THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SECOND GENERATION OF HAITIAN ORIGIN IN QUEBEC

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the issues surrounding second generation immigrants in the Quebec context and highlights some significant findings from the writer's work on the social experience and identity building of second generation youth of Haitian origin in Quebec over the last 15 years.

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Despite numerous studies on maintaining ethnicity across generations and the perpetuation of ethnic inequalities, there has been very little discussion of the second generation concept in Quebec and in Canada (Simard 1999, Potvin et al. 2007). Yet beginning in the early 20th century in the United States, researchers of the Chicago School took an interest in the characteristics and integration patterns of children of immigrants, who were mainly of European origin at that time. Presently, the second generation concept is widely used in U.S. research circles that focus on immigration studies to denote children born in the host society of immigrant parents (Gans 1992, Portes 1996, Waters 1996, Perlmann and Waldinger 1997, Zhou 1997, Portes and Rumbaut 2000).

Up to the 1990s, various writers in Europe, the United States and Canada described these young people, particularly those from "visible" minorities, from the standpoint of a "social pathology" and cultural conflict, as typifying the second generation. These young people seemed to form a "problem" class – alienated, anomic, and caught between two supposedly incompatible or antagonistic cultural systems (Malewska-Peyre et al. 1982, Yahyaoui 1989, Weinreich 1979). This crisis image has generally been associated with the youth of minorities most integrated into the majority culture and social relationships of the "host" society – young North Africans in France, Afro-Caribbeans in Britain and the U.S., and Haitians in Quebec – compared with minorities that remained "foreign" or lived in parallel institutions. In Quebec, the youth of the second generation of visible minorities, including young blacks, end up at the centre of public debate and alarmist talk about integration in the media, in ethnic and intellectual communities and in the halls of government. Like the North African youth in France, they – more than other citizens – are asked to embody the successes of the existing "integration model" and thus demonstrate the orderly operation, not merely of the political decisions made about them, but of social cohesion and the dominant order. Their "problems" may teach us more about the host societies themselves.

Quebec has seen no in-depth terminological or scientific debate about second generation youth. Until the 1990s, early studies of immigrant children tended to make no distinction between young immigrants and children born in Quebec to immigrant parents (Laperrière 1989 and 1991, Meintel 1993). But given the statistical reality of social inequalities persisting over time (high unemployment, problems at school, etc.), the second generation youth from visible minorities have become a focus of concern and major issue both for Quebec governments (which increased their involvement in integration during the 1990s) and for community leaders (most of whom are first generation). It was not until the mid-1990s that the first work specifically addressing the second generation came out (Potvin 1997, 1999 and 2000). And today, the second generation concept often seems to be reserved for children of post-1965 immigrants from non-European migratory waves identified by the authorities as belonging to visible minorities.

So why have the second generation youth of "new immigration" from the South suddenly raised so much interest and discussion? It is because they challenge the integration and equality model of the host society. According to Dubet (2007: 7), the "second generations" are discovered when the children seem less well treated than their elders or refuse to be treated as poorly. They experience a segmented assimilation (Zhou 1997), though some succeed academically and professionally and leave the ethnic neighbourhoods, thus eluding second generation status. Again, according to Dubet

(2007), the second generation theme emerges when the migratory process is interrupted, when the children and grandchildren of the first arrivals are no longer immigrants but also, even over time, have not become French or Quebeckers like the others.

In Quebec, public views on the integration of minorities are out of step with the actual processes at work in social relationships and the reality of racism (Potvin 2008). These descendants of immigrants are subjected to a socio-cultural integration process that, through mass consumption, school, the media and peer culture, makes them less and less culturally distinguishable from other young people. That reality does not rule out, but it does not necessarily imply, a parallel integration into an ethnic culture and social web. Second generation youth tend to negotiate their relationship with citizenship and ethnicity in ways that clash with the shrinking prism through which the majority views them. The ethnic markers used by these young people, partly in reaction to symbolic and physical exclusion, also generate alternate identities based on resistance, interbreeding, combined loyalties and alternating codes (Potvin et al. 2007).

The example of the second generation of Haitian origin in Quebec: Some observations

From the early 1990s to today, our research on second generation youth of Haitian origin in Quebec from both disadvantaged and well-to-do backgrounds (Potvin 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007a and 2007b) aimed at understanding how the sociological processes generating inequalities, discrimination and boundaries present in the day-to-day experience of these young people affected the building of their identity and, in a broader sense, their social experience. The intention was to reveal the plurality and variability of modes of participation and belonging, but also the strategies of resistance, opposition and negotiation used by second generation youth while replacing these processes in the social relationships of their society. We wanted to know how these young people stood out from the other young natives of the "majority" group and the first immigrant generation. Without getting caught in the traps of reductionism and essentialism, do the differences entitle us to speak of a particular second generation experience specific to distinct groups – racialized, ethnicized, disadvantaged, or all three? How then do we describe these young people without generalizing or truncating the reality? What processes affect how they negotiate identities and how they integrate socioeconomically?

The collective reflection process of the young people of Haitian origin covered by my research showed that culturally, they belong to Quebec society and do not see themselves as standing out from other young Quebeckers in terms of education, aspirations and immersion in a culture of mass consumption. Yet their social experience is built by and around racism and social determinisms arising from an immigration process that they did not initiate, blocking their egalitarian participation and emerging individuality. Racism is acutely felt because of – not in spite of – their strong sense of belonging to Quebec society. As noted by Reitz and Banerjee (2007) in their analysis of the Canadian *Ethnic Diversity Survey*, which corroborates the qualitative studies of the second generation, second generation youth from visible minorities feel more victimized by discrimination, because, as born Canadians, they expect recognition of their social equality and of their rights as citizens.

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So what makes second generation visible minority youth stand out most from other local youth is the racism they suffer, which tends to create or recreate physical and symbolic differences. Racism's role is not merely economic; it is central to the process of identity building, socialization and belonging. It would be fairer to speak of a differentialist neo-racism, exacerbated for this second generation, who are symbolically, culturally and physically both insiders and outsiders. These young people, who embody both the "other" (the foreigner) and the "same" (the native), are blurring the markers that the majority uses to distinguish the "us" from the "them." As Dubet reminds us (2007: 7):

> [*Translation*]
> From the standpoint of the parental culture, they are rootless; from the standpoint of the host country's culture, they are still immigrants. Moreover, the racism they face changes frequently. Whereas anti-immigrant racism was content to highlight the parents' cultural differences and cultural "archaism," anti-second generation racism highlights their cultural proximity: they are like "us," too much like "us," too modern, too ambitious, too into consumption, too visible in the city, institutions and the media.

Racializing and ethnicizing exclusion jeopardizes any chance these young people have of modernizing their

society's existing citizen integration model. So, for the young people of Haitian origin we met in the field, there is no "away" (where they are often sent) because, in fact, in their minds, they are not immigrants. They also find no refuge in Montréal's Haitian community, which they see as a minority space created by and for the first generation, mainly offering services to newcomers and serving as a political springboard for an elite as opposed to providing integration tools for these young second generation Quebeckers. Thus, these young people struggle, to varying degrees of success, to find a place among drastically different realities in order to find positive resources that lend meaning to their racism-fragmented experience. They move mainly among three identities that signify belonging and participation leading to normative, strategic or ethical acts by the young people: Quebec society (the Quebec identity), which integrates them culturally and, at the same time, rejects them socially; the Haitian minority community (the Haitian identity) inherited from the first generation of Haitians in Quebec, which provides little in the way of tangible support for their experience; and the black community (the black identity), which is symbolic, diasporic and transcendent, providing support for a universalized historical meta-story lending meaning to their experience of racism in Quebec.

Each of these identities has a dark and a bright side. Each identity is shot through with a tension that affects young people's ambivalent ideas about their feelings of belonging and the participatory patterns that those feelings allow. Accordingly, there is also tension between the identities, since they do not all have the same functions and are not active in all situations or in all individuals. This shaky balance gives young people the feeling of going through their own special experience, which is also a process of resistance and identity – the experience of second generation black Haitian youth. The specific nature of this shared experience stems from the tension between their strong cultural integration and their problematic social and political participation in Quebec.

The Haitian community is seen as an emotional space with its history rooted in parentage, the extension of family life, and a certain institutional completeness in Quebec, but also in the parents' painful immigrant experience, negative media images, and separated families. Yet, to the second generation, this community looks disorganized, bereft of resources, unattractive and unable to meet the needs that they see as being specific to their generation. They know neither its structures nor its history, and they do not anticipate continuing the work of their ancestors. Attachment to the parents' country of origin is vestigial and symbolic, and many of them have never been there. They struggle to identify with a minority group that is marginalized and a target of prejudice by the dominant group. This community's minority status and weak associative structures, networks, and political and economic heft all seem to be factors that distance it from the community. They condemn the attitude of the affluent classes of the first wave of immigration in the 1960s that have done nothing in terms of community development. While they want out of the community, they expect it to do something to give them resources that they cannot find elsewhere. But they say that it is not meeting their expectations.

Culturally, [these youth] belong to Quebec society and do not see themselves as standing out from other young Quebeckers in terms of education, aspirations and immersion in a culture of mass consumption. Yet their social experience is built by and around racism and social determinisms.

Their Quebec identity is equally fragmented and opposed to the other two – an identity of cultural references through school, television, work, neighbourhood, friends, and music – but second generation Haitian immigrants' feeling of rejection based on assumed differences is also exacerbated by media images, job discrimination, different and ostensibly unfair treatment by police, painful school and neighbourhood experiences, the gradual erosion of their friendships with Francophone Quebeckers, their perception of a marginalizing nationalism and their problem with building common causes and asserting their citizenship. Perceived as Haitians, they see their mobility impeded and remain at the bottom of society even though they are not immigrants. Despite access to education and training, these young people fail to overcome the social handicaps associated with the underclass and underprivileged and are often unjustly ascribed to "Third World immigrants." Also, despite a Canadian immigration policy that screens immigrants for qualifications and education, the unequal relations between North and South continue to fuel a certain collective feeling of inferiority that affects even the best-educated of these children of immigrants. They see the labour market as running on prejudice, downplaying their differences (which they see as assets), and exploiting and excluding them because they belong to a minority group that lacks the weight of numbers to become a real force or build a parallel market. The fact that some of them "get out" only serves to exacerbates the frustration and sense of exclusion of others. These young people are thus isolated on a road to integration strewn with obstacles and lack the individual power to make their way in. For them, young second generation blacks have the same problems but fail

to position themselves as dominant players. They say that they are powerless to associate, build networks, collectively claim recognition for their rights (and for their problems) and offset discriminatory situations.

These young Quebeckers find it hard to express themselves politically since their problems would be misconstrued by the dominant thinking and not reflect the traditional split between sovereignists and federalists. For them, Quebec's "national question" is a luxury in an affluent society, while they are rapidly losing their language and history. Quebec is where they live and is the source of their cultural landmarks, but the Quebec identity is not a positive option for them.

Yet they do subscribe, at a critical distance, to elements of Quebec's societal and civic culture, which shows that they objectively belong to this society – the French language, the system of rights and values associated with citizenship (freedom, equality, independence), the democratic institutions and mobility strategies, combined with a desire to make their historical and social contribution to the shared heritage. Quebec society provides them with major educational, cultural and social resources, and their determination to be part of its history, beyond a demoralizing categorization, blends with the sharing of civic values with the rest of Quebeckers.

Their Quebec identity is ambivalent because of their differentiation and sense of inferiority as members of a minority. These young people are aware of the social roles that they have internalized, but at the same time they refuse to take a strictly normative approach. Similarly, they defend their interests in the educational and labour markets but remain critical of a purely instrumental commercial logic, which they perceive as a neoliberal trap of individual accountability for "failure," though they are also looking for solidarity to fight the exclusion they feel victimizes them. The tension between these forces reveals a subjective space that enables them to keep their distance and look critically at roles and strategies based on an ethical vision of their own lives. This logic of subjectivation is fuelled by the experience of racism: feeling different and inferior, these young people experience a stronger tension between social standards (for example, equality, merit, competence and social utility, as part of a kind of social hypocrisy) and their strategies for defending their interests, setting their various identities against one another.

Where these two identities come together, we find the black identity that provides no physical or practical resources but that plays a symbolic role as a middleman between their Quebec and Haitian identities. The black identity provides a cultural response to social integration problems and politicizes the identity that distinguishes second generation Haitian immigrants from those of the first generation and from other young Quebeckers. For these young people, the syncretic black identity is much more expressive of their sense of sharing a common experience and destiny and helps them express identity, opposition and historicity. The black identity affords continuity, meaning and a historical foothold in North America that is more inclusive, more part of their experience and more modern than their bits and pieces of Haitian history. It fosters symbolic solidarity with different cultures, histories, heroes, schools of thought, and fighting methods and movements. It provides images of success and resistance, a historical foundation, fragments of memory, and the sense of a shared experience and faith (Islam, for some young converts). Its symbolic dimension makes the black identity their own, suited to their modern urban lives and affording them creative and critical abilities, especially through music. It supports liberating and collective action that builds belonging rather than subjection to belonging. This transclassist and transnational black community unifies the experiences of blacks around the world and garners media coverage for black identities. It enables people to counter domination by rediscovering their roots, defining themselves, freeing their minds of the chains imposed by their relationship with whites, and so on. Racism becomes a cognitive category that rebuilds identity around the black diaspora and a globalized memory of black movements and culture, enabling these young people to make the analogy between their situation and that of black people around the world. Leaders in American struggles like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, with their post-modern plasticity, make it possible to reconcile the individuation process with membership in a collective entity. Their cultural resources give the young people a feeling of belonging to this emotional community with non-national historical referents. Yet the black identity is not unambiguous: skin colour limits their freedom, and this blackness affords no practical resources for social integration that can meet their daily needs.

These young people believe that their experience is specific to the second generation, based on a number of different identities that they must reconcile to find a place in their society. By opposing exclusion, they acquire cultural resources to build their own identity, one that belongs neither to their immigrant parents nor to other young Quebeckers.

Ultimately, this second generation's identity is an uneasy mix of all three identities. It grows out of a relationship of domination, sometimes drifting towards an obsession with authenticity, an essentialization of colour and a rejection of whiteness for individual and

collective acceptance. But it also addresses black youth integration into a society that deprives them of a social function to match the expectations it raises. These various approaches to self-definition stem from the various heritages that make them up and from a range of participatory approaches. Depending on the social relationships and the individual involved, youth identity or "us" assumes different meanings to oppose, assert, differentiate or understand itself, or simply to exist. With the first generation, the second stresses its "Quebecness," individuality, blackness or African roots. With police, they are dominated, young, black and immigrants. With antiracist institutions or activists, they argue their "Haitianness" or blackness. These ways of belonging also stem from different types of racism – ideological racism (skinheads, the far right), systemic or institutional racism (police, school authorities and politicians), historical racism (focus on the white culture) and marketplace racism (jobs and schools).

These young people believe that their experience is specific to the second generation, based on a number of different identities that they must reconcile to find a place in their society. By opposing exclusion, they acquire cultural resources to build their own identity, one that belongs neither to their immigrant parents nor to other young Quebeckers. The experience of racism is a source of identity and explanation of their experience that breaks down and then rebuilds identity. This experience assumes a critical distance from Quebec's Haitian community and the dominant order, as well as membership in the diaspora and blackness (Césaire's "negritude") from which they derive cultural resources. But this specific second generation experience mainly reveals problems in Quebec society with its ongoing debates and social relationships that give it meaning.

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