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# Intra-Group Boundary-Making in Online Discussions Between Newcomers and Descendants of North African Immigrants in France

by CLAIRE SCHIFF (Bordeaux University)

## Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of intra-group differences and relations among long standing post-colonial immigrant communities. Through an analysis of sub-ethnic categories used by North Africans in France for naming newcomers, this article contributes to the emerging literature on 'ethnoheterogenesis' and diversification within immigrant minority groups by adopting the framework of symbolic boundary-making and Norbert Elias's established-outsider configuration. Using material gathered from online discussion forums serving the Maghrebi community, the author analyses how stigmatization and counter-stigmatization processes between new arrivals (*les Blédards*) and native-born minorities (*les Beurs*) are influenced by the colonial heritage, changes in the profiles of migrants entering France and evolving transnational ties. The study reveals how intra-group boundary making processes are structured around moral discourses and debates about three different but closely articulated themes: cultural and personal (in)authenticity, social (il)legitimacy and individual merit and the instrumentalization of gender relations in the transnational marriage market.

**Keywords:** intergroup relations; transnational immigrant communities; North-African minority in France; symbolic boundary-making; established/outside configuration; ethnoheterogenesis; online ethnography, ethnic labelling, immigrant replenishment

## Introduction

Immigrant or ethnic 'replenishment' refers to the continuous flow over long periods of time of migrants from countries such as Mexico to the United States, Pakistan to England, or Algeria to France. This process questions assumptions about the homogeneity and collective identities of minority groups who are presently made up of a mix of new arrivals, long-term settled migrants, children of migrants, and later generations (Jimenez 2008). The internal diversification of immigrant minorities through replenishment can be seen as a particular form of 'super-diversity', one which calls for moving beyond traditional ethnic distinctions in order to grasp the more complex generational and social lines of differentiation within immigrant communities

today (Vertovec 2019). In addition to becoming more internally segmented, these groups have also become more externally connected. This is largely due to the widespread use of internet communication technologies, which have contributed to the consolidation of transnational communities, further complicating 'the construction, negotiation and reproduction of social identities' (Vertovec 2001:578).

This paper addresses the effects of immigrant replenishment, internal diversification and transnational ties on intra-group boundaries among North Africans of various immigrant generations living in France. The empirical basis for the study is an online ethnography of internet forum discussions that serve the Maghrebi

diaspora; the study focuses particularly on the issue of relations between the descendants of North African migrants, commonly referred to in France as *Beurs*, and their contemporaries who have recently migrated or are seeking to migrate, called *Blédards* by their second and third generation peers. These relations will be examined using the theoretical framework of symbolic boundary-making, developed by Michele Lamont (Lamont and Molnar 2002) and proposed by Andreas Wimmer as an approach to ethnicity in immigrant societies which does not take ethnic groups as self-evident but rather as products of particular institutional configurations, socio-economic inequalities or other non-ethnic determinants (Wimmer 2009). How is newcomer/old-timer status perceived when the distinction concerns co-ethnics, and what are the historical and present-day realities which contribute to making such a distinction significant? By exploring the significance of intra-ethnic labeling and categorizations of new arrivals and native-born minorities by ethnic group members themselves, we seek to contribute to the emerging literature on the concept of 'ethnoheterogenesis' and processes of diversification within immigrant minority groups (Tiesler 2018).

Intra-group distinctions, according to migrant generation or duration of residency, have tended to be overshadowed by racial and ethnic factors in the literature on assimilation and multiculturalism. Despite some unexpected findings about the importance of newcomer status as a factor of stigmatization by more established groups (Elias and Scotson 1994 ; Wimmer 2004) these distinctions have seldom been explored as such in the literature on transnational communities or on boundary-making in ethnically diverse contexts. Our study of online discourses of stigmatization and counter-stigmatization between Franco-Maghrebi youth (*Beurs*) and recent migrants from North Africa (*Blédards*) aims to contribute to the understudied reality of boundary-making processes within immigrant communities.

The case examined can be viewed as a particular form of the established-outsider configura-

tion made famous by Elias and Scotson's classical study of the working class community of Winston Parva in northern England. According to an advocate of the application of this framework to the study of new migrants, this theory "needs actualization and adaptation to the globalized realities, with often blurry community boundaries where people retain multiple identities in various situations and might be considered established in one situation and outsider in another" (Petintseva 2015). Indeed, while in relation to newcomers the native born descendants of migrants are 'established', re the majority group, or from the perspective of the 'homeland', they may be viewed as 'outsiders'. Taking these multiple frames of reference into consideration, we shall attempt to understand how the processes of mutual categorization between the two parties are affected by representations and social realities stemming from the sending society, on the one hand, and by the fact that they belong to a historically stigmatized group within French society on the other. Are the axes of differentiation between newcomers and the descendants of migrants constructed mainly in reference to the norms and hierarchies of the host society or are they also affected by a backlash (*choc en retour*)<sup>1</sup> of perspectives from the society of emigration?

### **Stigmatization Between Newcomers and Their Settled Co-Ethnics: A Universal and Context-Dependent Phenomenon**

The few studies which have examined the symbolic and social distance separating new arrivals from their more assimilated co-ethnics reveal the existence of derogatory stereotypes and ambivalent sentiments on the part of each party towards the other, which suggest that the phenomenon is both a universal feature of the process of immigrant incorporation and one which is influenced by the particular context within

<sup>1</sup> To paraphrase Abdelmalek Sayad's study of the ways in which the first generations of Algerian emigrants were perceived by those who remained in the homeland (Sayad 1999 (1984)). See chapter 5: "Le choc en retour sur la société d'origine".

which it takes place. The most developed body of work addressing how intra-group relations are configured in reference to migrant generation concerns the Mexican origin population living in the United States (Hurtado, Gurin and Peng 1994 ; Gutiérrez 1995; Ochoa 2000 ; Telles and Ortiz 2008 ; Jimenez 2008). These studies reveal that blocked opportunity, institutional racism and discrimination all have a role to play in defining the social identity of the various sub-categories of Chicanos, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans. Continued migration tends to perpetuate these racial and cultural enforces between majority and minority groups and enforce stigmatization, since whenever migration is a highly publicized and controversial issue even those belonging to the third generation may be viewed as 'aliens' by the majority group (Jimenez 2008). Yet it is also interesting to note that, within the multicultural framework of North American society, later generations of Mexican-Americans feel pressure from more recent arrivals to conform to expectations of cultural authenticity (Jimenez 2008). This makes for an uneasy contradiction of pulls for Mexican-Americans to, on the one hand, resist their negative identification by the majority group with the stigmatized group of 'illegal' Mexican migrants while, on the other hand, answering to social pressure for cultural and linguistic conformity to Mexican ethnicity coming from more recent arrivals. These contradictory pressures are felt all the more strongly in a context of increasing segregation and blocked upward mobility (Telles and Ortiz 2008).

In a study of the relationship between new Polish immigrants and Polish-Americans in Chicago, a group which has been characterized by renewed rather than continuous migration and which, contrary to Mexicans, is not racialized in the United-States, the author notes that: "While the immigrant tries to learn the culture of the host society, the ethnic works to maintain an attachment to the ancestral culture" (Erdmans 1995: 178). Relations between recent migrants and their native-born peers are here again marked by tensions between attraction and repulsion as

each face pressures in favor of assimilation and ethnic retention, yet these appear much less intense and contradictory than in the Mexican case.

In a study of the stereotypes that second-generation Asian-Americans develop regarding recent immigrants (called 'FOBs' or Fresh Off the Boat) and those who appear too assimilated ('Whitewashed'), the phenomenon of 'co-ethnic othering' is interpreted essentially as a result of internalized racism (Pyke and Dang 2003). This analysis focused mainly on the racialization of immigrant minorities in the host country ignores the manner in which broader transnational relations between immigrants and their home societies might also impact how new arrivals and later generations regard each other. The issue of the effects of transnational ties on perceptions of newly arrived migrants by their second and third generation peers is addressed in a study of the figure of the 'Freshie' or 'Fresh Off the Boat' migrant as it appears in internet comedy videos on newly arrived immigrants from the Indian sub-continent in England (Charsley and Bolognani 2016). Derogatory stereotypes of the 'Freshie' depicting new immigrants as sexually unappealing and physically repulsive are linked here to the prevalence of transnational marriages across migrant generations among Pakistanis.

Hence, it appears that while intra-group stigmatization between newcomers and more established minorities are common, the form and content of these negative representations are dependent upon the historical and structural determinants of the immigrant minority's position within the receiving society as well as on the nature of transnational ties within the community.

#### **Internal Differentiation and Transnational Ties Among North Africans in France**

France is one of the oldest countries of immigration in Europe and, although it has not experienced the sudden peaks in the influx of migrants and refugees which its neighbours such as Germany or Spain have witnessed over the last decades, steady migration has resulted in close

to a quarter of France's present population being constituted in equal parts of first generation migrants and of their children (Héran 2017). Approximately one third of the second generation is composed of the children of migrants from the North African countries of Algeria, Morocco, and to a lesser extent Tunisia (Insee 2017). The Maghrebi minority living in France is the product of almost a century of continuous migration, making it by far the largest and oldest population of Muslims living in Europe today. Since the mid-1990s the initial flow of labour migration, followed by permanent family migration, has been surpassed by new streams composed mainly of the spouses of the sons and daughters of earlier waves of migrants and of young people coming to pursue higher education in France. Marriage to a French citizen has become the primary motive for applying for permanent residency, especially among migrants coming from North Africa. Algerians and Moroccans are the two most represented nationalities among those entering France to pursue higher education. The cohorts of Maghrebians who have settled in France over the past twenty years have much higher levels of education than their predecessors (Ichou 2014). Yet these new immigrants face more severe regulations concerning access to long-term residency as well as higher risks of unemployment than earlier cohorts of migrants (Landaro 2013).

Over the past thirty years, the North African minority in France has thus been reconfigured profoundly by rapid acculturation of the second generation, substantial changes in the profiles of successive waves of newcomers, as well as by diverging processes of upward and downward socio-economic mobility. One can hardly speak therefore of a homogeneous and integrated community. The growing middle-class of qualified professionals has not prevented a significant proportion of second and third generation youth from experiencing unemployment and social exclusion. Yet despite these internal differences, North Africans in France share certain features of a common identity, such as religious affiliation to Islam, an attachment to the home coun-

try, shared memories of colonization, as well as a self-consciousness born of their collective experience as the most stigmatized of France's immigrant minorities. This uneasy combination of internal segmentation and collective self-consciousness in a group which is one of the major post-colonial minorities in Europe makes it an interesting case through which to examine manifestations of intra-group tensions in a context marked by continued migration and heightened anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment.

A substantial body of work has been written on Maghrebi migrants and their descendants in France, some of which has addressed issues of relations within the community between immigrant parents and their children, between men and women, or between migrants and those remaining in their home countries. Yet few studies have taken a serious interest in relations between the French-born and newcomers, except to acknowledge in passing the derogatory use of the term *Blédard* by minority youth to designate home country residents (Bidet 2017), or those who display characteristics of the immigrant (Mardon and Zeroulou 2015). In one study of the variety of labels and categories used by young people of Malian origin born in France as a way of signifying their place in the internal diversity of their 'community', intra-group categorizations and labeling are analyzed as boundary-making processes, but the figure of the newcomer is only one among the many discussed (Belkacem 2010).

### **Intra-Ethnic Labeling as Boundary-Making Process**

Labels used in everyday life as elements of discursive categorization are of particular importance for analyzing boundary-making processes since they often represent the first step in the consolidation of distinct groups and reveal spontaneous and judgment laden representations of self and other (Wimmer 2004). This is particularly the case in established-outsider configurations where terms stigmatizing the other group become particularly meaningful for understand-

ing what is at stake in the relation (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Before addressing the nature of the internal debate about relations between newcomers and French born Maghrebians, it is, therefore, necessary to briefly explain the origins and the significance of the lay terms *Beur* and *Blédard* which represent the starting point of our study.

The term *Beur* (and its feminine equivalent *Beurette*) is a truncated inversion of the word 'Arab', typical of the vernacular slang called *verlan* developed by lower class urban youth living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It was invented during the 1980s by members of the second generation, the sons and daughters of the first wave of mostly uneducated rural immigrants, as they were coming of age. Over the past twenty years, the term has become a common feature of ordinary discussions about North Africans living in France and is used readily both by majority and minority group members, albeit more recently in another inverted form *Rebeu*. The term was popularized by the short-lived social movement known as *la marche des Beurs*, which stood against racism and equal rights of immigrants. This movement was initiated during the early 1980s by children of the first wave of migrant workers from North Africa living in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods.

The *Beurs* are regarded as distinct from both their parents and from their peers of majority origin, to the extent that they are culturally integrated within French society, while often being socially and economically marginalized. Regardless of the variety of individual trajectories which actually exist among the second generation, the ambivalent social figure of the *Beur* (or *Rebeu*) is one with which many young people of Maghrebi origin living in France must contend at some point or other in their dealings with members of the dominant group; but also, in a more ambiguous manner, it applies to their dealings with members of their own community living in France or in their country of origin. Indeed, their contemporaries living in the countries of origin overwhelmingly view them as French. Home

country residents often use derogatory labels such as *zmagri* (an arabic variant of *immigré*) to designate acculturated migrants and their children stressing their questionable membership in the cultural and national community, and that are often felt to carry negative judgments about respectability and moral values.

The term *bled*, borrowed from Arabic during the colonial period, can be loosely translated as 'village of origin' and evokes a remote place where nothing ever happens. The addition of the suffix *ard* means 'he who comes from' or 'is of the type', thus conveying the idea that the person's entire nature and mentality is determined by the fact that he or she comes from 'over there' and not from 'here'. In contrast to the widely used term *Beur* the term *Blédard* is clearly an insider terminology. It is mainly French-born minority youth who use it in reference to individuals who have spent most of their lives in their country of origin, as well as in reference to those who still live there.

#### **Approaching the *Beur/Blédard* Dichotomy Through Online Discussion Forums**

Our previous research on the schooling of newly arrived migrant youth residing in low-income ethnically diverse urban areas led us to observe the complex and contradictory nature of relations between recent immigrants and settled ethnic minorities (Schiff 2015). We noticed during our fieldwork that the derogatory use of the term *Blédard* in reference to new arrivals was particularly widespread among urban youth of North African origin. The issue of intra-group tensions is, however, not easily broached in face-to-face interviews with young people who feel more comfortable speaking about racism and discrimination aimed at them from the majority group than about their own prejudices towards newcomers. For this reason we decided to carry out further research on this theme by examining media on the internet.

Our study is based on material gathered over several years (2005-2009) from a wide range of sites that specifically cater to the Maghrebi

community and whose users are predominantly young adults of both sexes. In order to access sites which are exclusively written by migrants, Scopsi notes that the identification of the linguistic markers of migration are very useful since in each community there exist specific terms by which migrants name the various sub-groups of the diaspora (Scopsi 2009:91). By means of a simple keyword Google search using the terms *Beur* and *Blédard*, we easily accessed close to thirty lengthy discussion threads whose topics concern the differences and relations between these two categories<sup>2</sup>. Although these terms and the themes associated with them come up in many discussions addressing other topics, we have chosen to focus on those which explicitly address the question of relations between later generations and newcomers or residents of the country of origin in their headings. These discussions gathered a number of participants ranging from a dozen to close to eighty individuals, and solicited responses ranging from a few dozen to several hundred. Below are excerpts from several different topics which initiated the exchanges:

There is like a complex which French people of algerian origin have developed re their cousins from the *bled*. They regard them as assholes, careerists, and *bougnouls*<sup>3</sup>, where as the latter, once in France, have much more success professionally. The *zmagra*<sup>4</sup> spend their vacations in Algeria, think their cousins want to steal from them, to take their money and their euros, while they are housed, fed and transported, without having to spend any money (...) <sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For details see the list of sites and discussion threads. Only those which are still accessible online have been included (nine out of a total of twenty-seven discussion threads from different sites).

<sup>3</sup> Racial slur referring to Arabs.

<sup>4</sup> This term and its many forms (*zmagria*, *zmigri*) is an Arabic version of the French term 'immigré', which home country residents use to designate those who live in France.

<sup>5</sup> The author has tried to be faithful to the original style in her translations of the posts, many of which present errors and approximations in grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalisation.

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A particular type of racism, a racism larger than all other racisms. A racism between muslims, between arabs, even between members of the same country. Yes, a racism that I have experienced which has hurt me, whose origins I don't understand. Yes it is the racism of the *Rebeu*<sup>6</sup> against the *Blédards* (...)

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I don't understand why guys from the *bled* take the liberty to criticize girls who were born in France. This doesn't stop them from trying to pick them up, telling them lies about wanting to marry them. I wonder if they want to marry for love or for the papers. Because of this, I can't trust them anymore, even my own cousins.

In order to carry out fruitful online ethnographic fieldwork, Kozinets recommends in his manual on *Netnography* that the research focus on community sites that are active, interactive, substantial in terms of the public they address, heterogeneous in terms of the profiles of participants, and data-rich (Kozinets 2010:89). This is the case of those we examined, at least during the period of our study.<sup>7</sup> Sites aimed at transnational immigrant communities offer a venue into a public/private space of which discussion forums represent the most private "places of debate and identity-centered introspection" (Scopsi 2009: 93) where participants can discuss issues which might be considered taboo in face-to-face interactions. In line with approaches that consider the texts posted on such forums as 'observable interactions' which are in many ways less mediated than those gathered through direct participant observation (Robinson and Shulz 2009: 691), the exchanges around the issue of *Beur/Bledard*

<sup>6</sup> *Rebeu* is yet another, more recent inversion of the term *Beur*, designating the latest generation of French born Maghrebians.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the sites have since been discontinued as online forum discussions are progressively being replaced by social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.

relations reveal concerns with in-group tensions which are not easily addressed in interactions with members of the majority group. Online, not only do participants feel that they are communicating with members of the same 'community' in an arena protected from judgements by the dominant majority, but the fact that they are expressing themselves anonymously makes it easier to be forthright about their feelings and opinions.

The online discussion forums undeniably constitute a stage that encourages a form of dramatization, an acting-out of latent social imaginaries and a venting of resentments, as well as the use of irony and provocation. Yet the content of discussions and the opinions expressed by participants are informed by real-life experiences and existing social processes. Because what is known about the participants is limited to what they choose to say in their posts and to a few basic items of information, such as their country and/or city of residence, their gender and age, we make no claims of interpreting the material by relating it to the individual's personal experience or to his or her social characteristics. The social figures of the *Beur* and the *Blédard* and what is said, or rather written, about them, in the form of recurring themes, stereotypical oppositions and moral judgements are the object of our analysis. Many participants deplore the existence of such demeaning stereotypes as that of the *Beur* and the *Blédard*, and criticize others for generalizing about these categories. Yet most identify with one or the other, often stating in essence that: "I am a *Beur* (or a *Blédard*) and proud of it. But I am not what you (the Other) think I am". The discussions clearly testify to the existence of intra-group divisions according to immigrant generation, while at the same time revealing the lack of consensus about the causes, the consequences and the nature of the distinctions between the two categories. As we shall see, the debate is by and large a moral one in that that it refers to issues such as fidelity to and betrayal of one's community, cultural authenticity, and the dignity or indignity of North African immigrants and minorities living in France.

### The Ties that Divide or Coming to Terms with the Intimate Other

The first impression one gets from reading the exchanges is that the *Beur/Blédard* issue is a sensitive and divisive one. Many of the discussions reveal a complex web of resentment, condescension, jealousy and suspicion between the two groups, at the same time as a sincere desire to understand why their relations are so difficult. Throughout the discussions we find some of the universal regularities of the established-outsider figuration in the ways the French-born express contempt for the *Blédards* often resorting to 'blame-fantasies' concerning their intentions of taking advantage of more established group members in order to make a place for themselves in France (Elias and Scotson 1994). However, what appears to be specific to our case are the close family ties which often unite members of each group called "enemy brothers" by one participant whose post asked participants to share their opinions about why their relations are so contentious. Following is one of the answers he received:

By definition a *zmagri* is often the son or daughter of a *blédard* so by insulting *blédard* they are insulting their own parents. A *blédard* will end up having *zmigri* children if we don't change things in our f.... *bled* which is so rotted by corruption and carelessness. We've come to differentiate between ourselves: there's a *blédard*, there's a *zmigri*, but do you think that those hypocritical french people worry about such distinctions? (...) It's true that *blédards* like me arrive in Europe with a certain number of financial and administrative constraints, anxieties and problems, but they have the advantage of the dual culture. The *zmigri* however, have worse problem I believe, because it touches on their identity. They don't know where they belong between the two worlds. Their skin isn't white, nor is it burnt by the sun, they celebrate Christmas and the Aid lakbir, they live in France but outside of the comfort of France. I don't want to go on because



it enervates me, those people are my cousins, my family, my friends...

Here we can identify three distinctive features of the *Beur(zmagri)/Blédard* configuration which may contribute to the complexity of their relations: first, the importance of family ties between members of each category; second, their shared minority status re the French majority; and, last but not least, the dual framework created by the transnational space of migration. The processes of positioning and counter-positioning between the two groups reveal that the balance of power between the French-born and newcomers are not always in favour of the more established; this is a situation which leads to symbolic factors and issues of status playing a significant part in boundary-making processes (Petintseva 2015).

Indeed, debates about the differences, the relations, the merits and the shortcomings of each group revolve around three major issues which resemble the ‘moral schemes’, as observed by Wimmer in his study of boundary-making processes aimed at newcomers in three Swiss immigrant neighbourhoods (Wimmer 2004). The first one relates to the cultural and religious authenticity, or lack thereof, of members of each category. This theme is part of a larger, more implicit debate about the evolution of the homeland societies and about the nature of the acculturation process experienced by the descendants of immigrants in France. The second issue pertains to social mobility, to the educational and professional qualifications of individuals and to their administrative status. It poses the question of the social legitimacy of members of each category in their country of origin and abroad and of their individual merits. The third theme, certainly the most controversial and most frequently discussed on the forums, relates to marriages and sexual relations as seen through the lens of “mixed” unions between *Beur(ette)s* and *Blédard(e)s*. This theme raises a host of issues about changing gender roles, about the tensions between sincere love, individual strategies and

the demands of religion and community. Here the trans-national marriage market appears as an arena fraught with illusions and misunderstandings.

### **The Paradox of Authenticity: From Collective De-Culturation to Individual Hypocrisy**

At first glance, the *Beurs/Blédards* debate seems to oppose in a rather classical manner the values of modernity and those of tradition. One’s first impression is that the *Beur*, and especially their female counterpart the *Beurette*, embody the negative aspects of the western way of life in the eyes of many new migrants and residents of the home countries. They are associated with unbridled consumerism, sexual promiscuity, the absence of moral principles, and a general attitude of disrespect. In other words, they are viewed as the victims as well as the perpetrators of a process of acculturation regarded first and foremost as a process of deculturation by those who have grown up in the home country. The *Blédard*, on the other hand, tends to be cast by the French-born as the narrow minded country bumpkin, who is intolerant of difference, and who is too macho if he is a man and too submissive if she is a woman. Many reproach the *Blédards* for their moralizing tendencies and their feelings of cultural superiority, yet suspect them of harbouring plans to take advantage of their French-born brethren. For example, one participant describes his discovery of the ‘*blédard* mentality’ through his cousin whom he made the ‘mistake’ of welcoming in his home and whom he describes as “vicious and mean spirited, paranoid, bad-mouthing anybody who wasn’t like him, suspicious of me given my friends and my acquaintances who don’t really fit the islamic-maghrebian frame of reference of the right kind of people” to conclude that: “In fact the problem is that the *blédards* are close-minded, full of prejudice and easy associations and that their laid back side is only hypocritical!!!”

Throughout the debates, the participants often try to ‘prove’ the superiority of the category to which they belong, either by adopting

a traditionalist stance that encourages respect for one's culture and origins, or by making a case for modern western lifestyle and the value of individual emancipation and tolerance. These simplistic oppositions are, however, misleading, since in fact both the figure of the *Beur* and that of the *Blédard* combine aspects of modernity and of tradition. It is precisely this uneasy combination that appears so problematic. Indeed, the worst failings of which participants accuse each other are actually not that of being too westernized or too traditional. It is rather of trying to be what one is not, in other words of being a hypocrite or a 'fake', or of deluding oneself about the value of their culture. In answer to a young French born woman's criticism of the *Blédards'* cultural 'backwardness' one migrant returns the affront by undermining French culture and education: "You received a french education. The result: narcissism, arrogance, egocentrism, chauvinism, self-importance." He then depicts a reality in which the descendants of migrants are revealed as 'losers' on multiple fronts: "Let it be known that french culture is losing out, that the french economy is losing out (you are eating the money of blacks and arabs. In other words the biggest benefits of the french companies is made abroad and it won't last because the people want more transparency) that french society is losing out (you have to hide your name in order to find work, it's crazy). You despise the *blédards*, you despise the continuity of your grand-parents' society."

Ultimately, the *Beur* or the *Beurette* appears as the one who has become 'too' French and who is therefore no longer a 'true' Algerian, Moroccan, etc. At the same time, he or she is occasionally blamed for trying to maintain the most backward aspects of his or her parents' culture (for example for speaking a local Arab dialect instead of standard Arabic). Similarly, the *Blédards* are also accused of being two-faced by the French-born who portray them at one and the same time as backward and close-minded and as individualistic and ambitious types who are ready to take advantage of their own cousins.

The moral scheme of authenticity is not simply articulated here in terms of cultural conformity to norms and values defined collectively by each society. Rather, authenticity is understood here as the measure of a person's ability to resist a form of 'duplicity' which Abdelmalek Sayad has shown in his writings on Algerian emigrants to be at the heart of the 'paradox of alterity' according to which they as well as their descendants are always viewed as somehow illegitimate by one or the other of the participants in the migration complex (the host society, home country residents, previous generations of migrants) (Sayad 2006).

### **Social Mobility and (Il)legitimacy in the Host Country: A Transnational Perspective**

The second major theme relates to the issue of social mobility and the legitimacy or illegitimacy of processes of self-advancement in French society. Exchanges revolve here around the general question of whom of the *Beur* or the *Blédard* is more successful in France, and subsequently which of the two has a more legitimate claim for remaining or being in France. All sorts of stereotypes and counter-stereotypes are invoked here such as that of the delinquent drug dealer from the 'ghetto' (*banlieue*), of the illegal immigrant who is a drain on the welfare system, or of the spoiled sons and daughters of the ruling elites from the Maghreb. Many newcomers blame second and third generation youth for wasting away the opportunities their birth in France should have provided for them. For instance, one participant writes about the French-born: "Its enough just to compare your shitty low income housing projects with the three story houses that a simple government employee can get in the *bled*. (...) The problem is really that you are jealous. At least we the *blédards* come to France and start from scratch and become something. You have everything and nothing at once." In response to these accusations the French-born portray new immigrants as arrogant and overly ambitious, intent only on taking advantage of the resources made available to them in France. "If a *blédard*

succeeds better socially in France, this is only thanks to his survival instinct, for them France is a jungle, they don't know anything so they have to call upon posturing and vice, two qualities which any true *blédard* masters perfectly. They are capable of eating their own family unscrupulously just to serve their own interests."

Many of the arguments advanced here appear strikingly similar to those which Sayad observed two generations ago in his analysis of the perception which home country residents held of emigrants as individuals who practice a form of 'social ruse' or 'cheating'. He stressed at the time that: "the (relative) social promotion made possible by emigration, or rather the illusion of such a promotion, annoys all the more because it is suspicious since it is carried out in another social, economic political, linguistic order, in short another cultural order, and with the means provided by this foreign order" (Sayad 1999:171).<sup>8</sup>

What is played out through these discussions about the social successes and failures of the two figures is informed both by the past and the present. The ambivalent sentiments which the children of immigrants have regarding their parents' inferior social status as immigrants are mingled with the resentment provoked by the realization that the newcomers' more instrumental and indifferent relationship to French society may actually be an advantage in order to succeed in the host country. The contradictory image of the *Blédard* as both the uncivilized poverty stricken cousin from the country and the arrogant upwardly mobile university student combines two distinct immigrant profiles into one ambiguous social figure. The first image relates to the period of economic growth during which most of the participants' parents or grand-parents arrived in France as manual labourers. The sec-

ond one refers to the present day migration of socially displaced university educated youth who fail to find work in their own country despite their rising levels of qualifications (Ichou 2014).

In their respective countries of birth, both groups encounter obstacles in their quest for economic self-sufficiency and upward social mobility. The desire for social advancement lead members of each group to project themselves onto the 'other' country. By means of temporary or permanent emigration for the *Blédard*, or during holidays spent in the homeland for the *Beur*, each aspires to a form of social metamorphosis which might turn them into the 'rich cousin'. In order to do this, however, they must distance themselves from the stigmatized images of the immigrant that threaten their own identity and fragile social status. For the second generation of North Africans it is the figure of the backward peasant and the exploited immigrant that they seek to keep at bay. Indeed most French born youth of North African origin dread the perspective of occupying positions similar to those their fathers held when they arrived in France. For the newcomers the counter social model is embodied by the potentially delinquent urban youth from which they seek to differentiate themselves.

The reciprocal put-downs and accusations between the two groups concerning the attitudes the other adopts in France are in many ways a reflection of the conflicts that take place in the country of origin when members of the second generation return for holidays (Bidet 2017). Local residents often regard French-born youth as disrespectful and accuse them of trying to pass for what they are not by exhibiting their wealth and making believe that they live the good life in France. Second and third generation youth, on the other hand, feel resentful of the fact that they are regarded as foreigners or immigrants (*zmagria*) when they 'return' to what they feel on a subjective level to be their 'true' country. Many feel a strong sense of illegitimacy in their country of origin where they are not regarded as 'natural' members of the society and are looked upon with a mixture of envy and distrust. When

<sup>8</sup> Author's translation from chapter 5 « Le choc en retour sur la société d'origine » originally published as an article in 1985. « *La promotion sociale (relative) que l'émigration assure (ou plus exactement dont elle donne l'illusion) agace d'autant plus qu'elle est foncièrement suspecte : elle est réalisée dans un ordre social, économique, politique, linguistique, bref culturel, avec les moyens que donne cet ordre allogène.* »

they, in turn, accuse new immigrants of being in France illegally and of taking advantage of the system, they are in effect simply getting back at them for the rejection they have experienced during holidays spent in the home country (Bidet 2017).

### Debating the Advantages and Pitfalls of the Transnational Marriage Market

For immigrants and their descendants, marriage is a key issue in the debate for or against assimilation, or cultural reproduction. Marriage is the institution symbolizing assimilation, ethnic continuity, disintegration or integration, depending on whether the point of view is that of the ethnic community or of the host society. Marriage is also a pathway to social mobility and a means for potential migrants to gain access to the resources of western society at a time when other forms of migration have become severely restricted. For these reasons the transnational marriage market is an arena in which many different types of resources, such as legal status, wealth, reputation and cultural capital, are bartered and exchanged. It is therefore not surprising that one of the most frequently and most heatedly debated topics is the issue of gender relations as seen through the perspective of transnational marriages between *Beur* (or *Beurette*) and *Blédard* (or *Blédard*). Many discussions aim to assess the advantages and disadvantages of such 'mixed' marriages, or to understand the motives of individuals who seek their future spouse on the other side of the Mediterranean.

The issue of access to legal status complicates relations between young men and women of North African origin as each suspects the other of judging them primarily in relation to this factor. This is particularly the case for migrant men who express bitterness about this issue. Relating his own unsuccessful relationship with a North African girl born in France, one participant recounts that: "After a while together and during a dispute, in anger she said or made me understand that I should be happy just because she agreed to go out with me because girls like her don't go

out with *blédards*. (...) a man with his pride can understand what it feels like when he loves with the heart and at a certain moment he is asked the damned question: it's to get your papers?" To which a compatriot on another forum might answer: "(...) don't get married to a girl from here, you will never be respected, you will never be appreciated for what you are worth, they are in a mindset of primary racism: I was born in France, you're a *blédard*, so I'm better than you." The masculinity of migrant men is clearly challenged in a situation in which they may be dependent on their wives for their administrative and sometimes also their financial security.

More generally, unions between immigrants and the French-born descendants of migrants raise the issue of male-female relations in a context in which the migration process has reconfigured traditional gender roles. The couple made up of a *Blédard* and a *Beurette* appears to be the most at odds with the traditional model. Indeed, the femininity of second-generation women is already undermined by the process of acculturation perceived as a source of potentially deviant sexual behaviour. In discussions online, second generation women voice their fears about being abandoned by their fellow co-ethnics for French women or for a girl from 'back home' since they conform neither to the ideal of the liberated western women nor to that of the proper Muslim wife.<sup>9</sup> One of them asks, for instance, of her fellow co-ethnics men: "why do you feel obligated to make your life either with a french girl or with a girl from the *bled*? What is left for us maghrebian girls from France who have a part of both? Maybe it is this part of both that scares you?" To which another young woman responds: "If the french girl divorces she doesn't care and the girls from the *bled* accepts things that we

<sup>9</sup> According to the survey *Trajectoires et Origines* the children of North African migrants are significantly more likely to marry either a migrant of the same origin as them or someone of the majority origin than they are of marrying a fellow co-ethnic of the second generation. North African youth also have higher rates of celibacy and marry at a later age than youth of other ethnic origins.

wouldn't. We therefore end up on the side of the undecided."

The match between second-generation men and migrant women, on the other hand, is seldom a subject of debate online. While this is perhaps due to the more limited number of migrant women who take part in these forums, the fact that this type of match does not undermine traditional gender roles makes it a much less controversial issue. In marked contrast to the *Beurette* (f) / *Blédard* (m) couple, the union between *Beurs* (m) and *Blédardes* (f) appears almost as a caricature of the parental model, since in this case it is the man who is responsible for bringing his wife to France. He is the westernized one and she is the traditional one, or assumed to be so. It is quite possible that in fact these kinds of marriages suffer from the same cultural incompatibilities and administrative hassles as the others, yet they appear to conform more readily to traditional norms.

Due in part to the social pressure which still exists, particularly for women, against marriage with a non-Muslim partner, second generation women appear to be losing out in the game of musical chairs which defines the transnational marriage market. The following exchange between a migrant man and a French-born North African woman testifies to the resentments such a situation provokes:

- A simple question: since you don't like *blédards* and since they are all rotten, and since you are way more civilized, then why do your girls continue to marry us? Is it because your guys are too busy burning the neighbours' cars, or simply because you don't have the choice (...) So go ahead and please yourself and insult us and make us out to be what you like. This is one of the only places where you can do this, you're life is miserable, the life of the *blédard* too you'll say, but at least some of us manage to make it thanks to you, thank you from all the *blédards* who were nothing and who are better than you are today thanks to you.

- I'm sure your fingers have gone beyond your thoughts! in your last paragraph you thank all the victims of your pre-conceived stupid plans, so you see I was right! And even if there are a few good examples here and there, you aren't part of them since you admit it yourself! Doesn't the evil eye prevent you from sleeping tight? I hope all those women and children will find the strength to forgive you! As for your analysis on the men from France I'll help you, since apparently you're short of arguments! To start with there are already more women than men in the 20/40 age group here, then out of 100 men you've got 15 who are hooked up with french women. Next you have 10 who are dead either from HIV in the 80's and 90's or from an overdose. Next you've got about 20 who are permanent residents in prison. Next you have those who are freaked-out, about 10/100, for whom women are too complicated and who want a cut and paste version of their mother and who therefore go and get one in the *bled* thinking wrongly that she will be more manageable. That leaves 45, do you follow? Out of these 45 we can suppose that 25 of them are between 30 and 40 years old. Do you think that they are going to be interested in women aged 30 to 35 who aren't married yet for various reasons (studies, family responsibilities, limited beauty, bad luck...) well no!!! They are going to make eyes at the 20/25 year olds!!! So if some of my sisters were asked in marriage by a guy from the *bled*, why not? If most of you had behaved correctly we wouldn't be having this conversation... and you know it!

In his "Theoretical Essay on Established and Outsider Relations" Norbert Elias highlights the potential for each group to become trapped in a double-bind when the outsider is somehow needed by the established and when the balance of power between the two groups is unstable (Elias and Scotson 1994: introduction). The previous exchange illustrates such a situation and helps to better understand why the moral

scheme here is largely articulated around accusations of instrumentalization, (in)decency and (in)sincerity in a configuration of inter-dependency which poses the question of who is using whom.

### Conclusion

The labels spontaneously produced by minorities to name sub-groups of their own community are useful means through which to apprehend collective dilemmas and social imaginaries which dominant group members often miss or misrepresent. These categories and the boundary-making processes they entail question ethnic solidarity, cultural homogeneity and shared identities, and are therefore the cause of internal disputes among those who make use of them. By using the tools offered by internet communication which make it possible to access a public/private space of deliberation we have explored these 'hidden' dimensions of intra-ethnic relations between the descendants of immigrants and their peers from the home country. We have shown that such relations are influenced by a variety of dynamics linked to the status of the ethnic group in the receiving society, to evolving migration patterns as well as to long standing transnational ties. While derogatory stereotypes of the newcomer are common among many settled minorities, especially when migration is an ongoing phenomenon, in the case of the North African immigrant minority living in France, intra-group relations appear particularly contentious and acrimonious. This is due to a combination of factors, such as the historical legacy of the colonial heritage, which explains both the entrenched stigmatization of North Africans in France and the highly ambivalent perceptions of emigrants by those remaining in the country of origin. More recent phenomenon are also at play, such as the substantial changes in the profiles of North African immigrants entering France over the past decades, and their limited access to legal status and permanent residency, which make them increasingly dependent upon their more settled co-ethnics.

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### List of sites and discussion threads<sup>10</sup>:

#### Pan-ethnic sites :

- « Pourquoi les gars du bled ont une mauvaise image des filles maghrébines en France, » June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2005, <http://www.orientement.com/p165-pourquoi-les-gars-du-bled-ont-une-mauvaise-image-des-filles-maghrébines-en-france.html>

#### Moroccan sites :

- « C’est quoi un blédard ?, » August 28th, 2008, <https://www.bladi.info/threads/bledard.162085/>
- « Un bledar vous parle, » May 30th, 2007, <https://www.bladi.info/threads/bledar-parle.102868/>
- « Un bledard, » September 28th, 2005, <https://www.bladi.info/threads/bledard.50320/>
- « Je préfère une marocaine », February 9th, 2009, <https://www.yabiladi.com/forum/prefere-marocaine-3-2361369.html>
- « Le blédard & la rebeu », August 12, 2007, <https://www.yabiladi.com/forum/bledard-and-la-rebeu-70-2007784.html>

#### Algerian sites :

- « Espece de blédard.. », August 28th, 2006, <http://www.algerie-dz.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-27980.html>
- « le syndrome du Blédard », April 27th, 2005, <http://www.algerie-dz.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-5351.html>

#### Tunisian sites :

- « Relation : Beurette, Bledar : est très Grave !!!!! », July 23rd, 2007, <https://forum.marhba.com/forum/discussions-generales/17581-relation-beurette-bledar-est-tr>

<sup>10</sup> Only those which are still available online are included here. Following are some examples of topics from other sites used:

- « *Mariage avec une femme du bled OUI ou NON et pourquoi ?* » ; « *Supériorité du rebeu par rapport au blédard* » ; « *Il était une fois... la beurette et le blédard !* » ; « *Je ne veux pas d’un blédard* » ; « *Le stéréotype blédard chez les jeunes d’origine arabe* » ; « *L’amour entre une beurette et un blédard* » ; « *Bledart vs. Beur* »...

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