to acknowledge racial difference stems from the history of ethnic labeling during the Nazi occupation (Keaton 2006). Within the logic of the French republic, gathering ethnic statistics would racially stereotype immigrants and their descendants. Yet activists and scholars refute this lack of ethnic statistics, claiming that this law makes it impossible to document and address the institutionalized and informal racial discrimination of immigrants and their descendants occurring on a daily basis (Keaton 2006, Stavo-Debaugue 2002, Tribalat 1995). Without statistics on ethnic employment and housing, immigrants and their children have no way to argue that they face employment discrimination or police racial profiling.

Indeed, to counter this lack of hard data, the socialist party issued an unprecedented call for the government to collect new ethnic-based statistical research in 2006 (Gabizon 2006) in order to explore whether or not immigrants and their children are facing discrimination. The few studies carried out provided real evidence that French Republicanism policies do indeed permit--inadvertently or not--racial discrimination. For example, a multi-year study of ethnic and social segregation in the ghettos outside Paris city limits showed that ethnic segregation in these neighborhoods is increasing even

while their inhabitants are becoming *more* educated (Pan ke Shon 2009). Furthermore, statistics in a popular newspaper on unemployment in the late 1990s and early 2000s admitted that the children of African immigrants experience twice the unemployment levels of non-immigrant French; additionally, a high percentage of well-educated African-in-origin individuals are underemployed, meaning that they do not obtain jobs that use their education (Gabizon, 2008).

Yet right-wing politicians and media pundits insist that discrimination cannot occur in France, using the logic of what Lapeyronnie calls “Samuel Huntington’s distorted class-of-civilizations paradigm.” Within this ideology, they claim that immigrants and their children face unemployment and marginalization because refuse to adhere to national French values and culture and cannot assimilate (Lapeyronnie 2009). In other words, they attribute the economic and professional struggles of those descended from immigrants to their supposed “cultural” differences, insisting that these youth refuse to “assimilate” to French national culture and therefore cannot succeed in French society, despite being born in France. Now, the colonial-era term “assimilation” has been replaced with the politically correct “integration.” Yet, scholars, such as Dominic Thomas and Leetonia (2009) and Ibrahiima Abu Sal and Jamal Sow (interviews in Paris, June, 2011) argue that the meaning is still the same: cultural traditions and values from migrants’ countries of origin have nothing to offer the supposedly superior, “human rights”-centered French culture, and migrants must abandon them in order to find professional, familial, and political success in France.

The French state distinguishes between the “public” and “private” spheres for its people. According to this division, residents of France can practice their religious and

cultural traditions in the private sphere, i.e. in their own home, but the public sphere—schools, government buildings, and even in many cases public places—must be secular and a place where cultural differences do not interfere with French cultural practices. This theory supposedly enables all residents of France to access the “universal” human rights of French civic and cultural life. Yet, scholars and activists point out that the supposedly secular spaces of France are not secular: historically religious practices from Catholicism are now seen to be secular but are actually religious, meaning that Catholicism holds a privileged place in the French public sphere while other religions, such as Islam, are contested in the public sphere (Bowen 2009). The classic example of this conflict in France is the debate over whether Muslim girls should be permitted to wear the veil in public schools. Catholic crosses are permitted in schools because they are considered inconspicuous, while veils are deemed to be outwardly religious (Tevanian 2009). Some young French women who are Muslim contest this law; others claim that the law does not bother them because they can practice their religion in the private sphere. This conflict illustrates that historical religious traditions and French cultural practices may be seen as part of “universally” accessible human rights available to all, or as discriminatory laws that *prevent* certain French from practicing religious or cultural traditions in public places and allows other French to do so.

In this ideologically-charged environment, critical scholars of immigration and first generation French youth point out that even sociological literature sees the children of immigrants more as “objects of the sociology of migration than the sociology of French youth” (Timera 2002; Noiriel 1984 and 1996). Timera argues that the sociology of immigration has constructed its object of study as a primordial world, without

questioning migrants' and their children's experiences of discrimination and segregation. This type of scholarship, he argues, focuses on these immigrants as "being different, a world apart, and a people apart, akin to old-style colonial ethnology" (2002). Timera thus called for work that examines the experiences of discrimination and ghettoization as grounded in the social practices of migrants--demonstrating that they are differentially experienced within these communities, changed and constructed over time--rather than linked to innate cultural identities. Timera, and other scholars of migration in France, found that gender is also key element of the media's and right-wing politicians' discrimination of Muslim Africans in France. The media and politicians may stereotype these women as either victims of tradition or rebels against tradition. Consequently, they called for literature that defies these dichotomies and showcases the *complex* ways women negotiate their ethnic identities (Raissiguier 2010).

This thesis thus adds to the body of work refuting the idea that immigrants and first generation nationals are "primordial," or unchanging and culturally different, preventing them from assimilating. Rather, I see and demonstrate that their identities are gendered and "constructed"⁴: evolving and changing, part of a shifting community identity grounded in social processes (Timera 2002). When Haalpulaar first generation women choose to participate in Associational life among their ethnocultural community, I argue and demonstrate that they are not doing so because ethnicity or culture is the driving force behind associational life (see Pero and Solomos 2010 and Giraud 2004) but for a variety of other reasons appropriate for professional success and social support.

⁴ see Nagel, 1994.

As I will explore in this thesis, some women of Haalpulaar origin say that their heritage and ethnocultural identity serve as resources for what they call “better integration” into French society, i.e. pursuing higher education and finding professional jobs worthy of their education levels. They thus refute the right wing, essentialist claim that immigrants or children of immigrants who self-identify with and appreciate their cultural background cannot “integrate,” and become victims of unemployment or drop out of school. These women claim that being able to navigate both “worlds”—their ethnocultural community and mainstream French professional society-- is a resource to them. Their ethnocultural community provides social support when coping with discrimination and the challenges of being a working professional and mother in France. First generation French are also influenced by the multiethnic banlieue around them; this banlieue “mixité,” or cultural melting pot, is also a source of pride for them and an element that influences their self-identifications.

Not all women feel that their heritage is useful to them: I found, as well, that some women and men of Mauritanian origin feel frustrated with and stifled by Mauritians and their ethnocultural community, especially related to their parents’ limitations on their marriage partners. Furthermore, men do not necessarily find their heritage to be a resource that protects them from discrimination. The “third space” or transnational identity that ameliorates immigrants and first generations’ experiences of inequalities or discrimination does indeed function in this context, but not uniformly.

These stories about and insights into their widely varying experiences demonstrate that identity is socially constructed, and individuals’ identities are affected by social contexts and opportunities available to them. The identities of immigrant and

first generation Haalpulaar reflect discrimination in France, the realities of the multiethnic banlieue in which they are living, the particularities of the Haalpulaar transnational community, and the sociocultural realities of Mauritania. Haalpulaar culture is not preventing these individuals from “integrating.” However, the right-wing political discourse that blames their professional difficulties on “cultural difference” is one of the many forms of discrimination that does indeed affect the identities of individuals descended from migration in France.

Methods

In order to study people’s lived experiences of discrimination and cultural transmission, I employed ethnographic methods--participant observation and semi-directed interviews--while living in Paris, France from June - September, 2011. Through Facebook, prior to traveling to France, I met a journalist and Pulaar activist who agreed to find me a Haalpulaar host family. Participant observation with my host “mother” was invaluable: she invited me to accompany her to the market, and enjoyed talking to me about her troubles raising children as an immigrant in France. She was eager to introduce me to contacts for my research. This participant observation—listening to the frustrations Haalpulaar parents expressed in relation to their lives in France and raising children in France—informed my research questions and semi-directed interview questions.

Through my host family, I was introduced to the Haalpulaar historian Ibrahiima Abuu Sal. He told me about the multi-generational Djeol Women’s Association, *Era ngo Debbo*, which I thought would be an ideal association for me to work with, in studying multigenerational experiences with identity and discrimination. He put me in contact

with Yahya, an officer of the Djeol Association. Yahya then put me in contact with several of these first generation women of the Association, who were eager to do interviews with me and introduce me to others who would work with me. The women also graciously invited me to baptisms and weddings of the Djeolois community; during Ramadan, they invited to me to break fast. I attended, as well, the annual celebration for Djeolois Associations, which was attended by several hundred families of the Djeolois community, resplendent in bright bubus, eating Mauritanian dishes and drinking Mauritanian juices, dancing to a live band of Haalpulaar music. This participant observation continually informed my interview questions.

Independently of Yahya and his contacts—indeed, as a lucky coincidence—I was also invited to the wedding of a Djeolois first generation woman (which I described in the opening story of this thesis). At this wedding, I met a University student, Ameena, of Djeolois origin. Excited about my research project, Ameena invited me to her house, parties with her Haalpulaar and non-Haalpulaar friends, and introduced me to her younger siblings and her mother. Contact with her enabled me to access the younger crowd of first generation Djeolois, who were not active with the Association, though they often attended Djeolois community events.

Through these contacts, I carried out eight interviews with Djeolois 1st generation women, whose ages ranged from 22 to the late 30s; four interviews with their mothers, who had immigrated from Mauritania, and the Association president, five interviews with Djeolois immigrant men; and two with first generation men. I also carried out interviews with Mauritians who were not from Djeol, to gain some perspective as to whether the experiences of Djeolois were typical. I carried out two interviews with non-Djeolois

immigrant women, two with immigrant men, two with women of Mauritanian origin and one with a French man of Mauritanian origin.

Usually, interviewees invited *me* to their homes. I often carried out the interviews after they had fed me a Mauritanian meal, in their typically elegant living rooms—with oriental rugs and Moroccan couches—in front of the TV. Often an interview with one family member could lead to discussions with others.

The generosity of these families was overwhelming. They were excited by my research, and eager to help me so I could, as they said, succeed in my Masters program. Many also mentioned that they were excited that someone from outside their community had taken an interest in documenting their history. I often spent the night at their homes, if our discussions lasted beyond the hour of the last banlieue train back to Paris. As a rather cash-poor, bewildered student learning the metro trains and the city, I was very grateful for the opportunity to rest at people's homes, to share meals and conversation, and to carry out my research project. One time, in particular, I remember buying a melon to share with the family with whom I was doing research, and the mother of the home scolded me.

“You're a student!” she said. “You don't need to buy fruit for us! Don't tire yourself out with these purchases.”

Origin of the Project Idea

A sign of the important role of social media in globalized families and in defining identity, this project began on Facebook. I had worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in southern Senegal, West Africa from 2007-2009, prior to coming to the University of

Oregon. In Senegal, I learned Pulaar, a language spoken in many countries of West Africa, and the language of the Haalpulaar.⁵

I noticed Facebook groups promoting activism for the Pulaar language and for Haalpulaar culture.⁶ Interestingly, I realized that individuals who had migrated to Europe or the US had founded a good percentage of these Facebook groups. I also observed a video link on an individual's Facebook page for the Peul Diasporic Cultural Association, which was made up of both immigrants from Mauritania and Senegal to France and French-born children of these immigrants. Knowing France's right-wing assimilationist philosophy on migrant integration and national identity, as well the reality of discrimination and poverty for immigrants, I thought that it would be informative to talk to French-born youth who were choosing to take part in cultural politics promoting their heritage. I wanted to discern why they were embracing their cultural heritage, and if they thought this embrace of their cultural identity was contrary to Republicanism.

Shortly after arriving in Paris, I found, by talking to Mamadou Li and others, that cultural associations such as the one I had seen online often quickly disband. Formed by charismatic leaders, the one in particular that I had seen and communicated with on

⁵ Though the version of Pulaar that I learned is much closer to the Pulaar of Guinea and quite different from the Pulaar spoken by activists for the language and culture and of the Senegalese River Basin, I was able to understand the language spoken by the Paul, or Haalpulaar, of the Senegalese River basin. (Now, after spending time in France with the Haalpulaar, I am able to use the vocabulary words of the Haalpulaar).

⁶ Ibrahima Sarr, a political refugee in France and a creator of one of these websites, explained that because the Haalpulaar are a minoritized group in both Senegal and Mauritania, they feel compelled to create sites such as these to valorize their language and culture. (They are minoritized by Moor communities in Mauritania and Wolof communities in Senegal) Other communities, such as the Wolof in Senegal, have access to state-endorsed television channels and radio in their native language but the Pulaar speakers have to make their own media sources (June 2011).

Facebook had solicited enthusiastic French-born people of Haalpulaar origin to plan an evening party with a hefty entrance fee, then disbanded, and funds were not returned to the organization. More stable cultural organizations formed by Haalpulaar activists, such as Taabital Pulaagu, Daande Leñol, and others, were not often frequented by the French-born children. They were regarded by some first generation non-members as a point of pride, as they show that “Pulaar is a real language” (Maimouna, July), but also seen by other as “puritanical about the Pulaar language to the point of being fanatical” (Interview with Ami, August 2011).

When I told migrants that I was interested in studying their children’s interest in their heritage, many often replied that their children were not at all interested in their heritage. Some would then qualify, “well, perhaps the girls.” Others would say, “they only become interested when they are older.” Yet, despite parents’ statements that their children did not care about their heritage, I would observe other things on the banlieue streets or on Facebook that told me otherwise. French women of African descent, I observed, wore extremely trendy clothing, yet despite whichever trends these women were following, they would often wear small or large beaded African bracelets on one arm. Clothing or jewelry in the colors of African or Caribbean flags were also popular among first generation youth. Meanwhile, on Facebook, I observed dozens of sites created for “Miss Peul” or “Miss Guinea” or “Miss Senegal” contests: beauty pageants for French women of these origins. Parents did not think their children were interested enough in their culture or heritage; nor did they think that their children spoke Pulaar well enough. But these signs of first generation exploration of heritage and identity

pushed me to pursue my research project idea to explore heritage and discrimination and gender.

Positionality

My positionality as a White female researcher from the United States was quite complex. I arrived in Paris in mid-June. Prior to my arrival, I solicited (via Facebook) the help of a Haalpulaar journalist, Mamadou Li, who broadcasted Pulaar radio shows from France online, in locating contacts and in finding a host family.

Because of my linguistic abilities, I was privy to the Haalpulaar social circle and immigrant networks of Paris. Mamadou Li came to pick me up at the airport; we retrieved my luggage, and he asked if I would mind stopping by to see a friend of his who was going home (*“au pays”*) for a visit. Of course not, I replied, and we made our way to a different terminal. His friends were adjusting the weight of a large suitcase full of presents for his family; Mama Li told me that he had managed to persuade a Toubab (white person) tourist going to the Senegalese beach for vacation to claim one of his friends' suitcases as her own so he would avoid luggage fees. I smiled. In this way, a white woman speaking Pulaar with a crowd of Haalpulaar men in a crowded lobby, I became at once an “insider” and “outsider” among Haalpulaar migrants in France. Because of my linguistic abilities, my research interests, and my familiarity with the cultures of Senegal and Mauritania, I found myself gravitating towards these migrant communities. Indeed, I did not meet or make friends with any *“français de souche,”* or ethnic French, but rather French of Haalpulaar origin and Haalpulaar migrants. It is important for readers to take into account, when reading this document, that I am *not*

French, and that I did not have much access to mainstream French perspectives while doing this research. For this reason, I am careful to specify throughout this thesis that the mainstream French views I write about come from the media and from politicians, not from interviews.

My host family lived in an apartment near the *Gare du Nord*, the train station that is the central point of the 5 trains that go to the banlieue of Paris. Though I was initially worried that I would get an incomplete understanding of Haalpulaar life in Paris, as I was not living in the banlieue, I realized that her visitors were still primarily migrants. Furthermore, her apartment's location at the Gare du Nord was centrally located between all the banlieue neighborhoods, facilitating my travel to research sites.

My linguistic ability brought me easily into the fold of Haalpulaar migrants, who were thrilled to find a white person who spoke their language. This ability did not translate into insider status among their children, however. The second day I was in Paris, my host "mother" took me on a visit to fellow friends from Mauritania, in a quiet, tranquil banlieue neighborhood. Parents of 5 French-born daughters, the father of the household pointed out to them that I was a *Toubab* (white person) who could "put them to shame" with my Pulaar-speaking abilities. The oldest, an 18 year old with her laptop in her lap, who had picked at our lunch of Mauritanian Rice and Fish that her mother had cooked a few hours before with disdainful gestures, slouched in her chair, raised one eyebrow coolly, and asked me what I was studying. Embarrassed by my accented French compared to her perfect Parisian intonation, I explained that I was inquiring if Haalpulaar culture could be a resource to French-born children of Haalpulaar descent when facing discrimination.

“Ah bon? So the answer can be negative, too?” she asked, with some interest. I could feel the eyes of her parents burning into my back.

“Yes, of course. It can be negative, positive, or both.” I replied, feeling as if I were betraying her parents by speaking French with her, by admitting that their children might have a stronger affinity to French culture than the culture of their country of origin. In this way, I was introduced to the highly charged complexities of cultural heritage in this context: the policing of heritage by parents; the mocking of heritage by their children; the embracing of heritage by children; the rejecting of heritage by these children; the betrayals that parents may feel when their children embrace the culture of the colonizer, of the country where they have moved to make a living for their home country.

First generation Haalpulaar were quite often intrigued to talk to me, either to talk to a Toubab who spoke Pulaar, and/or to talk to an American, admired for my culture of Rap and Blockbuster films. Often, people were more eager to share their experiences of racism with me because, in their minds, I come from a country where racism is not as prevalent as in France. This facilitated my research. I felt comfortable carrying out this research, too, because I knew that I was talking to people who were interested in talking to me.

Furthermore, having lived in a small village in southern Senegal for two years, I had spent more time in West Africa than many of the first generation women with whom I did research. Often they were excited to ask me questions about village life. We also had long conversations reminiscing about the difficulties of being an “outsider” or an Occidental individual, in West Africa. Admonished for being too frank, warned not to

drink the water, laughed at for not knowing the nuances of social graces among Pulaar-speaking communities, laughed at for our imperfect Pulaar accents, we bonded over the embarrassment we often faced among local Haalpulaar communities in Mauritania. We also discussed what were, to us, our appreciations for and struggles with the cultural traditions and lifeways of Haalpulaar.

Introduction to the Content of this Thesis

In the second chapter, **“A Little African Girl in Paris, Overwhelmed”:** **Discrimination and Stereotypes of Africans in Paris**, I will explore the varied forms of discrimination that occurs for African migrants and the first generation. First, I review the literature on discrimination in France, which argues that racism is particularly insidious in France because of several factors. One is the residue of colonial-era thinking that assumes that cultures of Africa are inferior to the “universal” human rights-focused culture of France. Another factor is state Republicanism, the model of national identity in France that dismisses any discussions of race and discrimination on the grounds that the French republic is a “raceless,” “colorblind” society. Discrimination in France has gendered affects, as well; much of the literature on discrimination and gender shows that first generation men are more likely to experience discrimination than women. I then use the lived experiences of Haalpulaar Mauritanian migrants and their children (descended from Djeol) to illustrate the varied effects of discrimination and gender.

The third chapter, **“In Mauritania, children listen to their parents!”: Gender, Socialization and Cultural Values**, I explore gender, socialization and the transmission of cultural values from Djeolois Mauritanian migrants to their children. Literature by

leading scholars on African migration have shown that young first generation women have more struggles with their parents about cultural values, feeling frustrated with what they perceive as their parents' imposition of African cultural norms upon them. I found among the Djeolois Haalpulaar community, however, that first generation women actually retain and maintain more Haalpulaar cultural values from their parents than their brothers. Yet both first generation men and women may struggle at times from what they perceive as imposed norms and values from the Haalpulaar community that are inappropriate for their lives in France.

In the fourth body chapter, **“In pants or in a complète, I am comfortable in both worlds”: Gender, Identity, and Associational Life**, I explore gendered identity formation among the first generation of Djeolois men and women and the wider African Diaspora. I find that first generation women of the Haalpulaar Djeolois community, as illustrated by the quote that entitles the chapter, have successfully entered into the professional French mainstream workforce, and they say that their parents' cultural values helped them do so. They vow to pass on many Haalpulaar cultural traditions and values to their own children, to help them successfully “integrate” (defined by this community as obtaining good employment). They claim that first generation young men of this community, in contrast, have not absorbed cultural values from their parents and thus struggle with alienation that prevents them from finding mainstream jobs.

I argue that this idea is partially true: these young men do indeed absorb less cultural values than their sisters, but this is not the sole cause of gendered “integration.” French mainstream society, especially the media and the police force, mistrust young

men of minority groups more than they mistrust young women. This societal mistrust makes it difficult for young men to find employment, continue school, or even walk down the streets without police harassment.

Young women in the banlieue may also self-identify with a Muslim way of practicing religion that is different than the way that their parents' practice Islam. For example, young women of the Haalpulaar community, which does not require that women veil themselves, may *choose* to veil themselves.

Many youth in the banlieue, often due to struggles with mainstream French societal discrimination, may choose to self-identify with their culture, ethnicity, or nationality of origin rather than to self-identify as French. Or they may self-identify as French of X origin (Keaton 2006). I observed that youth in the banlieue use fashion—T-shirts with pictures of Africa, African bracelets, clothes and jewelry in the colors of African flags-- to express their ethnic identities. Scholars on rap and identity in France have observed that for banlieue rappers, calling themselves “black” may not necessarily reflect on their skin color: those of north African descent may also self-identify as “*noir*, black,” in solidarity with other minorities groups in the banlieues (Helenon 2006). Similarly, I also observed that youth in the banlieue often seem to self-identify with the larger, multi-ethnic group of minoritized people instead of, or in addition to, their own specific ethnic group. Regardless of how they self-identify, they often take pride in their multi-ethnic, *mixité*, diverse banlieue neighborhood.

My observations of this community confirmed the usefulness of the life cycle theory of transnational identity formation (Smith 2006); in other words, people's self-

identification with their ethnic origins or transnational identities changes as they grow older or reach different life stages. Young women of Djeolois origin may embrace their ethnocultural heritage when they reach their early 20s, either when they first experience discrimination in France or when they marry and have children and realize that they wish to pass on aspects of Haalpulaar culture to their own children.

In the conclusion, I present my thoughts on the ways in which my study sheds light on the complexities of the “third way” for Haalpulaar women and men and their children in France, the role of cultural identities in everyday life in France. I reflect upon the ways in which an understanding of the positive and negative aspects of the third way can lend itself to applied contexts, specifically in schools and social programs.

***Era Ngo Debbo, Voice of the Women: the Associations of Migrants of Djeol,
Mauritania, in Noisy-le-Sec, Paris***

On July 3rd, 2011, the men’s and women’s Djeol Associations held their annual celebration, in the community room of Noisy-le-Sec, a banlieue about 20 minutes from the center of Paris. The associations have formed a “sister city” partnership with the government of Noisy-le-Sec. The French government, based on a policy that allots resources to develop Africa in order to reduce the flow of migrants from Africa to France, often encourages partnerships such as this one.⁷

The associations had just finished building a hospital in Djeol, and this new hospital is one of the accomplishments they celebrated this day. The afternoon program featured speakers from Djeol and French Noisy-le-Sec residents who are active in the sister city partnership. They reflected upon the significance of the new hospital for the community.

Men and women in bright-colored bubus and three-piece dresses sat at long plastic tables that have been covered in paper table cloths for the occasion. The women wore heavy gold earrings and necklaces; each has tied her brightly colored head wrap with her own creative flair; some wore feathered fasteners instead of head wraps. Young children ran around the room, playing with each other. The women of Era Ngo Debbo prepared rice and fish for lunch; they prepared Mauritanian onion sauce and salad for

⁷ Joyce Millen, “Philobliarity,” Lecture at the University of Oregon, 2011.

dinner. Women scurried from table to table, carrying and distributing heavy platters of food and plastic bottles Mauritanian juices made from ginger or hibiscus. Migrant women spoke to each other in Pulaar; first generation women spoke to each other in Pulaar and French. Very few first generation men were present.

During dinner, a Haalpulaar band performs West African pop music and classic Haalpulaar songs. Men and women dance in small groups, and their grand bubus, heavy and bold, sway from their bodies. The children play together, chase each other, or try to imitate their parents' dance moves.

The attendees of the event are members of ARDF or *Era ngo debbo*. ARDF is comprised of men from Djeol who meet regularly in Noisy-le-sec in order to pool their resources to carry out projects such as this hospital, in their hometown.

As reflected in the existing literature on hometown associations and their projects (e.g. Kane 2002), the first “wave” of Djeol male migrants in France carried out projects that were religious in nature, building mosques and cemeteries in their hometown. However, as Kane pointed out, the current generations of migrants, most of whom are formally educated, carry out projects in partnership with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or governments in Europe. The newly built hospital is one example of this type of migrant-led development work.

As reflected by the absence of first generation men, first generation Haalpulaar in France are not all active in this Association, nor do they attend many events with their ethnocultural community.

Yet, first generation women do indeed participate in Associations of migrants. Gendered participation in these activities impacts socialization and identity formation. The women of Djeol have also formed an Association, called *Era ngo Debbo*. Started by Djeolois migrants in France and is, to this day, composed mostly of immigrants. However, it is now run by first-generation French women of Djeolois origin.

Era ngo Debbo has partnered with a Women's Association in Djeol. They carry out activities for their own children born in France and also work implementing development projects in Djeol, in partnership with the Djeolois women there. The women raised a large portion of the funds that the associations of Djeol were using to build a hospital in Djeol. This year, they are raising money to fund a day care that the women of Djeol wish to found (Interviews with Yahya, Sala, Ami, and Mahmadou, August and September, 2011).

As men tend to play more active roles in hometown associations (Kane 2002), the activities carried out by this women's association are relatively unique. In the 1970s, migrant couples from Mauritania who came to France exercised strictly gendered roles: men worked outside the home in salaried jobs and women were tasked to care for the domestic realm and raise children. Women thus had little access to money to send to their relatives back in Mauritania and depended on their husbands, with various levels of success, to help them do so (Interviews with Elimane and Kadiatou, Haalpulaar migrants, August 2011).

Currently, however, I found that because the French state mandates retirement at age 62, migrant men who have been settled in France since the 1970s have now retired, and their wives have the new opportunity to work outside the home and send part of their salaries to relatives in Mauritania. More recent immigrant and refugee women from Mauritania take more opportunities to work than immigrants who came to France in the 1970s, '80s, or 90s, even with young children at home. They reconcile this salaried work with the Haalpulaar woman's traditional role in the home by saying that life is expensive in France and men need their help for household expenses. Haalpulaar migrant women

have thus, in recent years, gained access to new funds to send home (interviews with Kadiatou and Mariam, August 2011).

However, women face challenges that men do not face when engaging in association activities. Women must balance salaried work with the domestic sphere, and they thus do not always work full time. They also must balance the funds they send to Mauritania with funds they spend on their children in France. Women are cognizant of the fact that their earning power is less than men's. Indeed, the president of the women's association pointed out ruefully, "we don't do anything for Djeol, compared to the men's association" (interview with Sala, September, 2011). Yet, I argue that their monetary contributions to Association projects are no small feat, considering that they must balance their salaried jobs with their household responsibilities.

Furthermore, the participation of the first generation is remarkable, considering that they do not have the same degree of direct familial connection to Djeol as immigrants. Indeed, for example, one leader in the group has only been to Djeol one time. Yet she works for her relatives that she barely knows, through the association. She also sends her young daughter to Senegal or Mauritania to spend time with relatives, learn Pulaar, and get to know the culture of her heritage. As I will further explore in this thesis, she claims that it is important for children to know their heritage or "know themselves," so they will "open up" to others and learn for them. In other words, she told me, children who are knowledgeable about their heritage and identity are better able to "integrate" into or "open themselves up to" professional and scholastic mainstream French culture (August 2). Her realization of the importance of exposing heritage and identity to her children, as well as her desire to help family back in Mauritania, motivate

her and other first generation women to participate in this Association. For these first generation individuals, transnational linkages to Djeol are an important part of their lives and their childrearing practices.

I observed that women often participate more actively in these associations when they grow older and have children. The same is true for participation in and attendance of community life events such as baptisms, weddings, or other religious ceremonies. This transnational identity maintenance is partially, as Nina Glick Schiller observed, linked to the “third space” of identity for the first generation: transnational identity formation protects the first generation from alienation when they struggle with discrimination or inequalities in France (*in* Smith, 2006). Yet, at the same time, these linkages are also a way for the first generation to, as they say, continue the important development work of their parents (Interviews with Genaba in July, Ami in August, Neneyel in August).

The Association also serves a practical purpose for maintaining the social cohesion and traditions of the Djeolois community: having formed this association, it is easier for the group to rent community rooms for weddings or other community events (Interview with Kadiatou, July 2011). Evinced by the presence of the children at the association meeting in this vignette, these community events allow migrants and the first generation to celebrate their events with the food and music of Mauritania, incorporating their French children in the traditions of the Haalpulaar.

Not all first generation Djeolois women participate actively in this association. I will explore the conflicts that may arise between young women and their ethnocultural community in a later chapter. Yet, even young women who are not in conflict with their

parents or their ethnocultural community do not often actively participate in this association. They give their membership dues once a year, but they rarely attend meetings. This may be because they do not have time, between school and work, to do so; it may also be because they are interested in investing in a wider social circle of friends outside the Djeol community. Additionally, they may also be interested in pursuing development-related activities in their parents' hometown, but on their own terms and through their own means: tourism, international development, or international business.

One first generation woman explained to me that often there are conflicts between the immigrants and the first generation related to which types of projects to carry out. When one first generation woman proposed a sexual education project for girls, for example, the immigrant members quickly protested that

“We do have sexual education, culturally! Girls do not need formal education: their grandmothers tell them everything they need to know.” There are thus disputes about what projects can and should be carried out and who has more authoritative local knowledge about local needs and channels for implementation of these ideas. (Interview with Neneyel, September 2011).

Djeolois migrants who settled in the banlieues of Paris in the 1970s have fostered strong social connections among their families by spending weekends and holidays together, in addition to formal association events such as these. Though they are not related by blood, they have formed such strong support bonds that even their children say that “they all feel like family now,” according to Astelle, a French-born, Djeolois woman

in her 20s. Even if first generation women do not actively participate in Association events, they still might attend weddings and baptisms of their cousins.

CHAPTER II

“A LITTLE AFRICAN GIRL IN PARIS, OVERWHELMED”:

DISCRIMINATION AND STEREOTYPES OF AFRICANS IN PARIS

It was a Tuesday in the sunny summer month of July, in Paris. Ameena, a first generation French young woman of Haalpulaar origin, sent me a text message inviting me to her student apartment for dinner that evening, in the banlieue of St Denis. We had met last Saturday night at a wedding of two Mauritanian university students. Sharing a large silver platter of mutton and onion sauce with 5 other young women in shimmering fabrics, she was excited to learn about my research and hear what I thought about her “culture.”

She texted me instructions to meet her after she got off of work, at the metro stop right before the St Denis banlieue, where she lived. I took the subway to the cathedral square, and sat on the warm, aging bricks, listening to honking horns and watching a woman with a dark veil wheel her baby carriage into the park. Tidy, colorful flowers were blooming everywhere.

Ameena bounded toward me, her shoulder-length hair bouncing, wearing jean Capri pants, laceless sneakers, and a white T-shirt. She walked and talked quickly

She brought me to a large discount grocery store, crowded with women in veils with strollers, African women in jeans and T shirts who had just gotten off of work, immigrant men with small baskets of just a few food items, and trendy female teenagers, in sneakers and jeans, buying chips, juice, fruit, and frozen quiches to take to parties. Ameena bounded past slower shoppers, buying pasta, fruit, and crème fraiche.

Waiting in the checkout line, she told me that she was born in Mauritania and had moved to France when she was seven years old. Now she was a French citizen. Knowing that I was interested in learning about discrimination in the banlieue, she told me that most of her international friends were not accepted into Masters programs last year: she was the only one who had been able to continue her schooling.

“For a while, we though it was racism that was preventing them from getting into the programs. And then we realized that they must have a quota for non-French students. You know how I got in? I am in a very competitive development studies and diplomacy program, designed for people who want to work in the UN for France. I knew that I was not going to get in, as a French citizen of African descent, if I said I wanted to work for the French government. So I played the perfect African, I said in my application that when I was 9 years old, coming to France for the first time from Mauritania, I stepped off the plane in Paris and was “amazed,” bouleversée, by everything I saw. I said that I wanted to “develop” Mauritania to be just like France, because everyone should have the chance to live like we do in France. You see? And I got into the school. I played the part they wanted me to play, the little African in Paris.”

From other conversations we had had together, I knew that she was very critical of humanitarian organizations, and of NGOs; she fretted for several days when she was cleaning out her closet because she did not want to donate her old clothes to the Red Cross because they would sell them to Africa later. And yet, she was accepted into the

program not because of her critical thinking abilities but because she played the “role” available to her as a naturalized French citizen from Mauritania: the African in search of “development” and betterment of her underdeveloped society, using the French model as guidance for improvement.

This vignette illustrates the complex effects of discrimination or perceived discrimination upon first generation French of immigrant descent. Some effects of discrimination, such as these, are subtle, and linked to the effects of long-held stereotypes and assumptions about Africa, France, civilization, and development. The media and right-wing politicians make these stereotypes pervasive, limiting the professional opportunities for the children of immigrants. Other forms of discrimination, such as the challenges immigrants and their children face in the resource-poor banlieue, are institutionalized through the French social systems.

This vignette reveals that discrimination does indeed exist in the “raceless” French republic, and there are circumscribed paths for the children of immigrants to take that limit their opportunities for success in mainstream society. Ameena, as a first generation French (though she is a citizen of France) only gained entrance into the degree program by playing the circumscribed part available to the first generation.

In this chapter, I explore the varied forms of discrimination that effect African migrants and the first generation in Paris. I review the literature on discrimination in France, which argues that discrimination is particularly insidious because of several factors. One is the residue of colonial-era thinking that assumes that cultures of Africa are inferior to the “universal” human rights-focused culture of France (see Leyponnerie 2009). Another is state Republicanism, the model of national identity in France that dismisses any discussions of race and discrimination on the grounds that the French

republic is a “raceless,” “colorblind” society (Tshimanga 2009). Discrimination in France has gendered affects, as well: much of the literature on discrimination and gender shows that first generation men are more likely to experience discrimination than women. I use the lived experiences of Haalpulaar Mauritanian migrants (descended from Djeol) throughout this chapter to contextualize the varied affects of discrimination and gender. It is important to note that many of the people I interviewed did not perceive discrimination as such, dismissing forms of discrimination as “ignorance.” This fact speaks to the subtlety and institutionalized nature of many of the forms of discrimination that occur for the first generation and immigrants in France.

Scholars of race in the French republic today refer to the 2005 *banlieue* riots as an apt illustration of the hidden, pervasive, and undeniable affects of racism in France. In 2005, two French-born youth of African descent were electrocuted when French police chased them into a power plant. The banlieue exploded in protests of racial profiling, and riots rocked the suburbs for several months. The reaction of the Right wing was to deny the validity of these protests on the grounds that police in the Republic do not “see” race and discrimination had not occurred. Yet the state re-invoked a 1955 law that was used to suppress unrest in France from Algerian nationalists. Activists such as Mimouna Hadjam condemned this “state of emergency” as retrograde “colonial management of the banlieue crisis” (Lapeyronnie 2009). Within the logic of this extreme Right-wing thinking, children of immigrants are not French but rather threatening, derelict, cultural “others” who must be assimilated or managed, disciplined because of their “cultural difference” and inability to assimilate (*in* Thomas, Lapeyronnie 2009).

Within this logic, immigrant parents are blamed for their children's "cultural difference" and defamed for their prevention of their children from "assimilating." During the 2005 riots, Sarkozy called parents incapable of exercising authority over their children and called upon the French parliament to pass legislation that would deprive them of child support (Tshimanga 2009). Keaton (2006) pointed out that the relatively rare occurrences of issues such as forced marriage or female circumcision are highly mediatized. This propagates the idea that sub-Saharan African parents are unwilling to assimilate into French culture, insisting on participating in polygamy and subjecting their children to arranged marriages and female genital cutting (Raissiguier 2010). Immigrant mothers, according to media depictions, threaten the nation with their many children, filling apartment complexes with strange "noises and smells," as President Chirac remarked (Tshimanga 2009). Immigrant women and children, within this logic, remind the Republic that immigrant problems with assimilation are "here to stay" (Raissiguier 2010).

In addition to ideological discrimination and racial profiling, scholars argue that institutionalized racism also limits opportunities for immigrants and their children. Schools in the immigrant-heavy banlieue are given less resources than schools in Paris, worse teachers, and more technical programs, rather than university-track options (Keaton 2006). Several of the individuals of the Mauritanian community with whom I spoke observed that teachers in these schools often orient the children of immigrants toward technical degrees; one student observed that as early as the first years of school, one can see children being urged to take technical tracks.

These circumscribed paths lead to unemployment and menial jobs for young men and women in the suburbs. Ameena related to me that many of her classmates from high school and middle school, particularly young men, are stuck, unemployed, still in her hometown. I observed this phenomenon first-hand: I accompanied her to the bank in her hometown, Sarcelles, a few train stops away from the student housing where she currently lives in St Denis. It was a weekday during the summer in the late afternoon, and the streets were crowded with immigrants and the first generation: young women in jeans or dress slacks coming home from school; young men and women wearing uniforms from their jobs at fast food restaurants; mothers out for walks, pushing baby carriages. Older men were relatively absent from the streets, and I inferred that most were at home sleeping, preparing for the night shift. Occasionally a retired elderly man walked by in long prayer robes, on the way to a mosque or to visit a friend. Across the street from Ameena's bank was a shady avenue, green with leafy trees growing out of the concrete sidewalk. A group of young men in Adidas track pants sat drinking out of plastic cups, laughing to each other, whistling at an occasional pretty woman as she walked by. One young man gestured to Ameena, and she ran over to give him kisses.

"He's my classmate, from high school!" she told me. They chatted about fellow classmates, and he admonished her for never calling him anymore. She replied that school was keeping her too busy.

Later that night, when I asked her what problems youth in the banlieue faced, she referred back to this moment.

"You see those young men from my class? They are what the Media calls dangerous. But you saw, they won't hurt you or me, or people from Paris. In Paris, you have to hold on to your phone, your purse, because perfect strangers will try to rob you.

But you see, those boys won't hurt you; their battles are between each other. Yet the media defames them, calling them shiftless because they can't find work.

Do you think they want to be unemployed? How many years has my friend been there, searching for a job? He's tried everything. Air conditioning repair, refrigerators. He doesn't want to be unemployed. You see, for a child of an immigrant, even early on in school, the teachers will tell him, 'Oh, you like playing with blocks? You'd be great for *le bricolage*.' They try to orient the children of immigrants toward technical degrees. And then the youth are blamed when they can't find steady work in that limited technical area. It's not fair, and it makes me so sad to go back to my old neighborhood and see them there."

Ameena's statement reveals the disconnect between media stereotypes and the reality of the banlieue. Right wing politicians blame young men for their unemployment, claiming their cultural "difference" prevents them from finding jobs. Yet the reality is that institutionalized racism from resource-poor banlieue schools and early stereotypes about the potential of young sons of immigrant men to succeed pigeonhole these young men into circumscribed paths that lead them to unemployment.

A member of the Haalpulaar community pointed out that institutionalized racism in schools is particularly insidious because Haalpulaar parents are either too busy working to contest it or too polite to question the wisdom of the school teachers and administrators. Cheik Oumar Ba, a political refugee from Mauritania living in Plaisir, a banlieue outside of Paris, works as a social worker in the school, and is paid by the French state to facilitate relationships between immigrant parents and teachers. He explained that French teachers' orientation of the students of immigrants toward technical degrees is particularly detrimental to Mauritians and Senegalese, who come from a cultural tradition where the teacher takes a parental-like role. These parents, busy working double-shifts to support their families and having been socialized in an environment where one does not question the opinion of a teacher, often put confidence

in the advisory role of the teacher and do not question the wisdom of the teachers when their children are put in technical tracks (Interview, July, 2011).

Abdoulaye, a first generation student who studied business at the university and who is currently working in an American bank in Belgium, explained to me that he had to complete two extra years of schooling because he had been placed in the technical track as a younger student, even though he had good grades and should have been placed in a college track. He recently left France to find work in Belgium because he found that he was not offered the positions he deserved with his schooling and experience in French banks.

“The Media depicts us as vagabonds,” he told me. “If employers see on your CV that you are from the banlieue, you will struggle to find a job” (Interview, August, 2011).

Dr. Ami, a PhD-holding teacher working in a technical high school in the banlieue, also commented on the pervasive, detrimental affects of media stereotypes. She explained to me that,

“People believe the media! My neighbors, for example, told me the other day that the schools were so bad here that they had to send their daughters to a school in Lille. Yet, I have a doctorate, and I went to banlieue schools!... People do not see the advantages of the banlieue: here, there is *la mixité*, ‘cultural mixing.’ Banlieue schools are not just attended by the bourgeois from Paris: there are people here of diverse backgrounds. That diversity is important for education. But people living in the banlieue see that that the media say that these schools are dangerous, that these neighborhoods are dangerous, and they believe it. And that makes the problems worse, because people no longer see the reality of life where they are living” (interview, August 2).

Her comment indicates that banlieue residents themselves start to believe media stereotypes, profoundly affecting their identities and confidence

The sheer power of these media portrayals of young men of African heritage in France was conveyed to me one day while sitting around a lunch bowl with my host

mother and her visiting friend, in front of the TV. The afternoon news told the story of a young man who murdered another student at a middle school in the banlieue, cutting from a shot of sobbing students, to the middle school, and finally, to a grainy photo of a smiling young white student.

“Ko tubaako? Normalement ko bibbe men waddat yimbe/ The murderer is a French person? Normally it’s our children who do these things,” said the visiting friend in disbelief (June, 2011).

Maimouna, a young woman of Mauritanian descent pointed to the link between racism and media stereotypes of immigrants and their children.

“When we accomplish something, we’re called ‘French.’ But when we do something wrong, or get in the news for riots or unemployment or crime, we’re ‘African,’ or we’re *français d’origine tel*, ‘French of x origin,’” she told me (interview, July, 2011).

Despite the fact that many individuals complain of the stereotypes and discrimination that they face and point to these problems as limiting their employment opportunities, it is important to note that not every immigrant or individual of Mauritanian origin feels that he or she has experienced discrimination. Many migrants, though some have lived in France for most of their lives, continue to identify themselves as “Mauritanian,” saying that France is not “their country” (interviews July, August). Not considering themselves part of French society, they do not struggle or contest discrimination and racism, choosing instead to focus on the opportunities to make money that France enables them to have. They say that French discrimination is preferable to the challenges they faced as Black Mauritians living under the pro-Arab government regime. Indeed, many say that they are thankful for the French laws that forbid the

formal discrimination and marginalization that they experienced in Mauritania and ignore what many call “hidden” discrimination [caché] of life in France (interviews with Genaba and Demba, July; Cheik Oumar Ba, July).

But, as observed in other literature on French of African origin (Tshimanga 2009, Timera 2002), their children, born or raised in France, often consider themselves French citizens and therefore do not wish to tolerate racism or discrimination from French society.

Those of African descent commented, as well, upon the general stereotyping of Africa and Africans that, while not directly causing employment discrimination, alienates youth from their cultural heritage and make them feel ashamed of their origins. These stereotypes are directly related to stereotypes from the colonial era that characterized Africans as primitive, especially in comparison with France (see, for example, Laponeyere 2009).

Ameena’s little brother, who is 9 years old, told me a story that illustrates these stereotypes’ affects upon youthful perceptions African heritage. He commented to me that his teacher, when learning that he was going back to Djeol for vacation, joked to the class that Africans “dance around fires” and he would have to eat bugs, “like on TV!” he said, shaking his head.

“Furthermore,” he said, echoing conversations I had had with others of the first generation, “on TV, no one shows the beautiful houses, the rich people of Africa. There are bigger and more beautiful houses there than here! But they just show the starving, poor people” (July, 2011). Stereotypes such as these, say social workers and cultural mediators of the Haalpulaar community, may make first generation children ashamed of

their heritage and alienate them from their parents and their parents' ethnocultural community (Interview with Cheik Oumar Ba July, Haby June).

Astelle, a French woman born to Mauritanian parents, explained to me while shopping that youth of African origin often feel ashamed to speak African languages because of their experience in French schools. She had offered to bring me to the St. Denis boutique district, a place where many immigrants and French of African origin shop. I commented that my new jacket was "a good find," as we spoke in French but mixed in words in Pulaar and English, for fun. She repeated the phrase. A few hours and several stores later, she bought a shirt and commented that "it is a good find!" I replied that I was amazed that she could remember vocabulary from other languages so easily, without writing or reading it. She replied that she has always loved languages, and that it was undoubtedly linked to her bilingual Pulaar and French childhood. I replied,

"But, I have observed so many youth who refuse to speak Pulaar or whatever language their parents spoke to them in the home. It's like they're embarrassed to speak those languages."

"They are embarrassed, often." Astelle replied. "Or, after years of avoiding speaking these languages and only speaking French, they simply do not learn to speak these languages. You see, from the beginning, in school, they admonish us not to speak the languages of our homes at school. They would tell us,

'That is some other dialect—we speak French here,' if a child says a word from the language of his parents accidentally. When you hear that from your teacher at 3 years old, you learn quickly not to speak that language: you become embarrassed to speak it. And then, by the time you grow up and realize that that other language is a treasure, it's too late. I'm lucky that my mother cannot speak French, because I had no choice but to speak Pulaar with her, even though I was embarrassed."

With African languages derogatorily referred to as dialects, and stereotypes of Africa holding sway in the classroom, children of African origin may feel ashamed of their background.

This derogatory image of Africa competes with the idealized image of Africa that their parents try to transmit to them.

Children, listening to parents' nostalgia about their hometowns, or even upon visits to Djeol, will observe life in the village and come to the conclusion, for example, "that there are no robbers in Djeol," (quote from Ameena's brother, July, 2011.) Then, on the other hand, French media and the French school system tells these children that the culture of their heritage is primitive, that its cultural practices are strange and worthy of National Geographic, or that its languages are "dialects," forbidden in official places of learning, endangering their French accents with corruption. These polarized images of their cultural heritage compete in the minds of these children. As Timera (2002) explained, young French children of African origin go to school and find a very different world and set of values than that of the home, and it is difficult for them to deal with this divide in the two realities. The power of the scholastic discourse equating national values with "human rights" and characterizing immigrant cultures as in need of assimilation may alienate these children from the culture and language of their home and their parents, deeply affecting their identities and home life (Keaton 2006).

Discrimination has gendered affects, as well. Immigrant women face particular challenges: immigrant mothers are portrayed in the media as "domestic" and "traditional," depicted in their domestic spaces, and highlighted in their domestic roles. However, this viewpoint overlooks the reality that many of these women span both the public and private spheres because many do have jobs outside the home (Rassiguier, 2010). Perpetuating this reductive view of immigrant women is also the tendency to mistrust Islam. Left-wing French women and even mainstream French "feminists" may

claim that Muslim women are oppressed by their culture and religion, arguing that the Republic's laws must "liberate" them from headscarves. The rhetoric promoting the republican nation's liberation of Muslim women from their religious oppression and protecting their human rights is often used to justify the forbidding of headscarves in school, despite the protest from some of France's multicultural citizens (see Tevanian 2009).

Yet, despite the negative stereotypes of Muslim immigrant women, first generation women are often favorably depicted in the media. Rassiguier points out that young French-born women are seen to be culture-bearers on behalf of the French government, helping "control" their unassimilated brothers and making them adhere to Republic laws (2010). For example, during the 2005 riots, articles in several newspapers emphasized that young French-born women of African descent went out into the streets to beg their unruly brothers to stop rioting (Gazibon 2005). Timera, an anthropologist from the Soninke Diaspora, revealed that overall, young female children of the African Diaspora in France advance further in school than their brothers. He argued that because women children of West African migrants are expected to marry within their families' social circle, rather than earn a living for themselves, they are able to advance further in school, while men drop out of school early to work (2002).

Young women's success within mainstream French society may have repercussions for their family relations: young Haalpulaar women experience more sanctions than men from their parents when they refuse to marry within their expected family circles. Indeed, these women often use the resources of French republican laws, transmitted to them through their scholarship, to assert their "human rights" or rights as

an individual of the Republic, to resist their parents' sanctions upon them and state their right to marry whom they wish. Men from these communities therefore fulfill the image of the young Frenchman of African origin who is unable to "integrate" successfully into French society, while women use the rhetoric of the Republic to state their individual rights to resist their parents' wishes and claim identity within the French republic (Timera 2002).

I have explained that Right-wing politicians promote the discourse that immigrants and their children do not experience discrimination. Rather than acknowledging the existence of underemployment and discrimination at job interviews, at the workplace, or in schools, they blame higher rates of unemployment among the children of immigrants upon their supposed failure to integrate into French society. Rather than acknowledging the possibility of media bias and a higher proportion of socioeconomic struggle among the children of immigrants, they blame crime rates among the children of immigrants upon fictive cultural difference (Tshimanga 2009).

Through ethnographic accounts of discrimination, I have shown that it occurs in schools and in the workforce, preventing children in the banlieue from accessing the same resources and opportunities as children in Paris. It begins when the schooling the children of immigrants receive in the banlieue orients them toward a certain type of degree, limiting many to the socioeconomic status of their parents. It occurs when the children of immigrants or those of the banlieue have trouble finding employment or furthering their scholarship, or when police are more likely to racially profile a French man of African origin. More generally, it occurs through media portrayals of the children of immigrants and of the banlieue as dangerous.

Also, I have illustrated the ways that stereotypes about African cultures and languages may distance the children of immigrants from the languages and cultures of their parents, shaming them from speaking their maternal language, and causing them to see their parents as deviating from Republican values (Keaton 2006). Or these stereotypes, as illustrated in Ameena's vignette, enable the children of immigrants to enter graduate programs *only* if they exhibit the desire to "develop" and improve the place of their parents' birth through the values and societal models of Europe.

In the chapters that follow, I will illustrate that despite the Right-wing claim that the cultures and languages of immigrant parents prevent their children from succeeding in French society, or "integrating into" French society, certain women of Djeol origin say that their ethnic heritage is actually a resource for them in finding mainstream success in France. I will also explore the other affects of discrimination upon identity.

CHAPTER III

“IN MAURITANIA, CHILDREN LISTEN TO THEIR PARENTS!”: GENDER, SOCIALIZATION, AND CULTURAL VALUES

One evening in July, 2011, Ameena invited me to her mother's home, to meet her and her little siblings. Ameena lives in a student apartment in the banlieue of St Denis; her mother lives with her husband and children in a banlieue more than an hour away from the center of Paris.

We rang their apartment in the high rise, and four children ran up to the door to meet us: the twins (a girl and boy three years old) Aicha aged 8, Mohamoud, aged 11, and Li, aged 13. The TV was loud in the living room.. Aicha's mom, Neene (mother) Fatoumata, wore a loose, wax print skirt, shirt, and kerchief, and sat on the couch, obviously tired. She is stunning, like her daughter: heart-shaped lips, the same tall forehead, the same light brown eyes. She is in her early 40s.

The living room has three long couches that line the walls, a small dinner table, imposing, elegant dark flowered wall paper, and framed photos of Aicha's mother, wearing what the Haalpulaar call “la tradition:” her hair was braided back from her forehead into a bun with coins and gold earrings woven throughout, she wore gold earrings with red thread wound around the tops, and dark makeup gave her a brown, temporary tattoo over her lips and down her chin.

Ameena introduced me to her mother and explained that I speak Pulaar and was doing a project on the Djeolois Haalpulaar and the first generation in France.

“She wants to interview you about whether it is difficult to raise children here,” Ameena told her.

“Yes,” Her mother replied. “Because children are between the two cultures, [French and Haalpulaar.] [The French] tell kids that they have rights, but no one tells them that they have duties and obligations, too. If you have rights, you have obligations too!”

Ameena raised her eyebrows at me. “You see? She's very right. This is interesting, what she is saying. “

“The kids know that [the French state] will punish parents who make them do too much [work.] “Her words reflected a common refrain among Haalpulaar raising children in France: they complain that they cannot discipline their kids in France, because they cannot slap their children for misbehaving or give their children many chores to do around the house. Having heard stories where the law reprimanded immigrant parents for corporal punishment or for assigning too much housework to children, immigrant parents often claim that they cannot properly raise their children because of the nebulous protection of their children's “human rights” by the French government.

She paused and pointed to 8-year-old Aicha, Mohamoud, and Li. “Ya addu hiraande . Go bring dinner. The children didn’t budge, giggling and kicking the couch, pushing each other off the couch, and pretending to interview each other.

Then she raised her voice without sitting up,

“Sukabe, a halaat haa a tampii do. Toon, kai, sukaabe doggat. Si be naani neene maabe. Ya, addu hiraande! Here in France, you will yell at kids until you’re exhausted. There [in Mauritania], when kids hear their moms speak, they run. Go bring dinner, I said!” she said to the children, who were now making faces at each other.

The kids giggled again. Aicha sat up straight and said to her mother, “We have a French education.”

Neene Fatima replied to her, seriously. “You will never be French.”

“Pourquoi pas?” “Why not?” I asked.

” The origins persist. And, be careful, kids! Here, even if you’re born here, if you don’t stay in school, you will never succeed. I tell them all the time, if you stay in school to a high level, they will not be better than you, and you will succeed. They [the French] are not better than you. The girls listen. But the boys, they just want easy money. They think they will never face racism here, but they will.”

“It’s true, the kids will indeed have to face racism when they grow up.” I replied.

“Yes! They don’t think so, but they will indeed have to face [racism].

But still, racism is not exaggerated here to the extreme that it is in Africa. We have justice in France, and laws that protect us.”

Then, fed up, she yelled one final time at the children to go get dinner, and Li got up, making faces, moving slowly and insolently.

I heard the ding of the microwave in the other room, and Li came back with a steaming plate, still making funny faces to make his siblings laugh and to annoy his mother. We sat down to eat rice and fish. The kids barely picked at the meal. Mothers often complain that their French children prefer to eat hamburgers and KFC over the rice dishes they spend hours cooking and shopping for in the specialized African grocery stores widely scattered around town.

This chapter will explore the gendered socialization of first generation French children of Haalpulaar origin. I use participant observation and interviews with immigrant parents, the first generation, and social workers from the Haalpulaar community to illustrate the gendered processes of cultural transmission and common conflicts that arise between parents and children. I show that parents are often frustrated when raising their children, because they feel that their children do not absorb or appreciate Haalpulaar values or traditions. I demonstrate how cultural norms, state laws,

and Republicanism complicate these conflicts, and I relate these findings to the literature on the subject of first generation socialization.

The first generation, when children, often feel that Haalpulaar values are not useful to them as French citizens and may resent what they feel is their parents' imposition of cultural values upon them.

Neene Fatima's comment that "the girls listen, but the boys, they want easy money" illustrates the ways in which cultural transmission is gendered: first generation female children seem to embrace more cultural values from their parents' culture of origin than their male children.

Many conflicts between parents and their children, based on my observations, often seem to be quite ordinary generational conflicts, which occur between parents and children in many countries and of many cultures. Yet in the context of migration to the French state, where media and politicians defame the "cultural differences" of migrants, parents and children perceive these conflicts as *cultural* conflicts. To parents, their children are rejecting the cultural values of Mauritania, and, to the children, their parents do not understand French culture.

Yet, despite these conflicts, French women of Mauritanian descent often, in their adolescent years and into their late 20s, embrace the cultural norms of their parents, demonstrating that parents are indeed passing on cultural values to their female children.

As I pointed out, politicians and media pundits consider French cultural 'integration' a key for success within mainstream French society. Scholars such as Mbembe (Tshimanga 2009) argue that this concept is directly linked to the colonial model of assimilation, in which French culture was considered a universal culture,

desirable for all. Within this logic, Africans did not have a desirable culture; their only hope for betterment was to assimilate to French culture (*see* Vaillant, 1990).

Right-wing politicians today link the struggles that youth born to immigrants face to their immigrant parents' inability to pass on the all-important French culture to them, rather than acknowledging the realities of structural racism that may prevent these children from achieving success in school or the workplace (Leyponnerie 2009). It is inconceivable, within this logic, that cultural values or practices from immigrant parents' cultures could be useful to people trying to make a successful living in France. For this reason, teachers tell immigrant parents to discourage their children from speaking in their native languages, or make cautionary visits to parents' homes if their children use words that are not French in school (interview with Tidjane, Guinean Masters student and Pulaar language activist, September 2011). The media sensationalizes conflicts between parents and children that demonize the "backwards" cultural ways of their parents, publicizing incidents when parents forced their children to marry against their will or send their female children to be circumcised in Africa⁸.

First generation children are aware of the stigmas related to migrant parents in France and often use these stigmas as an excuse to refute their parents' authority. Aicha, in this vignette, defiantly told her mother that she has "a French education" in order to justify her ignoring her mother's orders to go heat up dinner. She made reference to the laws of the republic that protect the rights of children and used the discourse about French education and values that they learned at school to defend her "right" to act

⁸ As emphasized in Keaton (2006). While Keaton does not deny the existence of this type of problem, she argues that these problems are overemphasized to the degree that first generation girls overwhelmingly mistrust Africa and the cultures of their parents, and claim that French culture has given them "freedom."

differently than a child would in Mauritania, , as her mother claims is the ideal. Echoing the neocolonial and nationalistic discourse of French culture as the universal culture, providing “human rights” to all and protecting individuals from oppressions in other cultures, children often frame their desire to be different from their parents, and to defy their authority or requests for work around the house, as their “human right.”

Her mother’s response to her, “You have rights, but you also have responsibilities,” is a direct response to the French state’s emphasis upon “human rights” that is often used to justify the state’s “protection” of children from oppressive family practices or the state’s defiance of parental authority (see Tshimanaga 2009, Keaton 2006). Her mother, in turn, uses the cultural reference that “children in Mauritania love doing things for adults” to chastise her daughter’s attitude and to push her to obey her authority.

Parents wish to impart Mauritanian values and Haalpulaar cultural norms and behaviors to their children. Their identities and allegiances often lie in their country of origin, as they came to France “to work,” not to become French (Interviews, 2011). Whether or not they formally hold French citizenship, most still consider themselves Mauritanian, as I found when asking them their nationality. Some find it hard to understand that their Mauritanian values and behaviors are not innate to their children, and instead, believe that their children are rejecting their cultural values (Interviews with Kadiatou and Elimane, July, 2011).

Their children may consider themselves French, as they were born in France, attended French schools, are comfortable with French culture, and consider French their first language. For this reason, the norms and values of Mauritanian society often seem

foreign to the children of immigrants (Interview with Fatoumel, August, 2011). Timera calls the challenges young children of migrants face going between home and school and finding that school values and culture are different than their home environment psychological trauma (2002). Furthermore, politicians, teachers, and the media teach children that the school is the place of Universal rights, while home is a place where those rights are in danger, especially for girls who, in this often exaggerated viewpoint, might be forced into an arranged marriage or circumcised (Keaton 2006).

Parents' frustrations are compounded by the state's negative characterization of immigrant parents as well as the French laws dictating childrearing practices that are different from those in their home country. Many expressed frustration that French law forbids, for example, the slapping of children. When speaking about male youth delinquency, parents often complained that "the state says that we cannot discipline our children, " yet blames them when their children have problems with delinquency (Interviews, 2011). Parents also pointed out that in Mauritania, among people of their culture, the entire village disciplines the child; in France, however, if one disciplines another's child, one gets in trouble. This makes it difficult, they say, to take care of ones children when they spend any time outside of the home (interviews, 2011).

Parents of this community also commented on the difficulty of raising a child when working the number of hours one must work to make a living in France. As one parent explained, raising a child in France is "*24 hr sur 24,*" or 24/7 (Demba, 2011). Indeed, parents scrambling to make ends meet *and* sending money home to support their family, their village and its associations must often work more than one job. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that individuals are also underemployed; despite the

fact that many have advanced degrees, they often cannot get hired for a job that meets their professional qualifications in France (Ke Shon 2009) and must work several low-paying jobs. These challenges make it difficult, they say, to spend time with their children (Interview with Jamal Sow, Haalpulaar scholar in France, July 2011).

Many scholars and Africans in the sending communities praise African migrants for the work they have carried out in their hometowns, sending medical care to those in need, and replacing the negligent state in constructing infrastructure in their hometowns (Kane 2010). Yet members of the immigrant community in France often criticize immigrants' remittances, stating that they neglect their children in France in order to send money back home. As one woman of the first generation in her late 20s, born to Haalpulaar parents, said to me,

“We would see our parents sending clothes, shoes, backpacks, so many things to *Afrique*, and we would think, ‘We don’t get things like that!’ Today, I understand why our parents send those things. But before, as a child, it hurt a little.”

Another time, I witnessed a Haalpulaar mother telling her 11 –year-old son that she would send their old computer to her family in Mauritania. He answered, alarmed,

“Don’t do that, mom! They’ll think we’re rich! They won’t stop asking us for things!” Immigrants’ family members’ real needs, perceptions of wealth in France, and lack of opportunity for salaried jobs in Mauritania motivate immigrants to send much needed and appreciated remittances. Yet their children often do not understand their parents’ support of their families in their hometowns until they are older. As children, they may yearn for the opportunity to take vacations, own nice shoes, or visit their parents’ hometown, and do not understand why their parents see these desires are

secondary to the needs of their family members in Mauritania. This confusion increases conflict and resentment between parents and children.

Struggles over food in the home are also, to these women, symbols of the gulf between children and their parents. I pointed out that Neene Fatima's children did not eat the meal she had cooked that evening, preferring snacks or leftover fast food. Indeed, I met many mothers who complained that their children would not eat Mauritanian dishes, especially those that were made of grains rather than rice and onion. Often, women interpret their children's refusal to eat their cooking as their rejection of their "culture." One woman told me proudly that her daughter, though she refused to eat many dishes growing up, has now learned how to prepare most of them for her own household (Interview with Mariam, August, 2011). I observed at community events that immigrant women would often brag to each other about the ability of their French-born daughters to cook Mauritanian dishes; or, they would lament to each other that their daughters were unable to cook these dishes.

Language is another source of contention between children and parents, reflecting the larger right wing battle promoting "French" national identity over "other" national identities, as well as the societal presence of thinly veiled discrimination. Parents often worried to me that their children could not speak Pulaar: they told me that ever since they started school, where they are told only to speak French (at age 3), they do not speak the language of their home.

Parents often tell children that they "cannot speak Pulaar" because they have French accents when they speak or because they code-switch between French and Pulaar. And, the children of migrants themselves often say that they "cannot speak Pulaar." For

example, Ami introduced me to her brother, Abdoulaye, so that I could interview him, warning me that, “he can’t speak Pulaar!” Yet, I found out later that he could indeed speak Pulaar (when his cousin called him on the phone and he responded in Pulaar). His Pulaar abilities are in fact so advanced that he can *read* the language (an ability rare among even native speakers of Pulaar): he carried out a project analyzing written Pulaar news articles in school. However, he says that he does not speak the language “well.” Despite their bilingual abilities, children of immigrants may be told by members of mainstream French society that they cannot speak French, because they use the slang of the banlieue, and by the Pulaar community that they cannot speak Pulaar (Interview with Jamal Sow, June 2011).

Gendered Cultural Transmission

Neene Fatima commented that among the children of their community, “the girls listen. But the boys, they want easy money.” Indeed, I often heard parents express their frustrations with their French-born sons, saying that they were able to pass on cultural values and linguistic abilities to their daughters but not to their sons. A common complaint among the Djeolois community is that their daughters can speak Pulaar but their sons really cannot.

I witnessed a baptism for a baby girl in late June, born to Mauritanian parents who have lived in France for nearly 8 years, that aptly illustrated immigrant parents’ opinions of gender and childrearing. The women had gathered to cook in the kitchen and spend time together in the living room: nearly 30 women and their children had crowded into

the apartment, dressed in their finest, gossiping and cooking a meal serving nearly 100 people in a kitchen no more than 4 feet square.

The women kept telling the new mother, “*Debbo do na moyyi, ndi leydi moyaani e worbe*. It’s good to have a girl here [in France.] This country is not goof for men.” I asked them why the country was “bad” for young men, and several women explained that their sons were “ruined” by the country.

“They don’t listen to us,” one explained to me. “They don’t speak Pulaar, they don’t even understand it! They don’t continue schooling here, either; they drop out of school.”

“It’s good to send our sons to Mauritania to grow up!” another said. “Once they are older, 13 or so, they can come back here and go to college. That’s fine. Then they turn out ok, they respect us, they listen to us, and they are dedicated.”

These comments illustrate these women’s concerns that their sons, growing up in France, were not gaining the cultural and linguistic competency of the Haalpulaar community. Over the course of my stay in France, I met several young men (and a few young women, as well) whose parents had sent them to spend their adolescent years in Mauritania, to be properly inculcated in Haalpulaar culture and cognizant of familial ties. Indeed, Tidjane, a 30-year-old man attending that baptism (who gave me a ride to the train station when I needed to leave) told me that he was born in France, but his parents had sent him to Mauritania for his adolescent years.

“And they were smart to do this!” he told me, “Because now I feel indebted to the family in Mauritania and am continuing the tradition of sending remittances to the family there. If I had not been sent to live there, I never would have felt that obligation.” He

was very recently married to a woman from Mauritania, a choice he made with the help of his family.

Related to this gendered socialization of women, the immigrant Mauritanian Haalpulaar community has strict societal definitions and pressures for young French women of Haalpulaar origin. These pressures are illustrated by the rather mocking nickname for girls and women of Haalpulaar origin who are born or raised in France, “*Vaches folles*,” or “mad cows.” As explained by Jamal Sow, a scholar from Mauritania in his early 40s who has worked with the children of immigrants in public schools, the Haalpulaar community uses this term to indicate that French-born girls

“mangent n’importe quoi et n’importe ou, elles font n’importe quoi, elles disent de n’importe quoi, elles n’ont pas de honte et de pudeur des Haalpulaar, le pulaagu. They eat anything, anywhere; they do anything, they’ll say anything, and they don’t have the moral code of shame and modesty that most Haalpulaar share, called the pulaagu.”

Sow explained that as the Haalpulaar are historically a herding people, known for their relationships to cattle, this term is a double entendre. It makes reference to the Haalpulaar relationship to cattle *and* the “mad cow” epidemic in Europe that occurred when people ate meat that was improperly butchered and prepared. It thus implies that the girls born in France of Haalpulaar origin do not control their actions and feelings properly (telling people too bluntly what is on their minds) and do not exhibit modesty; nor do they do not know *how* to do so because they were socialized in France (Interview, June 2011).

This description is used in jest and in seriousness, often put forth as a joke but meant as indirect communication and admonishment to behave. Ameena told me that her mother calls her a vache folle when she says that she doesn’t want to cook for her husband all the time and expects him to cook for her as well. She also called Ameena a

vache folle when she decided to move into her own student apartment, rather than continuing to live with her family until she married; her mother was worried that other mothers of the Haalpulaar community would judge her for letting her daughter have too much “freedom.” (Interview with Ameena, July, 2011). Immigrants may put the phrase in Pulaar into the plural form, calling a group of French-born Mauritanian women “*vache follejidi*.” This term illustrates the cultural expectations that the immigrant Haalpulaar community has for Haalpulaar women.

The term also illustrates the challenges young French women of Haalpulaar origin may face from the Haalpulaar community: they are held to standards of femininity that they do not fully understand or find relevant to their way of being and their French cultural milieu. For example, I first met Ameena at her cousin’s wedding. She left the wedding reception early to be sure to catch the final train home; I left a bit later, with the group of young Mauritanian students who had invited me to the event. When we arrived at the train station, I saw Ameena waiting by herself. She had changed from her Mauritanian dress to jeans for the ride home. She seemed happy to see me at first, but then her face fell upon seeing the group of women from the wedding still dressed in their Mauritanian dresses (the young male students were all wearing suits, as is acceptable for Mauritanian men.)

“I wish I hadn’t changed!” she whispered to me frantically. “They’re going to gossip about me, wearing this outfit. I wish I were still wearing my African dress like the rest of the women.” When the train arrived, she urged me to sit with her away from the group, even though she had spent the evening eating from the same bowl and dancing with the same crowd. One of the young men called over to her, in Pulaar, “why are you

so hostile to us?” as if he expected her to not be able to understand the language. She did, however, understand; and they had a heated discussion together for much of the ride home.

No such culturally specific term exists for French-born men of Haalpulaar descent. Immigrants may call young French men “*bandits*,” referring to the stereotype that they spend their time on the streets and deal drugs, as common in French media depictions of these young men. But this term does not carry with it the culturally specific expectations of dress, behavior, and femininity that are implied in the “*vache folle*” term.

The debate about *why* parents do not pass on cultural values, identity, belonging, and language to their sons as often as they do to their daughters is an important and current one among Haalpulaar in France. Many parents say the reason girls absorb more cultural values and linguistic ability is because girls have less “*liberté*,” and are “*guardée*” or “kept” in the house more than young men. Young women are also given more chores to do, argue parents, so they are less likely to get into trouble, because they don’t have time. Young men, on the other hand, are given the “freedom” to spend more time outside the home.

Ami, having observed the community as a schoolteacher in a banlieue school, and from her perspective of a first generation woman within the Djeolois community, explained to me that, in her opinion, the issue of gendered cultural transmission is not linked to the fact that women are more “protected” or have less “freedom.” Rather, she says, young girls absorb more values from their mothers simply because they spend more time with them, and mothers are more likely to talk to their daughter. She told me that growing up, she had the “freedom” to read and study as she wished rather than do chores

for her family all the time; yet, she still learned Pulaar and the traditions and cultural expectations of that *milieu*. She also successfully completed a PhD. She feels comfortable navigating both mainstream French society and the Haalpulaar cultural community of her extended “family” of the Djeolois. Furthermore, she told me, several young women of the community are currently living on their own while going to the University, which is outside the accepted boundaries for young women in the community. Aameena is an example of one of these women. Yet their parents are allowing them to do so: this “freedom,” says Ami, has not hindered these girls’ success or severed their ties to their parents’ cultural community.

Ami thus claims that the key issue in transmitting cultural values is not a lack of “freedom” or excess of “protection” but is due to whether children absorb cultural values through time at the home and through dialogue with their parents.

“Our young men, you see them and you think they are strangers in their own home!” she told me. “When you visit Haalpulaar homes here, do you ever see young men? No, and that’s what I always tell our parents. Young men come home and they go to their rooms. It’s like they’re in a hotel. They just give their laundry to their mothers. And no one challenges them on this! ... But with girls, there is more cultural transmission. You discuss things with your mom, you’re close to her, she teaches you things.

But the fathers? They’re absent! That’s another problem. Fathers never communicate with their children. It’s like they’re still in the Fouta [the desert of Mauritania]: they bring home their salary, voila, I’ve done my duty. Here’s the rice. They don’t ask you what you did at school, they just give your mom orders. They don’t communicate.”

“Yes,” I replied, “they must balance their jobs with the work they do in associations, implementing development in their hometowns. It is hard for them.”

“Yes, their work is important, but at the same time, they don’t raise their children.” She told me.

The disconnect between fathers and their sons of the Haalpulaar community means that the first generation of young men does not wish to participate in association activities, unlike many of the first generation women. Ami explained that, “It’s because

the young men feel like they're being used. Their fathers never talked to them growing up, and now that they are 18, they tell them to give them their dues for the ARAF association. “

The current president of ARAF, Momadou, explained the dues collection process for the association to me. Each year, each member is expected to contribute to the association. But, if an individual who does not pay dues refuses to explain the reason behind his failure to pay, the association will then write an official letter to his family and friends back in Djeol, complaining about this problem. The social pressure often pushes the member to contribute again. However, when the Association does this for the first generation of French-born Djelois men, social pressure from a village that these men do not consider their home did not make any impact upon them. The association thus cannot successfully convince these young men to participate in its activities (September, 2011). In contrast, first generation women do indeed participate in the activities of Era ngo Debbo, or at the very least, contribute their mandatory dues; most of the unmarried first generation women I talked to pay their dues to the Association but do not attend meetings.

In *Mexican New York*, Smith observed that American-born women of Mexican origin were more likely to be present in their ethnocultural community, as they attend more religious ceremonies and community gatherings with their mothers. The community observed the same for French-born or raised women of Haalpulaar descent. Young girls often help their mothers out with chores around the home: cleaning, cooking, doing laundry. Even if they simply spend time at home and do not do chores, as Ami said was true for her, mothers, as she said, communicate with their daughters more.

Young girls thus have a better understanding of the cultural references informing their parents' worldview.

Young men, on the other hand, are not expected to interact at the home. Nor are their fathers. Additionally, because fathers are so often out of the house – working several minimum wage jobs, organizing association meetings for the development of their hometowns—sons do not have a male cultural reference to help them comprehend their parents' worldview. As a result, they often see their parents as schools or mass media tell them to understand immigrants.

Their brothers, as Ami told me is customary among the Haalpulaar, are not encouraged to spend time in the home, unlike the daughters of the household. In Mauritania, says Ami, “everything is outside.” Kids are raised outside. Their brothers in France are also told “*yahu to bawo*,” go outside,” whenever they are noisy or wanting to play.” According to Ami, in Mauritania, the people “outside” learn the same cultural values as their parents, as everyone spends a great deal of time outdoors, interacting with the neighbors, visiting family, doing chores, etc cetera. But for French children of Mauritanian origin, the culture of the banlieue e street in France is quite different than that of their parents. The family for these young men becomes the street.

Furthermore, banlieue street culture is defamed in the media and in the French popular imagination. As a result, Ami argued, male children feel like strangers in their parents' households and within mainstream French culture. Ami pointed out that alienation from home culture and identity is what causes these boys to have trouble negotiating mainstream French culture.

“When you don’t know your own culture, you cannot open yourself up to other cultures, [such as mainstream French culture]” she explained to me (Interview, August, 2011).

Genaba, a first generation woman with two young children, explained to me that she will raise her young son differently than the gendered expectations her parents had for her brothers, making him carry out chores around the house: cleaning his room, helping her with housework. She is doing this because she wants to pass on Haalpulaar cultural values to him. She proudly told me that he is learning about both cultures: he uses the Pulaar word for “shirt” (*wute*) to describe all of his T-shirts. “*Ou est mon wute?*” Where is my *wute*?” he asks. She is happy that he is learning both French and Pulaar (interview, July 2011).

Parents and their children communicate differently, because of their socialization and culturally-informed styles of communication. Many youth complain that parents do not communicate with their children. Haalpulaar parents, in turn, are shocked when their children ask them things that would normally be taboo in Mauritania, such as where they met before getting married. Children may unwittingly violate a cultural norm of Mauritania while trying to ask questions of their parents that are appropriate in a French household but inappropriate to a Mauritanian parent. For example, Cheik Oumar Ba explained to me that he witnessed a father yell at his son because his son asked him where he met his mother.

As he is Haalpulaar himself, Ba explained to me that he understood why, schooled in the French system, the child would ask this seemingly innocent question. However, within Haalpulaar cultural norms, it is inconceivable to ask ones father this

type of question, because the issue of meeting one's spouse is a discussion that one can only have with someone of one's age group.

But beyond gendered socialization from the Haalpulaar community, mainstream societal ideas of gender and race also have great influence upon the self-understandings of the children of immigrants. While the Haalpulaar community has the expectation that their French-born young women be able to take part in and exhibit important cultural behaviors, the French media also expects and sees these young women as successfully integrated into French society. Young women born to immigrants are more likely to be successful in school than young men (Timera 2002). The French media thus often depicts these young women as sympathetic to French national values and *le droit humain*. For example, one article in *Le Figaro* after the 2005 riots described the young women of the rioting communities pleading to their brothers to “return home” and stop rioting (Gabizon 2005). Young men, on the other hand, are continually defamed in French media, by mainstream politicians, and targeted by police.

Keaton (2006) and Timera (2002) found that young women often use French national values and their “human rights” learned in school to refuse parental control in issues such as marriage. Timera observed that women in sub-Saharan African communities in France often have troubled relations with their parents, because they use their success in mainstream French society to leverage control over their lives against their parents’ wishes. Young men, he explained, often drop out of school early and find work, giving part of the money they earn to their parents and keeping in their good graces.

This observation is similar but also quite different than my observations of the Djeolois French community. The first generation women with whom I spoke in the Djeolois community—and apparently in the wider Haalpulaar community — did indeed seem to be able to negotiate mainstream French society more successfully than their brothers. At the same time, they seemed to have better relations with their parents than their brothers.

This is, of course, not to say that there are no conflicts between women and their parents! In the next chapter, I will discuss the conflicts that arise when women wish to marry someone of a different ethnic group.

Despite these conflicts, parents pass on cultural values to their daughters. Many first generation women expressed that when they grew older, they appreciated their cultural values and found they gave them resources for finding success in professional life, scholarship, or in overcoming discrimination with patience and grace.

The embrace of one's cultural heritage as one grows older corresponds to the ideas set forth in Smith's analysis of the Ticianese (Mexican) first generation in New York City. He illustrated that the "life course" alters transnational life. He argued that changes in identity linked to the life course are an important element of transnational identity that Nina Glick Schiller overlooks. Glick Schiller's transnational theory revealed that migrants and their children do not always "assimilate" but retain ties to the home country, as a way to escape discrimination and inequalities in the new country. Smith, however, nuances this analysis, revealing that the life course of the First generation can alter their relationship to the home country (in Smith 2006).

In Smith's analysis, he found that younger children take less interest in their connection with Mexico; but their Ticuanese identity takes on urgent meaning to them during their adolescence and throughout their late teens and early twenties. This corresponds to research by scholars ranging from Erik Erikson to Carolina Suarez Orozco who have documented the strong need during adolescence for a secure ethnic identity (in Smith 2006).

The accounts and commentary presented above suggests that among first generation Haalpulaar individuals in France, I found that there was a great variety of reasons for the embrace (or NOT) of one's ethnic identity. Most of these reasons seemed to correspond to later times (early 20s) in the life course. Some embrace the culture of their parents when they faced discrimination at the workplace or in school. Others embrace their ethnocultural identity when searching for professions and in pursuing higher education. Ameena, for example, wishes to pursue international diplomacy; her half-sister Maimouna is excited to develop tourism in Mauritania. Among the Djeolois community, I observed that women in their mid and late 20s often strongly embrace their ethnocultural identity when they are ready to marry and have children, . At this particular moment in the lifecourse, women I talked to seem to begin to spend time with the Association and attend baptisms and weddings with real regularity. I observed that the Association and Djeolois community events provided a support network and social network for married women with children, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Regardless of when this desire to embrace one's ethnocultural identity happens (and again, I stress that it does not happen for all), gender strongly influences what happens when these individuals try to embrace their ethnocultural identity. First

generation men do not feel at ease within the Haalpulaar cultural milieu, nor the mainstream French milieu, so they cannot always find the community that they are seeking. They thus search elsewhere for community: the greater banlieue *milieu* and, as Ami pointed out, the streets of the banlieue. First generation women of Djeolois origin have been socialized to be at ease within the Haalpulaar community. They confidently speak Pulaar and navigate the Haalpulaar cultural milieu. They *can* and often do embrace their ethnocultural community, while simultaneously successfully navigating mainstream France.

CHAPTER IV

“IN PANTS OR IN A COMPLÈTE, I AM COMFORTABLE IN BOTH WORLDS”: GENDER, IDENTITY, AND ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

It is mid-morning on a Tuesday in July, 2011. Peering out the window of the E train from the Gare du Nord to the banlieue Noisy-le-Sec, I see sun dappled grassy fields and swirling graffiti on industrial buildings. It is the third day of Ramadan, and the train—with its high percentage of Muslims, Africans and Arabs, wearing clothing ranging from trendy jeans, to suits, to veils and prayer robes—feels somewhat subdued.

Today I have an interview with Genaba, a 1st generation French woman of Mauritanian origin, who is a governing member of the Djeol Women’s association, Era Ngo Debbo. She is on maternity leave from her job as an accountant, enjoying the break from her 40-minute commute to the firm in downtown Paris, and she has invited me to her house for an interview.

“We can eat lunch together, since I’m not fasting,” she told me with a warm laugh over the phone.

Her husband is fasting: he has the day off, and he pulls up to the train station in flashy, dark denim jeans and a button down shirt. His voice is gravelly from fasting fatigue, and he parks in front of the high rise where they live with their 3-year-old son.

Their apartment is small, yet elegant, with white sofas and armchairs, red and orange flower arrangements and candles that match a red and orange Lagos wax print fabric swatch on the glass-topped table. Dark wooden statues of reclining, long-limbed African women in red and orange wraps flank a small TV. Gold butterfly decals surround a framed photo of Genaba on the wall, bringing out the subtle gold of a square plaque with Arabic calligraphy on the adjacent wall.

Genaba has a heart-lipped, wide smile, wide eyes, and white teeth. Her hair is smoothed back into a ponytail, and her gaze is poised and serene, a gentle, teasing laugh ready to surface with her friends and family. She wears a delicate red and white pagne and matching top, discretely falling in soft folds over her pregnant stomach. Only she knows the sex of her child, which she is keeping as a secret from her husband, and she carries with her a poised, knowing excitement and happiness. She greets me in a combination of Pulaar and French, seats me on the couch, and brings me a tray of juices, sodas, and cool water.

I tell her I like her outfit, and she tells me,

“I feel comfortable in both pants and in an African complète, thanks to my parents. I wear pants in the street, like what you’re wearing, but back at home, I put on my pagne, my African wrap skirt. That is what is good about our childhood, the Haalpulaar in France, we know how to behave in both milieus: among the Haalpulaar and among the French. I want to pass that onto my children, too.

This chapter operates within the theoretical framework set forth in my first chapter. This framework argues that African immigrants and their children do not struggle to “integrate,” as stated by Right-wing politicians, but rather to overcome racial discrimination and socioeconomic inequalities. As Genaba’s words indicate, some first generation women find their parents’ cultural values to be helpful in being “comfortable in both worlds,” or in overcoming discrimination and entering the mainstream French professional workforce.

Using the ethnographic data I gathered within the Djeol community of Mauritania and the opinions of first generation women and men of the Haalpulaar Diaspora, I explore the identity formation of the children of immigrants. I show that there are several gendered ways that children of Djeolois immigrants form identity in the context of racial discrimination and assimilationist politics in France. They may adopt multiple elements of these identities, and at different times of their lives.

It is important to note that class may have a role within these identities formations as well. Genaba, Ami, Ameena, Maimouna, and Astelle are highly educated and have successfully obtained schooling and professional opportunities that put them in a higher socioeconomic class than migrant women and many other first generation women of Haalpulaar descent. Their elevated socioeconomic status might help them access this positive identification with their heritage, because they have access to the professional world as well. Interviews with first generation women of Haalpulaar origin of lower socioeconomic status might have expressed more frustrations with their ethnic identities; or, as Gutierrez pointed out, may have expressed more self-identification with their ethnic identity (1999). Yet, at the same time, it is also important to remember that several of

these women were raised by immigrants who were not formally educated; their mothers do not speak French with comfort. Their background is thus of a lower socioeconomic status than that to which they currently belong.

The first, which I call “cultural mixing or *métissage*,” using the terminology used by Ami, the science teacher in the banlieue, is the self-identification of which Genaba is an example in this vignette. With this identity formation, French of Haalpulaar origin feel as if their parents have passed on important cultural values, language, and religious beliefs to them, and they hold this cultural identity and belief system as the foundation for their identity. Those who identify in this way are overwhelmingly women. As Ami explained, thanks to their Haalpulaar cultural foundation, they are able to “open themselves up” to cultural exchange with French values, have patience when negotiating discrimination, and succeed or “integrate” into French society. I will show the ways that their Haalpulaar heritage, as they recounted to me, gives them professional skills, a steady support group, and important values. These cultural values and skills helps them to, as Genaba pointed out, navigate both *milieu*, their ethnic community and the competitive French job market.

As I explained previously, first generation women told me that their brothers are alienated from their Haalpulaar heritage, and from their parents and their homelife. First generation women use this fact to explain why young men encounter difficulties in other social situations (such as the French job market): because they had no solid cultural and social foundation as children. I will elucidate the first generations’ other ways of self-identifying in a later section of this chapter.

Genaba says that she follows her mother's instructions to *muñ*, as is the expression in Pulaar, or be patient, when facing discrimination and inequalities. Thanks to the cultural and religious values of her parents, she says,

“Discrimination is hidden⁹, but it's there. It was hard for me to find a job—everyone told me I was “overqualified¹⁰,” from my 4 years of college education. I don't know if it was really something else¹¹ though. But I found this job, *Dieu* is great.

“Where I am working, I am one of 5 blacks of 100 whites¹²! But I can't feel discouraged: one needs to do everything one can to integrate, to succeed. I always think of other black people who will come after me, looking to work where I am working. I know that someone else, since I have done a good job, will be able to succeed.

“My faith helped me succeed, to move forward. I am Muslim. Even to get this apartment, it took 3 years! *Si a hulaani Allah*. God gives us trials. He tests our patience. *Muñ, muñ*, be patient, is what our mothers always tell us. Every marriage, every home is built on patience, they tell us. We know it's important to be patient and to thank God.”

Despite having graduated with four years of college, she told me that she worked for several years in a boutique in the airport while searching for jobs appropriate for her education and skills. Culturally-informed patience and faith, she said, were resources to her, reminders that she would eventually persevere in finding a job, even when encountering discrimination on the job market. Her words, and those of other first generation women, illustrate that mainstream French society's faulting of Islam as preventing immigrants and their children from “integrating” into secular society (see Tevanian 2009) is unfounded. Indeed, Genaba and other first generation women insist that Muslim values helped them “integrate” and find the job she has today.

Another common theme among first generation women of Haalpulaar origin that emerged from these interviews is that their heritage and linguistic skills bring them

⁹ La discrimination est cachée, mais c'est là.

¹⁰ Surdiplômé

¹¹ Je ne sais pas si c'était autre chose.

¹² Je suis un des cinq noirs de cent blancs!

unique professional opportunities, useful to finding good professional and opportunities in France, or internationally. Genaba, for example, told me that her volunteer work within her ethnocultural community, with their women's association *Era Ngo Debbo*, helped her to obtain her job. She had originally joined the association to "continue the work for *notre village*, our village," in Mauritania. But a happy, unexpected consequence of this volunteer work was that, at the interview for her current position as an accountant, they asked questions about her budgeting for the Association and her pricing of items at their annual yard sale and fundraising cultural event. This volunteer work with her ethnocultural community sparked the interest of her interviewer and helped Genaba find employment.

Other women I talked to from this community expressed interest in professional opportunities related to their bi-cultural experience and knowledge, in international development, diplomacy, international business, and tourism. Many envision setting up international businesses or developing tourism industries in Mauritania in the future. For example, Maimouna, a 22 year old in a Tourism and Hospitality graduate program, wishes to teach about the cultural richness of Mauritania through tourism, simultaneously creating jobs in Mauritania and combating the negative media stereotypes of Africa in Europe. Since I left France in September, Astelle, a woman of the first generation in her late 20s, had taken an internship with an international organization in Nouakchott, Mauritania. As of February, she moved to Mauritania to work for this organization. Though she does not feel that she faced discrimination in France, she is excited for the opportunity to, as she said, jump over some of the steps she would have to climb in her career trajectory in France. In this international organization, her bilingual and bicultural

abilities are seen as valuable skills and she has the opportunity to use them. She finds her work satisfying and more challenging than the work she would have found in France.

Ameena is currently carrying out a six-month internship in Mauritania as well.

Among the wider first generation Haalpulaar community in France, I observed that other youth wish to use their bicultural knowledge and connections to capitalize on international careers; one young man born in Senegal but raised in France has manufactured “*Ko Mi Haalpulaar*” (I am a Pulaar speaker) T-shirts which he has sold in France, the US, Senegal, Mauritania, and Guinea. He uses networks of people he knows in these places to sell the shirts for him, or he travels to these places to sell his shirts (for which he has a website). Frustrated with discrimination he has faced in France, he now wishes to be his own boss, with his own business. These young adults demonstrate the ways that their cultural heritage and community can be a resource for entrepreneurship, international business, education, and experience, within or from without mainstream French society. In this way, they embrace their ethnocultural identity to improve their job compatibility and possibilities, opening themselves up to a professional world that is more global and more creative than that which they find within the mainstream French job market.

I also observed that the social circle of Djelois immigrants and the first generation, as well as the formal Djeol women’s association, *Erango Debbo*, is an important support network for these busy, professional women and mothers. I had the opportunity to accompany several Djeolois women to baptisms, weddings, the Djeol youth celebration for Ramadan, and the Association annual party. Baptisms are usually held in the home, but other events are held in a community room, available to the group

through the Association's formal connections to the French city government. The women organize to cook for the events, pairing up the evening before to make huge quantities of salad, rice and fish, *Thackeray* (yogurt and millet balls), and ginger and bissap juice. They hire a DJ to play music of West Africa and Euro pop. Families gather, dressed in the latest fashions from Dakar and Nacho, often purchased from a recent traveler to Mauritania, sent by family members there, or sewn by tailors in Paris. The community eats, drinks, socializes, and dances. Men gather on one side of the room, women gather on the other, and children run and play together. Immigrant women lead the group in dancing to mbalaax or to Baba Maal songs; their children lead the group in dancing to Ivoirian-French pop songs.

Often, women of the Djeolois community in France complained about the busy lives they lead: raising children, working, running a household, cooking, shopping, etc. These informal and formal Djeol community events can be a great deal of what makes their lives so busy! (These first generation women also have friends beyond this Djeolois social circle: old classmates, neighbors from the banlieue, co-workers, etc., whom they see.) Yet, through events like these, the women also access a supportive social circle. They see members of this social circle often for these community events, and less often for Association business. In this way, married women with children have the opportunity to go out, dance, and stay connected with a solid core of women, rather than focusing solely on child-rearing and work. These women can also ask for help from the others for childcare, when needed. For immigrant women unaccustomed to raising children within a society that functions with the nuclear family, rather than large extended households, this social circle provides valuable community contact. As Genaba explained,

“We have a community! Each weekend, there’s a wedding, a baptism. It’s busy, but it’s great, because we get to see each other. You run around, getting outfits sewn, it’s hectic. We saw how our parents do it, and we do the same. We offer money to people in good and bad times.”

Also in July, I attended a baptism for a child born to a French woman of Djeolois descent. Nearly 30 families crowded into the small apartment to eat, drink, and celebrate the baby’s birth. The women squeezed into the bedroom, the men in the living room. Most of the women were young mothers themselves, or were recently married. Women who were not married, I observed, do not attend baptisms as often, unless they are very close friends of the mother. The evening was filled with stories of birth, advice from sage older mothers to new mothers about childcare, and advice to pregnant women about staving off morning sickness. I noticed that one of the women, who was pregnant and seeking advice for morning sickness, did not speak Pulaar. I wondered if she had attended many social events among the Haalpulaar community before this one, and before she had entered into the life stage of marriage.

Indeed, marriage is an important event for young first generation women of Haalpulaar descent. It is a time for them to access the resources, social networks, and traditions that their ethnocultural community gives them, as well as to receive the often unwanted constraints and pressures of that community. A common topic of conversation among Ameena and her friends who were recently engaged or married was how best to negotiate the traditions that their parents expected for the wedding. Do they have to have a two-day ceremony? How could they avoid the tradition in which the older women of the community wash their hair on their wedding night? (They complained that if the couple planned to go to a honeymoon the day after the wedding, the new bride would not

want the older women in the family to undo her fancy braids or updo hairstyle to wash her hair.) As I will discuss later in this chapter, young women's desires to marry someone of a different ethnic group, or even Haalpulaar in origin but of a different "caste," are also a point of contention between the first generation and their parents.

Robert Courtney Smith used his fieldwork in New York City to modify the theory of transnational identity, pointing out that life stages affect individuals' transnational identities. He found that first generation Mexicans in New York City are often ambivalent about their heritage when young, but they begin to embrace their Mexican identity when entering the "life stage" of adolescence (2006). Among the women of the Djeol first generation, I observed that their embrace of the Haalpulaar heritage and community begins at a slightly later age: in their early 20s. Perhaps this shift in self-identification occurs after the individual goes on the job market and realizes that she must contend with discrimination in the workforce. Perhaps in her 20s, the individual wishes to explore potential international career options that could be enriched by her bicultural heritage. Perhaps she starts to embrace the cultural traditions and social networks during the important time of her marriage and childbearing.¹³

Genaba explained to me that as a child, she was indeed reluctant to explore her cultural heritage.

"Yes, when I was young, I was embarrassed. But luckily, with our milieu, you grow up and you see it's good. You want to grow up and wear pretty [African] clothes, too. I know how to be a real woman, take care of myself, my husband, the house, the food. That's being an African woman, to me, it's beautiful. You learn that, here and there."

¹³ The exception to the embrace of Haalpulaar heritage is if youth have disputes with her parents over their choice of marriage partner: often this type of dispute will push the first generation to reject their heritage.

Upon entering the life stage of being a married woman, she began to embrace her cultural heritage. My interviews with others in this community indicated that other first generation women do so as well.

Furthermore, the formal and informal meetings of the Djeol community reinforce cultural traditions and linguistic abilities for their children. First generation Haalpulaar women explained to me how they teach their children to learn about and appreciate their Haalpulaar cultural values and the Pulaar language. Several mentioned that they send their children to Senegal or Mauritania to visit relatives during summer vacations. Neneyel, a French-born woman who spent several years in Mauritania as a young adult before moving back to France to raise her children, told me that her daughter came back from a vacation in Mauritania with a newfound understanding of why her mother has certain values and principles.

“I hate wasting water,” Neneyel told me. “Spending time in the desert, you realize the importance of water! Living in Nouakchott, there would be days on end that I would have just one bucket of water per day for my 3 children and myself. And you would see women waiting in lines, walking miles with heavy buckets of water on their heads. That is why here in France, when I see a tap running and wasting water, it is like the water is spilling out of my heart, it hurts so! I always tell my children, now that they are grown, to take shorter showers, and they never understood why I care so much. But when my daughter came back from her vacation in Mauritania, she told me, ‘Mom, I understand why you nag at us to turn off the water!’” and she pays more attention to how she showers now. Going *au pays*, to the country of origin, gives them another perspective on life. It is important. They see how life is elsewhere, but they can also understand their grandparents and their parents’ way of seeing the world. *C’est bien, parce que tu sais d’où tu viens, et où tu vas aller*. It’s good [to travel to Mauritania], because you get to know where you come from, and where you are going.”

Many stressed to me the care they take to speak to their children in Pulaar, even though, as Ami explained, French is the language that they themselves feel most comfortable speaking.

“But if I speak French to my daughter,” she told me, “I will be denying her own culture. She won’t be able to speak to her grandmother. She won’t be able to speak to her cousins, or speak to people when she goes to Senegal or Mauritania. She has to have a good cultural foundation, in order to be able to open herself up to other cultures. If she can’t communicate with her own family, she will be lost! And so, even if it takes extra effort for me, because I think first in French, I speak to her in Pulaar.”

These first generation women are not raising their children with Haalpulaar values uncritically: indeed, in the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Genaba has bent Haalpulaar gender roles for her son. She has him do chores around the house, so that he will spend more time in the home than her brothers and thus have the opportunity to be socialized with Haalpulaar values. Several women stressed to me that they wish to raise their sons and daughters with better communication than their parents. They also stressed that they would limit their remittances to family members in Mauritania much more than their parents, so that their sons and daughters would have opportunities that they had never had, such as to take vacations to countries other than Mauritania, participate in summer camps in France, take music lessons, et cetera. They are altering Haalpulaar values and gender roles, but they are also working to pass on cultural and religious values and linguistic abilities so that their children, as they say, have a cultural grounding and foundation. Without this cultural foundation, they warn, children can become “lost,” like so many children in the banlieue, unable to “integrate” into mainstream French society, unable to “open themselves up” or to be at ease in a variety of social contexts (Ami, Geneba, 2011).

Genaba explained to me that her return visit to Mauritania revealed to her that she is not considered completely African or completely, as many people of the first generation observe.

“They consider us French there, and here, they consider us African. So me, I like to learn how to do things like an African as well as a French person, so nothing is lost, for my children.”

“Doing things like an African,” her words indicate, can prevent her children from feeling the alienation that can be a challenge for the first generation. When the first generation does not feel accepted in their country, nor in their parents’ country, they risk feeling alienated. For this reason, Genaba and other first generation women take care to pass on cultural values from their heritage, to give them a cultural foundation and community to rely on if they feel alienated from mainstream French society.

This “métissage” identity corresponds to Nina Glick Schiller’s theory that transnational identity formation can be a “third way” of self-identifying for migrants and their children, which protects them from inequalities and discrimination in the new country (*in* Smith 2006). With this third way, the children of the first generation may identify with their parents’ homeland, protecting them from the alienation they feel in a country that may legally accept them but does not culturally embrace them, or that discriminates against them because of their skin color. These French women of Haalpulaar origin do not all uniformly feel that they experience discrimination in France. However, those that do often point to their cultural values as helping them overcome this discrimination. International jobs, for some, may be an opportunity to escape discrimination or limited opportunities in the workplace (Interview with Mamadou

Diallo). Even for those who do not feel that youth face discrimination in France, they still see an inherent value in giving their children a solid cultural foundation for their identity, to draw upon if they wish throughout their lives (Interview with Ami).

As Genaba emphasized in this vignette, she values her cultural heritage, and she values her French heritage as well. She wants to raise her children with Haalpulaar values and linguistic skills, yet she also told me she does not necessarily want to move to a “big home in Senegal.” Her identification as Mauritanian-in-origin *in France* is an identity that gives her resources for navigating discrimination, for successfully entering the French workforce, for raising her children, and for maintaining a diverse social network and a dependable ethnocultural community. Her work in the Association *Era Ngo Debbo* gives her the opportunity to stay connected with --and give resources to-- her family and friends in Mauritania, without committing excessive monetary remittances that would compromise the comfort of her own children. The Association also serves to reinforce the Djeol social network. Additionally, it gave her valuable skills and experience that served her in the French workforce. Her “métissage” identity enables her to be a successful accountant and working mother, and as she says, taught her to be “a real woman, an African woman”

Genaba and other women in her community demonstrate the ways that their bicultural heritage and language can be a professional, educational, and cultural resource and an important element of their identity. They show that knowledge of their cultural heritage is helpful to them, not a hindrance to “integration” or success in France. Traveling to Mauritania or simply learning about Haalpulaar culture and language from their parents is important, many first generation women of Djeol argue, because, “*tu sais*

d'où tu viens, et où tu vas aller, ” you know where you are coming from and where you will go.” Their stories, I argue, are solid counter-examples to the right-wing logic that blames the struggles that the children of immigrants face in finding employment success and continuing their education on their “cultural difference.” Indeed, these women argue that helping children learn about and explore their “cultural difference” is necessary for their identity formation. They argue that pushing the children of immigrants away from their heritage--shaming them for their African background, pushing them to deemphasize their bicultural heritage at school, or telling their parents to focus on speaking French to them to the detriment of their bilingual abilities-- isolates and alienates them. They say that this isolation will, in turn, make it more difficult for them to be open to and tolerant of any value systems and social contexts, including that of mainstream France.

The Limitations of Cultural Mixing: “Identité Forcée” or Forced Identities

There are limits to the utility of ethocultural identification to the first generation. People of the first generation struggle between having a Haalpulaar cultural foundation and being forced to uphold Haalpulaar values and practices that they do not believe are appropriate for them. Many first generation men and women explain that their life situations, or *réalité*, are different from that of their parents, because they are growing up in France. Many express or exhibit the need to feel as if are able to modify and choose Haalpulaar cultural values and norms as needed and appropriate for the “reality” of France.

As I pointed out with Genaba’s story of how she has modified gender roles to raise her son, the first generation wishes for Haalpulaar roles within the family to be more

flexible. Similarly, a debate over women's roles in the household wages between immigrant women. Some claim that it is shameful that Haalpulaar women in France (or first generation French women of Haalpulaar origin) work outside the home and must ask their husbands to help them with cooking or childrearing. Others acknowledge that the Haalpulaar norm for the wife to be the homemaker is not appropriate for the "*réalité gooto*" or "other reality" of France. Djeolois immigrants who came to France in the 1970s to work in factories are now retiring in greater and greater numbers, and their wives are taking the opportunity to join the workforce for the first time. They wake up in the early morning hours to clean office buildings or hospitals and return home in the late morning to cook and serve lunch for their families. These wages have enabled many immigrant women to contribute greater sums of money to their women's Association; however, many immigrant women keep their employment a secret from relatives back in Mauritania. They may not wish for those in Mauritania to know that they, living in the land where Mauritians used to receiving remittances believe one can "find money on the ground," work in housecleaning. To Mauritians in the homeland, these working women are violating the sacred tenet that the wife must be devoted first to her family and children. Furthermore, they are working as housekeepers, while many middle and even lower middle class women in Mauritania hire housekeepers (Inferred from interview with Fatoumata, Kadiatou 2011). For this reason, they often keep their jobs from their relatives back home, purchasing fancy, expensive clothing to wear on trips back home, distributing great sums of money to friends and family, and not divulging the less enviable aspects of their lives in France.

First generation women told me that now that their mothers have jobs, their mothers understand why their daughters wished to make lifestyle choices and embrace roles different than their mothers, such as having fewer children and working outside the home.

Another pivotal issue subject to cultural debate between first generation men and women and their parents is marriage. The French media overemphasizes the rare cases of “forced marriage,” which occur when parents send their daughters to be married in their country of origin (Keaton 2006). According to interviews with Haalpulaar social workers, parents do wish for their daughters to marry their cousins from Mauritania who have immigrated to France. However, explained a Haalpulaar social worker named Haby, these marriages do not always go well, because the immigrant and the woman are “from two different cultures” (Interview June 2011).

Another conflict over marriage occurs when parents and children dispute the children’s choice of a marriage partner. Parents become defensive when their children choose to marry someone descended from another ethnic group or of a different country of origin. Parents also protest when their children choose to marry someone of an incompatible “caste.” The Haalpulaar caste system, officially abolished in Senegal in 1909 (Dilley 2004), and in the 1980s in Mauritania, still has lasting affects today. Based on a person’s last name, other Haalpulaar immediately know if he is descended from the “noble” or “slave” caste. Those of the former slave caste are not supposed to have certain professions or positions of power, and those of the former slave caste are not supposed to marry those of the former noble caste (N’Gaide 2003).

Haalpulaar youth born in France still encounter the inequalities and social stigmas related to this caste classification. Often, these youth are not aware of the continuing prevalence of the abolished caste system, and do not even know which people are descended from which caste, until they wish to marry. Their parents may surprise them and forbid their proposed marriage because the couple is of incompatible castes (interviews with Sow, See, and Bah, 2011). Haby told me that women are more often subject to parental limitation upon their marriage partners. She witnessed many women becoming frustrated with their parents' anger, and disowning their families. She tells parents,

“These girls are not born knowing this caste system. For them, a person is a person...you mothers are frustrated with their social choices, but your girls haven't done anything wrong. *You* chose to immigrate, not her. *You* chose that she would grow up here. *You* have to shoulder that choice. She married another culture, another vision, another way of living”¹⁴ and will pick her marriage partner according to her different upbringing.” If parents are not flexible, Haby explained, their daughters will often sever ties with the community and their parents.

¹⁴ Ce que vous êtes en train de défendre, elles n'ont pas ça dans leur esprit. Elles ont dépassé ça. Parce qu'elles ne sont pas nées dans ça! Elles ne connaissent pas ça! Donc, pour elles, une personne est une personne! Même s'il y a des différences, elles vont dire, cette personne a fait des études, cette personne a réussi, c'est ça qu'elles voyaient.

Mais les mamans souffrent de cela aujourd'hui. De toutes les façons, je dis aux parents, “ta fille n'a rien fait. Ce n'est pas elle qui a choisi l'immigration, c'est TOI qui a choisi l'immigration.” Laughs. Tu as choisi qu'elle soit née ici, qu'elle grandisse ici. Donc, tu dois assumer. Elle a épousé une culture, elle a une autre vision, elle a une autre mode de vie.

Among the young men of the Djeolois community, many have married outside the ethnocultural community without facing too much resistance from their parents. Some first generation women and men speculate that in the future, women will find that their parents are more flexible to their choices and decisions. If parents do not become more flexible, the youth say, they will endanger their daughters' relationships to them and to their community.

Mon Bled, My Homeland: Anti-French Identities

In the chapters on discrimination and socialization, I demonstrated that young men and women of Haalpulaar origin may feel embarrassed or ashamed of their cultural heritage, especially in light of negative media stereotypes of Africa and of immigrants. On the other hand, youth may also actively embrace their ethnocultural heritage, especially when they face discrimination in mainstream France, and feel frustrated with a lack of job and school opportunities or with racial profiling. As I demonstrated in the chapter on gendered socialization, women often feel at ease within the Haalpulaar community: linguistically and culturally competent. Young men, on the other hand, may not have spent a great deal of time among the Haalpulaar community while growing up, as young men do not spend a great deal of time in their homes. As a result, they may not have a veritable ethnocultural community in France that they feel they can embrace and call their own. Instead, they may idealize the homeland of their parents without knowing or experiencing it and without spending time with its ethnocultural community in France. This is another type of identity formation that occurs among young men of the Djeolois

community and among young men and women of many ethnic groups of the greater banlieues.

Ami expressed her worries with this idealized self-identification when she related a story about her students.

“Students will ask me “Madame, what are you?” and I respond that I am French. And they respond,

‘No, that’s not what we mean!’ And then I ask them, ‘Well what are you?’ and they won’t tell me French. They say something else. And I say to them, “You were born in France. You are French!” Even the Antilleans do this, despite the fact that they have been French, even longer than Alsace and Lorraine!

Then I say, ‘are you asking my nationality? I am French, just like you. And they respond, ‘no, no I am Mauritanian! I am Algerian! and I say no. ‘No, your parents are Algerian, but you are *French*. If you go to Mauritania or Algeria tomorrow, you won’t have any legal papers. You will be an immigrant.’

It’s a recent thing, [this self-identification with the country of origin and denial of their French nationality.]! And another thing, they’ll act like their banlieue neighborhood is their nationality, writing St. Denis or Sarcelles on their backpacks. I was shocked when I saw this. I told them, you are *French*, and you can’t do anything about that!’ And the worst is that they will go to their country of origin, and they’ll call themselves French. Maybe it’s a reaction [to their frustrations from society’s stereotypes]. I have the impression that they tell themselves, “Since I’m considered an immigrant, since I’m called Mohamad and everyone asks me where I’m from, even though I was born here, OK, I’ll give them what they want. So they embrace this model [of identification with their parents’ homeland and rejection of their French nationality]¹⁵

¹⁵ A: Par exemple, quand les élèves me demandent “madame, vous êtes d’où”, je ne me souviens plus comment ils forment ça, jamais ils attendent une autre réponse quand je dis que je suis française. “Mais non, madame, ce n’est pas ça qu’on vous demande!” Et je leurs demande “mais toi tu es quoi?” ils ne répondent pas français, ils disent quelque chose d’autre, et je leurs dis, mais tu es ne en France, tu es française? Et même les antillais! Alors que les antillais sont français même plus longtemps que l’alsace et lorraine! Et ils vont dire non, non. Ce n’est pas ça ce que je veux dire. Mais alors, tu me demandais ma nationalité? Je suis française, comme toi. “Mais non moi je suis Algérien!” Je dis non, non, tes parents sont algériens ou tes grands-parents mais toi tu es français. Tu parles de la nationalité, tu es algérien. Demain si tu pars en Algérie tu n’auras aucun papier algérien tu vas être immigré, c’est tout.

L: Même dans les boutiques à St. Denis, il y a toujours des boucles d’oreilles de Guadeloupe.

A; Mais ça, c’est assez récent et moi je suis contre ces trucs parce que ça entretient le communautarisme. Alors tu vois même des élèves qui désignent, et même il ya des quartiers carrément, ils vont écrire sur leurs sacs leur quartier, comme si le quartier était une appartenance, mais c’est quoi ça? On est à l’heure de l’Europe et vous nous parler même pas de ville mais de quartier!

Par contre, si vous demandez des origines, c’est comme vous peut-être mais ta nationalité, c’est français.

Moi j’étais frappée au début quand j’ai entendu ça. Vous êtes français, vous n’y pouvez rien! Et le pire c’est quand ils vont dans leurs pays d’origine. Ils se revendiquent comme français parce que de toute façon

Frustrated with mainstream France's imposed identity upon them as an immigrant, as an "other," these French youth born to immigrant parents may prefer to self-identify with the homeland of their parents, their banlieue neighborhood, or sometimes their ethnic origins. In this way, they simultaneously rebel against the republican model that supposedly considers all French as French but discriminates against certain in reality. They actively self-identify as the "others" that they are often forced to be.

Youth's exploration of their self-identification with the homeland is expressed in street fashion in the banlieue: youth may wear T-shirts with pictures of Africa, or expressions such as "*Algérie, mon bled*," "Algeria, my homeland." Youth may wear jewelry with Africa or Guadeloupe pendants, or bracelets in the colors of the flag of their parents' homeland. Clothing and accessory boutiques in the banlieue of St Denis sell these products. A French man of Senegalese origin, Diallo, built on and responded to this trend by manufacturing and selling T-shirts that say "I am a Haalpulaar" (Miin ko mi Haalpulaar) to youth in Paris (and in other countries.) Young women, expressing their bicultural identity, often wear small beaded African bracelets with their jeans and booties, skirts, dresses, or tunics, adding a hint of African culture to their otherwise stylish Parisian street wear.

là-bas l'image qu'on leur renvoi, on leur renvoi leur différence mais ici j'ai l'impression qu'eux aussi s'installent dans cette différence aussi. Peut-être c'est un mécanisme, mais j'ai l'impression qu'ils disent "puisque qu'on me considère un immigré comme je m'appelle Mohamad on me demande d'où je viens même que je suis née ici, je viens d'ici, ben alors d'accord c'est ça qu'ils veulent" alors eux aussi ils acceptent de rentrer dans ce modèle.

As Ami points out, youth feel frustrated when they go to their parents' country of origin, finding that they are not considered natives there, either. Cheik Omar Ba explained, too, that many French-born youth of Mauritanian origin have begun business projects or development projects in Mauritania and Senegal, but have felt frustrated by state corruption or state-sanctioned racism in Mauritania. He told me that,

“Some live their whole lives saying they will go “back” to *Afrique*. And yet when they go there, they come back, disappointed with the fact that people see them as French. And the government there blocks all their efforts to do development, to open businesses. They come back understanding why their parents criticized the government so, and why they had to leave.”

Furthermore, youth feel continually frustrated by the cultural sanctions of their parents' ethnocultural communities in France, as I explained in the chapter on socialization and gender. Youth feel stifled when their parents wish for them to marry someone acceptable within the norms of their ethnocultural community, when their parents impose gendered cultural norms and traditions on them, or when their parents tell them that they cannot speak their language acceptably.

The first generation's exploration of their ethnocultural heritage is thus ambiguous and complex. Within the larger context of racism in France, some youth express longing for and identification with their homeland, or “*bled*,” pointing to the homeland as a place where they would not experience the racism and “othering” of France. They may self-identify as “African” (Algerian, Tunisian, Mauritanian, Senegalese, etc) in defiance of the French Republican model. Yet in doing so, many youth self-identify with a Mauritanian or Haalpulaar identity that their parents'

community does not recognize: their parents criticize them for their failure to conform to the values and expectations of their homeland culture. In addition from discrimination from mainstream France, these youth grapple with the cultural norms imposed by the Haalpulaar community in France, the lingering inequalities of the Haalpulaar caste system, and their feelings of alienation when they visit that idealized homeland.

The first generation's ambiguity related to the culture of their parents and their transnational identities demonstrates the limitations of Glick Schillar's "third way" theory of transnational identity. Rather than liberating them from inequalities and frustrations they may find in mainstream French society, the Haalpulaar cultural community may also impose social constraints and frustrations upon them.

It would be an idealization to assume that the culture and identity of the "homeland" provides French youth of the Haalpulaar Diaspora complete respite from oppression and inequalities in France. Yet many demonstrate their interest in this possibility through fashion choices and through self-identification with their country or ethnicity of origin.¹⁶

Astelle told me a story about her workplace, an administrative office in a banlieue school, that illustrates the importance of cultural and ethnic origins to this generation of French people, as well as the stress the societal gaze may cause in relation to their origins.

"Today was our first day of school," she told me, "and we of the office staff sat in a circle, to get to know each other. And we each went around saying, '*Je m'appelle Astelle, je suis d'origine peule, de la Mauritanie; je suis Mohamad, je suis d'origine*

¹⁶ In an unpublished paper, I also discuss the first generation's use of rap to explore this relationship with their identity.

Kabylé, d'Algérie,” “I am Astelle, I am Peul in origin, from Mauritania; I am Mohamad, I am Kabyle in origin, from Algeria.’ And those who started out by just saying their name were asked, *Tu es quoi,*” “What are you?” One young man got angry and snapped, “*Je suis etre humain,*’ I am a human being! And wow, with this Naffisatou Diallo and Dominique Strauss Kahn scandal, everyone is teasing me for being Peul, like Diallo!”

Facebook, YouTube and other social media sites are also venues for the first generation’s exploration of their ethnocultural heritage. First generation youth have started Facebook pages that serve as an archive of “funny phrases or expressions that their Haalpulaar parents say in French.” Participants make posts ranging from single words, for example, “montor” instead of “montre” (watch) to French phrases with Pulaar words; for example, “Eh c'est qui qui a gnifé la lampe? Ca c'est du vrai pulaar français!” (Who “turned off” [using the Pulaar verb] the lamp? That is real French Pulaar!) that others respond to with likes and their own comments. First generation youth also join sites started by Pulaar language activists and Black Mauritanian political activists. They tag videos of comedians speaking in Pulaar and French, satirizing the challenges immigrants face in France. They also tag videos of their parents’ country of origin or photos of themselves visiting their country of origin. Many mentioned that they appreciate Facebook because it allows them to keep in touch with family members in Mauritania. Facebook thus serves as a venue to explore their first generation identity with first generation Haalpulaar in Europe and the US, and in France in particular, as observed among other first generation communities Online (see, for example, Kim 2011 and McKay 2011). They can learn about Haalpulaar culture, language, and the politics in their parents’ country of origin. In this way, they build an Online community that can

offer some belonging to these youth who feel excluded from both the country of their birthplace and the country of their parents' origin.

Islam, Le “Mouvement”: Neo-Dogmatic Identities

The first generation with whom I did interviews pointed to another identity choice for young French women and men of African origin: Islam. I pointed out, in the previous section of this chapter, the ways that being Muslim can be a resource for First generation youth and adults, helping them, as they say, navigate discrimination and the day-to-day challenges of life in France. At the same time, they point to another way of self-identifying as Muslim: in rebellion against mainstream French society. Genaba referred to this “movement” of Muslims negatively when I asked her if she struggled to practice her faith within secular French society.

“So your faith and religion helped you to ‘integrate’.” But I asked, “But, is it not difficult to be Muslim here?”

“You see extremists complaining on TV, but you see, I don’t wear a veil. We’re not in a Muslim country, we’re in France. Islam tells one to be tolerant. You’ll see girls who wear tight pants and a veil. That’s not modest, that’s something else. It’s a new *mouvement*, a [protest] movement. Our parents are Muslim, and they’ve lived here 30 years without problems! But these youth are suddenly saying that they want to wear veils in school, even though their mothers don’t wear veils.”

Here, she is referring to the protest movement, among French Muslims, to permit the veil in public schools and, more generally, to better integrate Islam into French public identity and life. French lawmakers who defend the anti-veiling law state that the law protects these girls from the oppression of their parents and from the supposed misogyny of Islam. Yet Genaba points out here that these girls are not “oppressed” by “misogynous” Islam, as assumed by most French left-wing lawmakers who refuse to allow the veil in public school; in many cases, and especially among the Djeolois community, the parents of these girls do not wish for them to wear the veil. They are most likely going *against* the wishes of their parents and their community when they choose to make Islam public; as she pointed out, her parents adapted to praying in the private sphere and not challenging French law publically 30 years ago.

She and others with whom I spoke call this identification “Islamicism,” or being “an extreme” Muslim.

Sociologists such as Tevanian (2009) write about young women who wear veils in French schools and argue that they are courageously contesting discriminatory French national laws that target Muslims and Islam. Yet, I argue that many of these articles do not explore the complexities of this issue hotly debated among the African Diaspora in France. My interviews with 1st generation French women of Haalpulaar origin revealed a different understanding of these young veiled women. Ami, Genaba, and others point out that these young women are *choosing* to veil themselves *against the wishes of their parents*. For this reason, they say that these girls are not bravely contesting discriminatory policies but rather practicing an “extreme” form of Islam that violates their parent’s guidance. They say that these girls choose to don the veil not for religious reasons but rather as a rebellion against their ethnocultural community and against mainstream France, a political and identity politics “movement.”

Ami pointed out to me that her parents never had problems being Muslim in France and practicing their religion in the private sphere, “unlike the youth of today! That’s why I think it’s politics, not religion. It’s indoctrination.

We are mixed! We are born in France and we are Muslim. Our parents are immigrants, but they practice tolerance. It’s their children that started to veil themselves, to ask if the lamb in the school cafeteria is Halal. My cousin used to wear mini-skirts and wigs. But one day, she put on a veil and a long skirt. She told me, ‘I want a job where I can cover myself.’ And I asked her, since when? She had the nerve to tell me not to buy

anyone Christmas presents. I told her, we are mixed. Christmas is part of French culture, and we are French, too.”

Women who support the right to veil themselves in the public sphere, in contrast, point out that the law forbidding veils in school is hypocritical. One woman told me,

“Why can girls wear mini skirts but not baggy, ample clothes? Sometimes I feel like the French don’t take our religions seriously. They are not a religious people. For example, we have the right to take 3 days off for our religious holidays. One day, one of my colleagues said to me when she heard that I was taking time off, ‘I believe in a *diesse*, a goddess. Can I have a day off, too?’ It hurts when someone makes light of your beliefs in this way.” She points out that it is difficult for young Muslims in France to self-identify as Muslim among those who are not religious.

What motivations are behind this identity choice? Do these girls veil themselves as a way to form a community of youth who share and are proud of their faith? Or do they, feeling rejected by mainstream society, search to defy the French Republican practices that will not embrace French youth of immigrant origin? Are they, as many scholars argue, attempting to build a new Republican French model by being Muslim, veiled, and French? Or are they, as many first generation women of this community argue, simultaneously rebelling against the wishes of their parents *and* their French schoolteachers? The complexities of the meanings of this self-identification are myriad, and lost in most media and scholarly explorations of these issues.

Banlieusard: Emerging Identities

When the media writes about the *banlieues*, they describe a place rife with gangs, drugs, crime, and unemployment. When sociologists write about the *banlieues*, they describe a place where immigrants and their children are cut off from public transportation and ghettoized in districts where schools have very few resources (See Keaton 2006, Tshimanga 2009). These depictions of the banlieue are not without their accuracy; after all, one must wait nearly an hour at certain times of the day for buses and trains to pass by the street corner; more children are indeed oriented toward technical degrees than university studies in *banlieue* schools; a *banlieue* address on one's CV makes it more difficult to find employment. (interview with Jamal Soh, July, 2011; and others).

Yet these dismal stories are not the only stories to be told of the banlieue. Many individuals with whom I spoke see the banlieue as a melting pot that is interesting, enriching, diverse, and family-focused. Indeed, I use the word melting pot because they themselves use this word, in English. They choose to use it as, to them, a positive description of cultural exchange and mixing (ignoring some of the issues of power implied in the term "melting pot" in the United States.) They take pride in living in the banlieue, and their self-identification with the multicultural banlieue reflects this pride.

It is also important to keep in mind, as well, that each banlieue is different from the other. Some are made up of desolate concrete high rises gathered around barren, grass fields, with a few basketball courts scattered throughout. Yet others feature new homes with lovely green trees and parks, rivers, and lakes. Still others bustle, with malls,

inexpensive yet exceedingly trendy clothing boutiques, McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants, Korean restaurants with white table cloths, kebab fast food stands, bakeries, Moroccan restaurants, with intricate gold or silver décor and a glass case brimming with a myriad of delicate honey and almond pastries on display. Schools are usually built within walking distance of the banlieue high rises, so parents can walk their children to school; small grocery stores are usually scattered within walking distance of apartments.

One Saturday afternoons in the summer in Noisy-le-Sec, I followed a group of immigrant women from apartment to apartment to greet people and exchange prayers, having reached the end of Ramadan. They wore rustling, heavy, rich-colored bubus and clicking heels, chatting in Pulaar, passing children playing soccer in the parking lots of high rise apartments, trendy young men of many ethnicities hanging out, high-fiving on benches and stoops. Elderly men walked to and from the mosque in flowing, black or white prayer robes and checkered prayer scarves. Young women, wearing clothing ranging from jeans and stilettos or trendy sneakers, their long hair extensions or intricate braids brushing their back, walked alone or in groups, sometimes with children in tow. Young women with full black long-sleeve and floor-length tunics with veils pushed baby carriages and chatted with friends, in French or in an African language. A few elderly French men and women walked, smiling, from their homes to the bakery or to visit friends. North African immigrant elderly men had pulled chairs and board games outside, to drink tea and spend time together. We rang into high rise apartment buildings, walked through dingy, smelly hallways, and entered richly decorated, shining apartments, with oriental rugs, a large TV, framed photos of women with their hair braided with

coins, candles, flowers, gleaming coffee tables and glass display cases with African tea sets or juice glasses. Incense bathed the nostrils inside these homes. Often a young woman sat somewhere in the apartment, studying, using the computer, or cooking; if the father of the household was not working, he would be sitting and watching TV, with a child or two playing around him.

While older or less educated immigrants may not have the linguistic capabilities, time, or desire to spend time with inhabitants of other ethnic groups, many immigrants, and especially youth who grew up or were born in France, have multi-ethnic social circles, reflecting this multicultural environment. Indeed, it would be rare to find a French-born child of immigrant parents or a child raised in France who did *not* have a multi-ethnic social circle.

Another time, I attended a wedding between a French man of Djeolois origin and a French woman of Algerian origin. Djeolois immigrant women wore bubus and scarves; young French women wore evening gowns, cocktail dresses, jeweled abayas, bubus and scarves, bubus and veils, or bubus and trendy hats. The mother of the bride and her cohort had made an Algerian dish for the meal; the Djeolois women had made a Mauritanian dish. The DJ alternated between West African and north African music; though the mothers danced hesitantly to both sets of songs, they obviously preferred the music of their countries of origins. Their children, however, were at ease with both types of music, and also danced to American rap and French Euro pop.

“The couple grew up together in Noisy-le-Sec,” attendees told me, “We are happy for them! They are both Muslim and they both love each other, and there will be no problems for them.”

Helenon (2006), writing on rap and identity in France, pointed out that among the multi-ethnic banlieue, “Arabs” descended from North Africa often consider themselves “black” or “*noir*.” This fact illustrates the multi-ethnic identity that arises from being part of one of the many minority cultures living in the banlieues of France. French-born residents of the banlieues often self-identify as “French of Mauritanian origin,” “French of Senegalese Origin,” “French of Algerian origin,” etc. This hyphenation of their French nationality is direct defiance of the Republican “raceless model” (Keaton 2006).

At the same time, many also self-identify with the neighborhood in which they live, emphasizing their multi-ethnic banlieue identity, born of time spent among the neighborhoods of ethnic minorities in France. They point to Islam as an element that unites them all; they also point to race (widely defined, with “*noir*” including those of North African descent) as uniting them all. Among the Djeolois Haalpulaar community, young French men often marry women outside their ethnocultural community, simultaneously self-identifying as French of Mauritanian origin and as part of the multi-ethnic banlieue community. One young French man of Djeolois origin told me that he considers himself “French of Senegalese origin” nearly as much as “French of Mauritanian origin.” He explained that he feels this way because many of his friends are Senegalese in origin, and the cultures of Mauritania and Senegal are similar. His self-identification as either Mauritanian or Senegalese in origin, despite the fact that his parents are both Mauritanian, reflects his multiethnic surroundings (Interview with Abdoulaye, July 2011).

Those in the banlieue thus take pride in their multicultural surroundings, despite the difficulties they face living there. Many say that even if they had the choice, they

would not live in downtown Paris and give up their “mixité,” their cultural mixing that takes place in the banlieue. Ami explained that it was good for her children to see the cultures of many places around her in the banlieue.

“People exaggerate the crime problems that they see on TV; they say they can’t raise their children here. But look at me! Banlieue public schooling got me my PhD!”

Another young woman of Djeolois origin told me, “Sure, I’d like to live in Paris-proper while I’m young, walk to the grocery store, live with my boyfriend. But when I grow up and have children, the banlieue are good for them. You can play, be around lots of children. It’s a family-centered atmosphere. And it is diverse.”

As one woman explained,

“Paris [proper] is the place for tourists, not our children. We are happy here...and those young men that they defame in the media? They are not dangerous. If they know you, they will protect you.”

A thirteen-year-old girl told me, “*Paris, c’est des bobo*. Paris [proper] is where the bourgeoisie live. But the banlieue are better. Here, everyone lives together.”

Sociological literature and media depictions focus on and denounce the problems of the banlieue: unemployment, lack of public transportation, poor schools. These problems do indeed exist. But at the same time, for many residents of the banlieue, their home is a diverse and rich melting pot, ideal for raising a family. Their identities are strongly tied to the banlieue. The First generation of the banlieue may self-identify as French of X origin, and may simultaneously self-identify with and point to the elements of their identities that unite many of the banlieue: religious, multicultural, and minoritized in France.

Many First generation Djeolois and immigrants pointed out to me that young men self-identify with the multicultural banlieue more than young women, because young women have been socialized to a greater degree within the Haalpulaar community. Young men of this community also communicate with their parents to a lesser degree, and often feel isolated in their own home. They use this fact to explain why young men of their community struggle with employment and scholarship to a greater degree than young women.

Yet it is important to remember that young men have the disadvantage of being men of a minority group in France, mistrusted by police and depicted as being part of gang activity in the media. The “third space” of transnational identity that serves First generation Djeolois women in enduring discrimination is not as effective for these young men who are so defamed in the French popular imagination. Furthermore, Haalpulaar identity is hardly available as a resource for these men because they have not been socialized to seek it out or been raised with access to it. These men’s “third space,” or transnational identification, is the multicultural banlieue identity, more so than Haalpulaar identity. Banlieue identity does not preclude Haalpulaar or Mauritanian identity; both men and women of the First Generation Djeolois reflect a degree of self-identification with the multicultural banlieue, as their social circles extend beyond their ethnocultural community. But first generation Djeolois men self-identify with the greater banlieue to a greater degree than first generation Djeolois women.

As Aameena explained to me, the positive element of the Haalpulaar community is that it can provide identity and pride for the First generation. The negative element is that it can be conservative and limiting. First generation youth of Haalpulaar origin, she

told me, want to be able to *choose* the degree to which they identify with their ethnocultural identity. Problems arise when Haalpulaar identities and values are forced upon them.

Haalpulaar identity can serve as a resource, a “third way” of self-identifying, for the First generation struggling to overcome discrimination in France. Among the Djeolois community, young women most often find their Haalpulaar identity to be a resource to them, helping them, as they say, successfully “integrate” or obtain good employment and scholarship, especially as they grow older. Yet if parents force Haalpulaar identity and values upon their children—for example, forbidding them to marry outside their ethnic group or social caste—these youth will no longer see their ethnocultural identity as a resource to them and will avoid self-identification with this identity. The third way becomes oppressive and the liberating qualities of the third way expressed by Glick Schillar and others are no longer an appropriate assessment of how these identities function.

The first generation explores self-identification with their parents’ country of origin in a variety of ways, ranging from participation in Association activities to starting Facebook pages and groups about Haalpulaar first generation experiences, to wearing clothing stating their allegiance to their country of origin. They may claim dual nationality, or even reject outright their French citizenship and nationality, in response to discrimination within French society. Yet claiming Haalpulaar or Mauritanian identity is not without ambiguities, challenges, and complexities for the first generation. Religion, for first generation Haalpulaar men and women, may also serve as a resource in overcoming discrimination. Yet related to the embrace of religious practices, there are

conflicts among the community. There are debates within these families about the degree in which the first generation should embrace Muslim practices, such as wearing the headscarf, that challenge national Republican values.

Self-identifying as Mauritanian or Haalpulaar does not preclude youth from identifying with the multiethnic banlieue in which they live. They take pride in this identity, despite the problems of unemployment, poor schooling, and poor transportation, proudly claiming allegiance to its melting-pot richness, and its family-centered focus.

Though the community blames young men themselves for the struggles they face in finding employment *and* fitting into their ethnocultural community, other factors influence the self-identification of these young men, beyond their own control. Gendered socialization failed to pass on cultural values and linguistic capabilities of Haalpulaar culture to them, and they do not seek out or identify with the Haalpulaar community or Haalpulaar values. Furthermore, the context of discrimination is different for women and men, and it is more difficult for men to succeed in obtaining employment. For this reason, Haalpulaar or Mauritanian identity may not seem as useful to First generation men as first generation women.

Genaba served me lunch before our formal interview: she had prepared Yassa (a Mauritanian /Senegalese lemon onion sauce served with chicken or fish), which she innovated upon by adding carrot pieces to the sauce. She told me she would like to open an elegant, up-scale African restaurant, because there are no such restaurants around her neighborhood. Her husband is a sous-chef at a restaurant on the Champs-Elysees, and she says he can make many French dishes, but he prefers that she or he make African food for her and her son: rice, or marrow, as they say in Pulaar.

After we finished discussing the interview questions I had prepared, Genaba's husband came in with her son, Abdoulaye, who was home from summer camp. Nearly four years old, he is talkative and observant. Genaba took out her wedding albums, upon my request, and he came to look over her shoulder.

She showed me pictures of her, smiling in a Grand Bubu in front of the small fishing boat that carried her across the river Senegal to Djeol, for the portion of her wedding in Mauritania. Then she showed me pictures of her wedding ceremony in France. She wore a beautiful, simple white wedding dress, with a pearl necklace and silver lipstick. Her husband wore a suit.

The next set of pictures showed the evening ceremony, the cosaan, or tradition, held with the Djeolois community in France. The room was decorated with gold and red fabrics, gold goblets on the tables. She wore a rich brown dress and yellow pointed shoes, as is the Haalpulaar tradition, and her hair was braided with gold earrings woven and coins. The older women of the Djeol “family” had decorated her hands and feet with intricate brown henna. Her friends and cousins wore matching bubus, and her mother and her friends posed for a picture, holding gourd spoons used for cooking in Mauritania.

“Our wedding ceremonies here are just Fridays and Saturdays, for dinner. There, in Mauritania, a wedding is 3 days long. We don’t have the time here like we do there, but we still get everyone together, just like they do there.”

Abdoulaye asked to watch his favorite cartoon on her I-phone, and she set it up for him to watch. He carefully held her phone and watched the show, as she and I looked at photos of the family members that attended her weddings in Mauritania and France. She told me that one of the customs Haalpulaar brides carry out in Mauritania is sitting in a room for three days before the wedding ceremony.

“The women feed you, they rub your back, and so many people come to greet you!” she told me. “It was hard to sit still that whole time, and I was so hot! But at the end of the three days, I came out glowing. And it was such a great way to meet everyone on the village.

We’re lucky,” she said. “We have both cultures, that of Mauritania and that of France.”

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Using ethnographic research with immigrants and first generation French who trace their heritage to Djeolois, Mauritania, I have shown that discrimination negatively affects the first generation in France. Yet, as my analysis in the preceding chapters suggests, ethnocultural identity can help the first generation, as they say, “integrate” into mainstream French society, finding prestigious jobs or obtaining prestigious degrees. They claim that a solid ethnocultural and linguistic foundation, as well as the strong support system of this community, gives them the resources and reserve they need to overcome discrimination in France.

I have also explored the limitations to the benefits of ethnocultural identification for these first generation Haalpulaar; namely, if there is not a certain degree of flexibility for the first generation to modify Haalpulaar values and traditions, the first generation will often feel stifled by and reject the Haalpulaar community. Because ethnocultural socialization within this community is gendered, and because men face more discrimination from mainstream French society than women, women claim more often than men that their Haalpulaar upbringing is useful to them.

The usefulness of the first generation’s ethnocultural identity in overcoming and resisting discrimination is an example of what Glick Schiller calls the “third way” of transnational identity (in Smith 2006). Through the third way of self-identification, the children of immigrants self-identify with their parents’ country of origin. This self-identification protects them from discrimination and inequalities in their host country. However, I demonstrated that there are limits to the usefulness of transnational identity

for these first generation women and men; their diverse range of identity choices indicates the limitations of this theory.

Robert Courtney Smith (2006) found, through his research with first generation Mexicans in New York City, that life stages have influence upon the degree to which the first generation will identify with their heritage. He found that younger first generation Mexicans feel ambivalent about their heritage, but begin to embrace their Mexican identity during adolescence. Within my research, I found that first generation Djéolois' explorations of transnational identity and ethnocultural heritage also change with their life stages. As women age, starting in their early 20s, they begin to appreciate and embrace their ethnocultural identification and heritage. This may occur for men as well, but to a lesser degree.

My findings provide solid counter evidence to the Right-wing French political viewpoint that claims that “cultural difference” prevents the First generation from “assimilating” or successfully obtaining prestigious employment in mainstream French society. Indeed, first generation French are most successful when, as they themselves say, can navigate “both worlds.” The first generation women of Djéol, social workers, and scholars from the Haalpulaar community agree that if immigrant parents have socialized first generation children with their own cultural values and language, exposing them to their heritage, their children will likely be more able to navigate mainstream French society. However, parents, must also give their children the space to modify these values as needed for the context of French society.

The first generation of Djéolois French women point to their success within the Haalpulaar ethnocultural community *and* in integrating into mainstream France as

evidence that first generation children will be better able to “integrate,” or succeed, if they have been exposed to and socialized within their parents’ value system. They argue that first generation children who feel estranged from the values of their parents will encounter challenges in navigating mainstream French society. This is because children who do not have a solid cultural foundation and identity will be resistant to the values of any cultural system; those with a solid cultural foundation will be better able to navigate diverse social contexts. French mainstream media often depicts immigrant parents as dangerous to their children, because their “cultural difference” may prevent their children from “integrating” (see Laponneyrie 2009). However, as I have demonstrated from this research, schools and state policies that discourage children from learning about their parents’ cultural values alienate children from their family and household. This alienation causes problems when these youth inevitably face discrimination from mainstream French society in the workplace, in school, or from the police. They realize that they will never be fully accepted as French, yet they do not self-identify with or understand the ethnic heritage and identity that they are forced to assume.

French media often defames immigrant women, criticizing their large families, publicizing the conflicts that arise between them and their daughters, and depicting them as oppressed by Islam (Rassiguier 2010; Keaton 2006). Yet my research with these highly successful First generation women of the Djeol Mauritanian community reveals the crucial role these non-literate, Pulaar-speaking immigrant mothers have played in preparing their daughters for success in the French workforce and classroom! These successful first generation women were raised by mothers who do not speak French in their home; they spent many of their weekends at formal or informal community events

among their ethnocultural community; they were raised as Muslims and self-identify as such. Yet their Pulaar-speaking abilities do not hinder their ability to speak flawless French. Their bicultural upbringing does not hinder, and rather enhances, their success in the professional workplace. It also enhances their abilities to balance childbearing and professional pursuits, aided by the social support of their ethnocultural community. Furthermore, this bicultural upbringing may also enable many of these women (and men) to pursue international careers in business, diplomacy, or tourism. Feminists and politicians in France often say that Islam oppresses women or promotes extremism (see Keaton 2006). Yet my research shows that Islam has not prevented these women from “integrating;” indeed, many argue that Islam gives them the patience to endure and overcome discrimination.

Interviewees have guided me in understanding the “headscarf affair” in a new light, enabling me to add their point of view to the scholarship on youth’s insistence on wearing the headscarf in French public schools. Interviewees explained that youth of Haalpulaar origin who insist on wearing the headscarf in schools are going against the wishes of their parents and their ethnocultural community. Their mothers and fathers do not wear headscarves or wish for them to wear headscarves. I argue that the youth’s desire to wear headscarves is thus a search for identity, stemming from discrimination they feel from French mainstream culture. Furthermore, due to frustrations between immigrants and the first generation, these youth also feel alienated from their parents’ cultural traditions and values. The headscarf and other forms of Islamic practice that are more dogmatic than those of their parents’ practices appeal to these youth, providing self-identification, community, and way of belonging. Many of the youth who wish to wear

headscarves in school are therefore not victims of “Islam,” as many mainstream French feminists *or* right wing political party members assume (see Tevanian, 2009.) Rather, I argue that this identity choice is a response, for some of these girls, to the alienation they feel from mainstream French society.

Similarly, Ami pointed out that she feels worried about the recent movement among first generation youth to reject their French nationalism and choose to self-identify with their parents’ cultures and countries of origin (Interview, Ami, August). My analysis of these youth in France suggests that some of these youth choose to embrace Islam identity politics or reject their own nationality in response to discrimination from mainstream society (keeping in mind that discrimination in France both limits their professional opportunities *and* makes young students feel ashamed of their African cultural heritage.)

Building on similar arguments by scholars such as Nagel (1994) and Timara (2002), I show that dogmatic Islamic positioning and strong identity politics are not *innate* to immigrant communities in France, as many right wing politicians or even left wing feminists assume. Dogmatic Islam, among young first generation women of Haalpulaar descent, is a social practice developed out of the frustrations they feel related to discrimination. First generation youth’s rejection of French nationality is not the reflex of an innate cultural identity, but rather a response to their experiences of discrimination and alienation.

This research reveals the salience of the role of cultural traditions and negotiations in immigrants’ and first generations’ lives. Culture can be an important role and resource for immigrants. Furthermore, the variations of self-identifications among these

communities, and the gendered places of identities in these individuals' lives, reveal that culture and identity are variable and situational. Individuals negotiate culture and identity to be appropriate for the situations and challenges they face in their lives. At the same time, culture also has a reflexive role for individuals and communities, which is tied to gender and generation.

In the context of France, where politicians point to the role of culture as preventing immigrants and the second generation from assimilating, culture still plays a similar role that it played in the colonization of Africa (See Leyponnerie 2009), where French culture is seen as universally beneficial and "other" cultures as detrimental. Yet these individuals reveal that culture can indeed be a resource in professional and social life, among the migrant community, the first generation community, and in mainstream France.

My research also reveals the strengths and limitations of the theories related third way of identity formation. While the third way can be instrumental in helping immigrants and the first generation overcome perceived discrimination by providing alternative identities and cultural practices to those proffered by the state, ethnocultural identification can also be stifling to these youth, making them feel as if they must accept cultural values that are not appropriate to their realities. Immigrants' and first generations' relationships to their ethnocultural communities and transnational identities are complex and situational.

My research revealed, as well, that these individuals' relationships with and development of transnational identities also, as similarly explored in Smith's research (2006), vary according to life stage and gender. Ethnocultural identification becomes

more viable and meaningful to young women as they marry and have children, or may become more undesirable to these women if they feel their parents are forcing marriage partners upon them.

The idea of the complexity of the “third way” can play an applied role in social services and educational programs for first generation youth in France. Politicians such as Sarkozy postulate that the solution to helping these youth is preventing these children from absorbing the cultural values of their parents (see Tshimanga 2009). Yet, based on this research, I argue that youth’s situations can be improved in two ways that are directly related to French state policies, not immigrant cultural practices. One way of improving youth’s situations can be in fighting institutionalized discriminatory practices that prevent youth, especially young men, from finding employment, as well as acknowledging the power of discrimination and perceived discrimination in day-to-day life. Another is reducing French mainstream stereotypes of Africans and immigrants that make youth of immigrant origin ashamed of their parents and alienate them from their parents’ cultural values and practices.

Haalpulaar social workers and scholars have observed the latter reality and are currently working within the French school system to increase first generation youth’s communication with their parents. Additionally, they are working to improve students’ understanding of the history of migration to Europe. Ibrahiima Abu Sal, a Haalpulaar historian who works for a state-sponsored NGO promoting integration and the cohesion of national identity called Unifomation/ Acsé, has designed a school program to address these needs. This program documents the history of migration to France from the perspective of migrants themselves and enables first generation children to learn about

their parents' cultural traditions. Through it, students conduct video interviews with their parents about their experiences of immigrating to France, their cultures of origin, and their perspectives on their home country and on France. Sal has also designed several public exhibits about the economic, social, and cultural contributions of African immigrants to France. Rather than restricting the cultural heritage, history, and language of immigrants to the "private" sphere, as espoused by French Republicanism, Sal argues that migration should be acknowledged as a fundamental pillar to France's national identity and history (interview with Ibrahiima Abu Sal, June 2011).

Cheik Omar Ba has developed a mediation program to facilitate communication between teachers and immigrant parents. This program works to overcome stereotypes that teachers have of immigrant parents and that immigrant parents have of teachers, enabling teachers to understand that immigrant parents have good intentions for their children, and vice versa. He teaches cross-cultural communication at several universities in Paris using lessons he has learned from this program.

Haby Sow, also a social worker, has founded a Haalpulaar cultural association for first generation women in one of the most infamous banlieues of Paris. Through this Association, first generation women work to help immigrants and their children communicate with each other, succeed in school, and valorize and carry out Haalpulaar cultural traditions in France.

Immigrants in France form hometown associations that carry out development projects in their hometowns in Africa. These associations also have a significant unintended role for families and ethnocultural communities in France. Their meetings and events often function as places of socialization for first generation children and

provide an environment in which they can engage with their cultures and traditions of origin. The Djeolois Associations are a powerful example of the important effects that association and community events can have upon first generation youth. First generation youth of Djeol often say that they feel “like family” even though they are not related to each other by blood (interview, July 2011). They have formed strong social bonds with each other, and these social bonds are especially useful to married women who are simultaneously navigating the professional workforce and raising children. First generation women have also begun another generation of remittances and development projects in their parents’ hometown of origin. Through remittances, both social and monetary, Djeol, Mauritania as the “homeland” and Haalpulaar identity have great significance for French first generation women of Djeolois origin. These women, in turn, are striving to maintain this community and identity for their own children, the second generation.

My work shows that the effects of the Djeol Association and community on first generation children are gendered; women maintain stronger ethnocultural community connections because of gendered socialization. Furthermore, it is not always immediately evident that the first generation will embrace their parents’ heritage and culture. If they feel that their parents’ norms and values are forced upon them—if they feel that their parents do not allow them the space they need to challenge gender roles and make important personal life choices—they may sever all ties with their ethnocultural community. They often begin to value their culture of origin when they encounter discrimination in France, or when they marry and begin to have children.

My Internet research, paired with ethnographic observation and interviews, suggests that the first generation of Haalpulaar in France actively explores their culture and heritage through social networking. They themselves generate these resources, via Facebook groups and pages for the first generation of Haalpulaar origin. They also explore the resources created by activists for the Pulaar language or Black Mauritanian political activists. These facts indicate that grassroots social media may thus be an important tool for the first generation's development of transnational identity. Interviews with the activists that generate this content have shown that this is most likely an unintended benefit of their political and linguistic activism.

Immigrants and first generation French alike celebrated France's recent presidential elections, in May of 2011, when Right-wing Sarkozy lost to Left-wing socialist François Hollande. On Facebook, immigrants and first generation French posted a cartoon of an African woman pounding Nicholas Sarkozy's head with a mortar and pestle. At first this cartoon seems rather silly: how could African women have any affect upon the politics of France? Yet, as I demonstrated with this research, Mauritanian women in France pass on culture to their children, through food, social events, language, and household chores and activities. These children, raised with bicultural values, may grow up and successfully enter into the professional workforce in France, while still valorizing the religious, cultural, and linguistic values of their mothers. These women are thus disproving the validity of the Right-wing discourse, espoused by Sarkozy and others of his political mindset, that blames the professional struggles of the first generation on their supposed "cultural difference." Perhaps France is entering an era of nationalism, much like that of François Mitterrand in the 1980s, where immigrants will no longer be

the scapegoats for national problems, and where new models of multiculturalism and feminism will be politically and socially explored and valorized.

I will conclude with an anecdote from a conversation I had with a young immigrant from Djeol at a University in Paris. I was surprised by a comment he made upon learning about my research interests: he called Noisy-le-Sec, a ghetto, because “its members spent too much time with others of the same ethnic group,” and said he never wanted to live in that neighborhood because it was so cut off from mainstream France.

I of course, respect his right to decide where he wishes to live and to decide to what degree he wishes to spend time with others of the Djeol Diaspora. However, I was shocked and dismayed to hear him call this neighborhood a “ghetto.” This derision for ethnocultural social networks and identification underscores the power of the French Right wing mentality, which automatically assumes that immigrants, or those descended from immigrants, who spend time with their ethnocultural community are “unable” to or refusing to integrate.

I knew, from my research, that the first generation women he criticized for living among others of Djeolois descent had obtained very successful employment. In addition to spending time with the Djeolois community, they frequent milieus outside of the Djeolois community every day of the workweek and for social events such meals. I had spent many hours with these women engaging in conversations that both embraced and criticized the culture of their parents; I knew that these women were not just “stuck” in this ethnocultural social scene. Rather, this community served them as a support network and a wealth of identity resources, for their complex and busy lives as professionals, mothers, homemakers, students, or wives.

I have shown in this thesis that these women navigate, as one commented, “*deux mondes*,” two worlds: the world of professional mainstream France and the world of their ethnocultural extended “family” of Djeolois immigrants and their descendants. I hope my work can thus serve to combat assumptions that immigrant and first generation people who spend time with their ethnocultural community are unable to integrate. Haalpulaar immigrant parents who speak only Pulaar can indeed raise first generation children who can professionally enter mainstream French society. People of the first generation who spend time with their ethnocultural community and who choose to send their children to Mauritania for summer vacation may, indeed, be “integrated” and successfully navigating mainstream French professional life. Rather than assuming that women who choose to wear African dresses to baptisms on the weekends are unable to integrate, it is my hope that this thesis can show that these women, as Geneva says, may choose wear pants to work during the week.

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