



Racism In French Rap Songs (Booba and Black M)

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Abstract

This study aims to identify racism in the songs *Je Suis Chez Moi* by Black M, *Ma Couleu* by Booba, and *Pitbull* by Booba. This study uses the subaltern theory by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The data in this study consist of words, phrases, or sentences in songs that contain racist elements. Data collection techniques included listening and note-taking. The results of the study on these three songs indicate that racism against immigrants is still widespread. Immigrants remain subaltern in society, and discrimination continues to occur. Racism in these songs is divided into two: skin color racism and structural racism. Black skin seems to be the absolute reason why this racism occurs. However, other forms of racism refer to the difficulty of accessing employment and social injustice. These three songs show how the subaltern is depicted through immigrants and descendants of immigrants in their lives in the banlieue and the racism they have to face every day. The use of special lexicon and language variation is one of the studies in the field of sociolinguistics. Hence, this study aims to analyse the use of Islamic vocabulary by the Malinke people in the novel *Allah Is Not Obligated* illustrates the connection between language and the character of this community, while also describing their situation and environment. Lexical data was collected using listening and note-taking. Analysis of language use and recording of lexical forms present in the novel's narrative and dialogues yielded 30 Islamic lexical items, derived from variations of French and Malinke. Analysis of the results revealed a binary opposition in vocabulary use, between positive (religious) and negative (offensive) contexts. It was also observed that the chaotic context of the country influenced language use. In addition to uncovering the socio-cultural conditions of the Malinke people, this study also aims to present a thematic vocabulary in French related to Islam, for example the word *kesyahidan* in Indonesian translated as *martyr* in French.

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INTRODUCTION

Rap music originated in the urban environments of New York City, particularly in the Bronx and Harlem. In the late 1970s, DJs began using turntables and scratching techniques to create a revolutionary new sound. In the early 1980s, rap began to develop further with the emergence of various groups and solo artists exploring their own lyrics and styles (Krim, 2000). Rap lyrics became a vehicle for expressing social and political messages as well as personal experiences.

Rap music entered France around 1982-1984. This musical culture initially took root in the densely populated banlieues (suburbs), serving as an outlet for immigrant and working-class youth (Prévos, 2002). Rap later evolved into a means of expressing social criticism, chronicling life in immigrant communities, and demanding equality. Furthermore, French rap is highly dynamic, drawing on the various cultures that have intertwined in the country. Therefore, it can be said that rap is closely linked to immigrant life in France.

Among French rappers, Booba and Black M are notable as descendants of immigrants from former French colonies. Both artists address the challenges faced by immigrants in France, particularly the difficulties of life in the banlieues and experiences of racism, as reflected in their lyrics. Elie Yaffa, known professionally as Booba, is a French rapper of Senegalese descent (Odrobina, 2022). Racism constitutes a central theme in several of his works, including *Couleur Ébène*, *Pitbull*, and *Ma Couleur*. In addition to Booba, Alpha Diallo, who performs under the stage name Black M (Black Mesrimes), is another French rapper whose songs frequently address issues of racism. Black M is also recognized as a songwriter and a member of the French group Sexion d'Assaut.

Both rappers are not only Black but also descend from immigrants from Senegal and Guinea. Going back further, Senegal and Guinea are two West African countries that were formerly French colonies. Senegal was part of the French colony in West Africa. Senegal gained independence on April 4, 1960, as part of the Mali Federation, which later dissolved before becoming a separate independent nation. The colonial influence and legacy left by France in Senegal are still evident in various aspects of the country's culture, politics, and economy. France colonized Guinea from the mid-19th century until independence in 1958. Following a referendum in 1958, Guinea voted to leave the French community and declared its independence on October 2, 1958. Since then, Guinea has faced various political and economic challenges, including a period of authoritarian rule in the early years of its independence under Ahmed Sékou Touré. Both countries have rich, unique cultural heritages that reflect a mix of local traditions and French colonial influences.

Racism is a topic close to rappers because it is a constant subject in their lives as immigrants. Immigrants in France, particularly those from African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries, frequently encounter significant racial discrimination. These individuals are often subject to negative stereotypes, such as being labeled "job-takers" or perceived as threats to French culture and identity. Immigrants from former French colonies, including Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, are especially vulnerable to prejudice based on race and religion, with a particular emphasis on their Muslim identity. Racial discrimination, especially against people of color and those of African and Arab descent, has persisted in French society for decades, despite the nation's promotion of equality and humanist values. Marginalization of these groups is evident in restricted access to employment, education, and public services. Although France has enacted laws prohibiting racial discrimination, systemic discriminatory practices continue to affect many aspects of daily life.

Songs addressing the experiences of immigrants include Booba's *Ma Couleur* which recounts the discrimination faced by this population. The lyrics emphasize the pervasive discrimination faced by young people of color in France, both publicly and privately. These individuals often experience injustice and are frequently perceived as troublemakers within their communities. Booba's *Pitbull* further illustrates the realities of life in the French suburbs, where many immigrants and their descendants reside. Economic hardship, limited access to quality education, and persistent social discrimination are prevalent in these areas. In the song *Je Suis Chez Moi*, Black M describes the experience of immigrants facing discrimination because of their skin color. The lyrics convey how individuals are perceived with disdain by those around them and how societal prejudices and stereotypes affect Black communities.

Numerous studies have examined racism. The first, conducted by Soviawan (2018), is titled *Penggambaran Anti Rasisme dan Islamofobia dalam Video Klip Lagu Green Day Trouble Times*. Soviawan investigated the meanings of anti-racism and Islamophobia expressed in the video clip as forms of social criticism. The study employed an interpretive qualitative research method, involving in-depth observation of the characters in the video. The video clip serves as an exhibition of anti-racism and Islamophobia, illustrating how Black men experience discrimination against their rights. Additionally, it portrays a hijab-wearing Muslim woman with a bruised face reaching for the microphone, symbolizing her protest against the discrimination she faces (Soviawan, n.d.).

The second study, by Ridwan (2019), is titled *Rasisme dalam Novel Bumi Manusia Karya Pramoedya Ananta Toer: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra*. This research examines how novels, as reflections of social conditions, serve as media for writers to convey their perspectives on contemporary society. Ridwan's study investigates the extent of racism perpetrated by Dutch colonialists against Indonesians. The findings indicate that racism by Dutch colonial rulers extended beyond discrimination based on skin color, encompassing restrictions on the rights of the local population imposed by the colonial government (Ridwan, 2019).

The third study is titled "Racism and Discrimination Against Chinese Americans in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*." This research analyzes the depiction of racism and discrimination in Celeste Ng's novel, which differs from other works by focusing on Chinese Americans who marry within their community and subsequently experience racism. The study employs the sociology of literature approach, utilizing Swingewood's theory to analyze data on racism and discrimination. Findings reveal that interpersonal racism and discrimination occur in the characters' daily interactions with white individuals at school, in public spaces, and in the workplace (Mao, 2025). The fourth study, by Tenripada (2023), is titled "Racism in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*." This research explores the relationship between the novel's narrative and the social conditions in America during the early 1930s. Using descriptive qualitative methods and sociological literary theory, the study concludes that the novel reflects Ralph Ellison's personal perspective. Ellison's experiences inform characters and events in the novel of discrimination, the struggle for equality, and the negative effects of white oppression on African Americans in the South (Lestari, 2009).

The subsequent study, by Rayhan Said (2024), is titled *Representasi Rasisme dalam Serial Kartun Family Guy (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes)*. This research analyzes the representation of racism in *Family Guy* using a descriptive qualitative approach and Roland Barthes's semiotic framework. The study seeks to identify and explain how racism is depicted in the series through denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. The findings indicate that denotative meanings are conveyed through racist actions such as insults, interpersonal racism, stereotypes, and institutional racism. Connotative meanings are reflected in language, gestures, and expressions of physical contact between perpetrators and victims. Mythical meanings are present in the normalization of racist actions within the narrative (Said, 2024).

Racism also occurs in France, a country renowned for its motto of "Liberte, egalite, fraternite" (Freedom, Equality, and Fraternity). This is evidenced by a 1998 survey conducted by the French government on attitudes toward other races, which showed that 38% of the population admitted to being racist. This result surprised the government, as it was twice the figure found in Germany and the UK. In France, racial discrimination has become a phenomenon, and this phenomenon has become a central social issue. France is distinctive for its diversity, with people of various ethnicities and races living in this hexagonal country. These differences fuel racism against minority groups, for example, social discrimination that often occurs in public places. Racism can also be defined as an idea or ideology that categorises people based on race, religion, or group. This action creates something, and as a result, individuals and groups are marginalised and no longer recognised as human beings.

Racism is widely regarded as a serious social problem in French society. The prevalence of racism was highlighted by a 1998 French government survey, which found that 38% of respondents admitted to being racist. Several factors contribute to the persistence of racism in France, including tensions between French secular values and religious practices, particularly those associated with Islam, the country's second-largest religion. Additionally, the social divide between immigrants and the native French population exacerbates perceptions of racial hierarchy. Many immigrants are employed in lower-wage occupations, which can reinforce stereotypes of inferiority. Racism is also reflected in popular culture, including television, the press, and music, where discriminatory themes are sometimes present in lyrics originating from France and other countries. Discrimination against immigrants continues to be a prominent issue in France. Divergent cultural, historical, religious, and racial backgrounds between immigrants and native French citizens contribute to a range of social challenges, collectively referred to as immigration issues. These challenges often result in discrimination, racism, and social segregation.

The causes of racism are often linked to the societal construction of race. Racism may emerge when physical differences are emphasized within a society that assigns significance to such traits. Additionally, psychological, ideological, and economic disparities can contribute to the development of racist attitudes. The presence of multiple racial groups with distinct cultures, as well as persistent social and economic disparities between individuals of different races, further exacerbates racism within society.

Racism is an ideology that holds one race as superior to another. This ideology is often used to justify discrimination, injustice, and oppression against certain racial groups. Racism can manifest in various forms, including individual racism, which involves discriminatory beliefs and actions by an individual, and systemic racism, which refers to institutional policies and practices that produce and reinforce racial injustice. Racism, the discrimination experienced by immigrants, is one form of othering within French society. Immigrants are considered subaltern, the Other, excluded from French society. The lives of immigrants living in the banlieues also demonstrate the realities of this societal stratification. The term

"subaltern," in a social or political context, refers to groups or individuals who occupy a lower hierarchical level or position within a social, economic, or political structure. The term is often used to describe groups that are neglected, underrepresented, or lack equal access to power or resources compared to more dominant or powerful groups in society. Subalterns often experience marginalization and struggle to articulate their interests or experiences in everyday life.

The term "subaltern" was first used by Antonio Gramsci, particularly in his work on cultural hegemony, which identifies groups excluded and marginalized within the social order. Spivak points out that "subaltern" is not simply a classical term used for oppressed classes and other groups. For Spivak, the term, in the postcolonial era, refers to anything related to restricted access, which becomes a kind of space of differentiation. However, Spivak explains a paradox that is often misunderstood. The main problem of the subaltern is not only the problem of oppressed groups or the oppressed working class, but also concerns anyone whose voice is limited by the access that represents them (Spivak, 2023).

Racism is an ideology that asserts the superiority of one race over another. This belief system is frequently employed to justify discrimination, injustice, and oppression against specific racial groups. Racism manifests in multiple forms, including individual racism, which encompasses discriminatory beliefs and actions by individuals, and systemic racism, which involves institutional policies and practices that perpetuate and reinforce racial injustice. Within French society, racism, particularly as experienced by immigrants, represents a form of othering. Immigrants are often regarded as subaltern, or the Other, and are excluded from mainstream French society. The experiences of immigrants residing in the banlieues further illustrate the realities of this societal stratification. The term "subaltern" in social and political contexts refers to groups or individuals occupying lower hierarchical positions within social, economic, or political structures. It is commonly used to describe groups that are neglected, underrepresented, or lack equal access to power and resources compared to dominant groups. Subaltern populations frequently experience marginalization and struggle to articulate their interests or experiences in daily life. The concept of the subaltern was first introduced by Antonio Gramsci, particularly in his analysis of cultural hegemony, to identify groups excluded and marginalized within the social order (Setiawan, 2018). Spivak emphasizes that "subaltern" is not merely a classical term for oppressed classes or groups. In the postcolonial context, Spivak argues that the term refers to any situation involving restricted access, which creates a space of differentiation. Spivak also highlights a commonly misunderstood paradox: the central issue of the subaltern is not limited to oppressed groups or the working class, but extends to anyone whose voice is constrained by limited access to representation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Qualitative descriptive research is a research problem formulation that serves as a guideline for investigating or capturing, in a comprehensive and detailed manner, the social conditions under study (Soendari, 2012). The data sources for this study were obtained from the lyrics of the songs "Je Suis Chez Moi" by Black M, "Ma Couleur," and "Pitbull" by Booba, which contain racist elements. The data in this study are written data, namely words, phrases, or sentences related to racism in the songs "Je Suis Chez Moi" by Black M, "Ma Couleur," and "Pitbull" by Booba. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative method. It is descriptive because the author describes the data to be analyzed, namely racism in the song "Je Suis Chez Moi" by Black M. It is called qualitative. After all, it uses words and lyrical quotations to explain related concepts, rather than statistical figures (Ahmadi, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Skin Color Racism

Black M, as a descendant of Guinea, has a different skin color from other French people. Discrimination is often experienced by immigrants or descendants of immigrants in France. This phrase describes the feeling of being highlighted by the majority society, not because of superiority, but because it is considered different. His experiences as an immigrant who was accepted in France due to the difference in his skin color. The lyrics of the song *Je Suis Chez Moi* reflect the feelings he received as an immigrant and society's views on his skin color. The song "Je suis chez moi" by Black M is a very powerful artistic response to various forms of discrimination, including racism, experienced by black people and immigrant communities in France.

Tout le monde me regarde
Everybody is looking at me

In the above lyric, the phrase literally means "everyone is staring at me." In a social context, it describes the feeling of being watched, judged, or even excessively suspected—an experience often felt by racial or ethnic minorities in majority communities. The gaze of the majority can create a profound sense of alienation, even if someone has tried to integrate and contribute to society. This reinforces the narrative that immigrants are often treated as "outsiders," even when they have lived there for a long time and feel like home.

The gaze of the majority is reiterated in Black M's song "Je Suis Chez Moi," which describes how others perceive and treat him based on his skin color.

Peut-être parce qu'ils me trouvent trop foncé
Maybe because they find me too dark

The phrase "trop foncé" refers to a darker skin tone or race perceived as different in certain social contexts. These lyrics reflect racial inequality or prejudice, or the differential treatment of someone based on their race, as is often experienced by people with darker skin tones. Black M may be expressing that she feels treated differently or even limited by others' views simply because of her appearance. It could also refer to feelings of alienation or difficulty integrating into certain groups because her skin color is perceived as "too dark."

Racism experienced because of differences in skin color leads to racial slurs. As is known, immigrants in France are predominantly from African countries, which contributes to strong racial discrimination. This is evident in the following lyric excerpt:

Négro dis leurs, dis leurs
Negro they say, they say

In the lyrics above, Booba wants to show that he often experiences racism simply because of his dark skin and his Black heritage. He is often ostracized simply because of his dark skin, considered dirty, and even considered criminal from their own perspective. Booba illustrates how young people, especially those from immigrant backgrounds, often fall victim to negative stigma and prejudice from a society that considers itself "authentic" French.

The lyrics above include the word "Négro," which can be considered offensive or derogatory in some contexts. Historically, the word "Négro" was used to refer to Black people, but it is also often used with negative connotations, particularly in the context of colonialism and racism. However, Booba often uses this word in more expressive contexts and as part of his cultural identity in rap music. The ridicule received by immigrants in France regarding their skin color is often faced by young people in France, especially those from immigrant backgrounds. This can be seen in the quote below:

Malabar, Choco BN, "sale noir!", ma génération
Malabar, Choco BN, "dirty black!", my generation

"Sale noir!" is a slang term meaning "dirty black," commonly used as a racial slur against Black people. Booba uses this phrase to highlight ongoing racial discrimination and his resulting anger and frustration. The phrase "ma génération" or "my generation" shows that these issues affect not only Booba but also many of his peers from marginalized ethnic backgrounds. They face discrimination based on skin color, as well as humiliation and perceptions of inferiority. The song "Je Suis Chez Moi" by Black M reflects the discrimination and alienation experienced by minority groups in France.

La France est belle (est belle)
Mais elle m'regarde de haut comme la Tour Eiffel (Eiffel)
France is beautiful (is beautiful)
But it looks down on me like the Eiffel Tower (Eiffel)

The lyrics of Black M's song "Je suis chez moi" reflect the feelings of discrimination and alienation experienced by individuals from minority backgrounds in France. The lyrics "La France est belle" (France is beautiful) demonstrate Black M's recognition of France's beauty, reflecting his love and pride for France as his homeland. However, this is followed by the lyrics, "Mais elle m'regarde de haut comme la Tour Eiffel" (But she looks up to me like the Eiffel Tower), which implies feelings of alienation and being looked down upon by society and authorities in France. The Eiffel Tower, an iconic symbol of the country, is used here as a metaphor to depict the superiority or distance felt by people from certain backgrounds toward him and his group.

Discrimination is not only experienced based on skin color, but also on character. This is emphasized by the title of the song, *Pitbull*, which uses the metaphor "pitbull" to convey aggression, strength, and resilience in the face of prejudice and discrimination, including against immigrants. Booba's song, "*Pitbull*," is a mocking reference to the French. The pitbull itself is a type of dog descended from bulldogs and terriers. Through the song "*Pitbull*," Booba Booba illustrates how society often views immigrant groups as a threat (just as pitbulls are associated with violence). He uses this metaphor to demonstrate his resistance to discrimination, demonstrating that despite the stigma, he persists and refuses to succumb to negative stereotypes. The song's depiction of rebellion can also be seen as a symbol of resistance against an unfair system that often biases certain groups. Booba, of Senegalese descent, often explores in his lyrics the racial tensions, injustices, and struggles faced by immigrants and African Americans in France.

Immigrants are not only perceived as threats but also judged based on their skin color. In Booba's song "*Ma Couleur*," there is the following lyric:

Jugé à cause de ma couleur
Judged because of my skin color

In his song "*Ma Couleur*," Booba talks about feeling judged because of his skin color. The word "jugé" means "judged," and "ma couleur" refers to the color of his skin. These lyrics highlight how people are often treated differently simply because of their skin color, regardless of who they are or what they have achieved. The song criticizes racial prejudice and discrimination in French society. It expresses the reality that Black people often face judgment, stereotypes, and exclusion. At the same time, the lyrics show pride in Black identity, even in a world that tries to silence it.

Black people in France face discrimination not just in how they are seen by society, but also in their personal relationships. French society often does not want to see them as equal to others or as part of the community. Many people hold negative stereotypes, seeing Black people as dirty or dangerous, and believe that Black and white people cannot come together. Because of their skin color, Black people are often not recognized as truly French.

Ils veulent pas qu'Marianne soit ma fiancée
They don't want Marianne to be my fiancée.

The song mentions Marianne, who represents the French Republic and its values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Black M uses his lyrics to show that some people do not see him as truly French. Through this metaphor, he shares how, as a Black man with immigrant roots, he feels excluded from French identity. He is criticizing a form of nationalism that excludes people of other ethnic backgrounds. The lyrics depict the struggles many French people with immigrant backgrounds face. Even if they are born and raised in France, some are still seen as outsiders because of their skin color or names. By talking about being rejected as French, Black M points out the hypocrisy of a system that says it stands for liberty and equality but still treats its own citizens differently because of race or culture.

These lyrics stand against racism and social injustice in France. Black M uses a strong metaphor to show how people question his identity as a French citizen just because of his background and skin color. The song makes it clear that he deserves to feel at home in France, and that no single group should control what it means to be French.

Structural Racism

Structural racism refers to discrimination embedded within the social, economic, political, and cultural systems that shape society. Unlike individual racism, which involves personal attitudes or actions, structural racism arises from institutionalized policies and practices that advantage certain racial groups while disadvantaging others. This form of discrimination is integrated into societal systems, resulting in persistent inequalities between racial groups.

In his songs "*Ma Couler*" and "*Pitbull*," Booba also highlights how this discrimination is not only individual but also structural. Many immigrants in France struggle to find decent jobs, receive a good education, or even find adequate housing due to their status as "foreigners" or descendants of former colonial countries.

Booba's song "*Ma Couleur*" illustrates various forms of structural discrimination. For example, in this lyric:

Surveillé par les douaniers
Monitored by customs officers

This passage highlights themes of surveillance, tension, and oppression by authorities, especially immigration officers (*douaniers*). Booba expresses feeling constantly monitored or controlled, which may relate to legal challenges, police scrutiny, or public attention to his lifestyle as an artist. The lyrics can also be seen as a satirical commentary on pervasive surveillance by both authorities and the public. Across Booba's work, struggle and resistance to oppressive systems are central themes.

Due to increased surveillance by authorities, immigrants often become immobilized, making them more vulnerable to arrest. This is illustrated in the following lyric excerpt:

Ne bouge pas, ne craque pas, ne doute pas, ne parle pas
Don't move, don't crack, don't doubt, don't speak

The above lyric excerpt from Booba's song "Ma couleur" reflects a message of steadfastness and mental resilience amidst the pressures and challenges of life, particularly in the context of discrimination or feelings of marginalization.

The meaning of the song's lyrics, "Ne bouge pas" (Don't move), suggests that one should remain steadfast and unwavering in the face of existing situations or external pressures. "Ne craque pas" (Don't give up) conveys the encouragement to remain strong and not give up amidst possible difficulties or emotional hardships. "Ne doute pas" (Don't hesitate) encourages one to remain confident and not let doubts take over, even when facing challenges or negative views from others. "Ne parle pas" (Don't talk) can be interpreted as advice to avoid excessive talking or explaining in situations marked by prejudice, and instead to focus on action and resilience.

Malgré tes diplômes, personne ne t'a jamais appelé
Despite your degrees, no one ever called you back

Social and economic systems sometimes overlook individual academic achievements, leading to frustration with inequality and limited opportunities, particularly for those facing hardship. Booba often uses such lyrics to highlight broader social issues and critique the current system.

Therefore, to achieve equality or the same opportunities as others, one must work harder, put in more effort, and fight more persistently. In this context, "resistance" refers to one's resilience in the face of challenges and injustice. These lyrics describe how one must overcome obstacles and discrimination to achieve the same success or goals as others.

Pour avoir les mêmes chances que les autres j'ai dû faire le double
To have the same chances as the others, I had to do twice as much

This is a message about the struggle for equality and opposing injustice. Booba's song "Ma couleur" (The Color), about structural racism, critiques the inequalities in society, particularly those related to race and skin color. Booba describes how individuals with certain skin colors, particularly Black people, often face discrimination and struggle to obtain equal opportunities despite their abilities or adequate education. The song expresses feelings of frustration and resistance against a social system that tends to marginalize certain groups, while also showing that, despite someone's hard work or achievements, they may still be denied fair opportunities simply because of their racial background. Structural racism, here, refers to systematic discrimination within social and economic structures that impact the daily lives and opportunities of individuals based on race or skin color. In other words, "Ma couleur" is a call to acknowledge and challenge racial inequalities that exist in society, and it exposes how power structures often oppress individuals based on their skin color.

CONCLUSION

Discrimination against immigrants remains a significant issue in France. Differences in cultural, historical, religious, and racial backgrounds between immigrants and native French citizens contribute to social challenges, including discrimination, racism, and segregation. Public perceptions linking immigrants to crime further reinforce xenophobia, especially in light of criminal cases involving immigrants. Common arguments against immigration include cultural, security, and economic concerns, which are often cited as risks for France. Stereotypes associating immigrant children with crime and the increasing difficulty immigrants face in finding employment also contribute to negative attitudes. Racism involves one group viewing another as inferior, leading to categorization and unequal treatment. Those perceived as belonging to lower-status groups are particularly vulnerable to racist actions by groups that consider themselves superior.

Research indicates that these three songs address elements of racism, specifically skin-color racism and structural racism. Skin-color racism is shown through the discrimination immigrants face due to their skin color. In "Ma Couleur" and "Pitbull," Booba describes how individuals are stereotyped based on their appearance. Structural racism is addressed in Black M's song "Je Suis Chez Moi," which highlights challenges such as barriers to employment and denial of recognition as French citizens due to immigrant backgrounds.

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