

Introduction

I have conducted one year of fieldwork in Caribbean clubs of the French capital exploring the transnational and diasporic connections between the islands and hexagonal France, and I would like to present an overview of my results. Firstly, I will introduce my fieldwork context with some excerpts. Secondly, I will attempt to draw some major points resulting from my findings.

Since 1946 Guadeloupe and Martinique are French overseas Departments. This has been affecting migration patterns to a relevant extent.

ARCHIPEL OF THE ANTILLES



Alex was an IT technician for a big energy company in France. When we met, he was in his early forties and had two children. Born in Guadeloupe, he came to Paris during his childhood; therefore, he considered himself as a Parisian. Alex started organizing Caribbean nightlife events in 2010, while I was doing my fieldwork. He had an acquaintance in Guadeloupe who was well connected within the French Caribbean star-system and used to organize a zouk event in the island every summer. Alex thought that he could collaborate with him and organize his own events in the capital. Historically, Caribbean artists perform in the clubs of the capital as most of the Antillean diaspora lives in hexagonal France.

Alex associated himself with two deejays in order to make the financial enterprise possible, and started organizing events in a club location in the banlieue North West of Paris. The club space was meant for weddings and celebrations and could be rented for one night. This was the way in which most organizers organized their events: not in stable locations, but in rented spaces of the less expensive urban periphery. The location was not chosen accidentally: on the contrary, it hosted once a week the event organized by the most famous and established organizer of the French Caribbean scene. The latter

had a huge network of clubbers across all generations, and Alex aimed to cater to his adult crowd, between 30 and 50 years old. Indeed, Caribbean events catered at different degrees to different age brackets.

The event started by hosting about one hundred people. Its attendants remained a relative small crowd for more or less one year. Admission was worth 10 Euros and the organizers offered one welcome drink. However, in 2012, the admission fee raised to 20 Euros, and they offered a free welcome drink plus a Caribbean dish such as chicken or fish with rice. Some time later, these events hosted several hundreds of people and became famous among the French Caribbean crowd between 25 and 40 years old. In spite of the fact that they were situated in the periphery, organizers attempted to give to these events and upscale allure, with demanding dress codes and a relatively high admission fee.

Mapping of Caribbean nightlife in Paris

Usually, when Caribbean organizers achieved popularity, they aimed to move their events to the city center. The locations in the banlieues were usually situated in industrial areas of difficult access via public transport. To this extent, it took time for organizers to entrust crowds that sometimes travelled through 50Km to reach a club location. Yet, once an event was established, it could move to other locations, namely in the desired city center as crowds were mobile. However, the choice of Alex was to remain in this club in the periphery. He had told me that he catered predominantly to a crowd that was mobile by car; second, if in the city center, he could not offer free drinks and food, as locations were more expensive. With 20 Euros, he could only offer admission. Here in the periphery, he could give added value that made his event even more desirable and convivial. Let alone that he organized games where he offered presents to the clubbers, such as bottles of champagne and weekends in his father's resort in Guadeloupe (flight excluded).

CLUBBING IN THE ILE DE FRANCE REGION

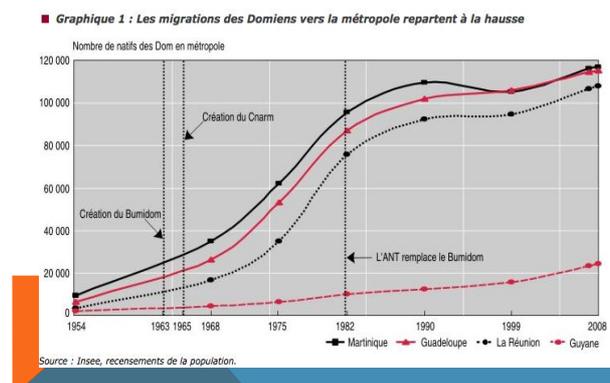


FOCUS OF CLUBS IN THE CLOSE BANLIEUE



French Caribbean nightlife was a relevant night-time economy in the urban landscape of Paris. Events were organized all over the city, predominantly in locations situated in the outskirts. I have followed three networks of organizers who organized events in the banlieues, although the most successful network (3000 guests) moved to the city center. Reflecting the residential patterns of the French Caribbean migration to Paris, they took place in boroughs that are most times socio-economically disadvantaged.

OVERSEAS POPULATION IN PARIS CENSUS 2008



One fourth of the Antillean population lives in hexagonal France and predominantly in the region of Paris¹. Hence, nightlife events take place in those peripheries that are often poor and increasingly hosting migrant populations. These peripheries have been built in the post second World War period in order to host external and internal migration flows in the purpose of filling the need of main d'oeuvre for a rising industrial economy. Some of these peripheries have a past of working class struggle because of their social composition. Then, the on-going gentrification process in the city has been affecting disadvantaged populations including migrant populations and minoritized ethnic groups. As a result, the city center has become unaffordable to many, and the banlieue increasingly ethnicized as migrant populations suffer the most of social and socio-economic disadvantage. The French Antillean migration has been affected by the same processes, and mostly finds itself in the urban peripheries.

With this joint research, we aimed to find out how second and third generation migrants in Europe built their leisure networks. We have discovered that ethnic night-time economies revealed interesting information about youth undergoing discrimination and urban segregation in the three European capitals. Concerning Paris, I would like to highlight some main points of how and why French Caribbeans attended this nightlife in relation to a complex social structure.

1. First of all, in the wide landscape of Antillean nightlife, I have explored a section of French Caribbean nightlife that had strong diasporic inflections; in other words, it hosted predominantly members of the Caribbean diaspora. This was a minority of events in the landscape of Caribbean nightlife. As I have showed above, the number of French Caribbeans living in Paris is high. Similarly, transnational relations between the island and hexagonal France are intense. Sociologists have called the French Caribbean diaspora as a model of reversible migration, or the “third island”. The relative ease with which Caribbean clubbers could travel between the two locations was relevant to their networking practices. People networked predominantly within kin networks, and maintained acquaintances who connected them with the islands, be they of the second and third generation. **Caribbean nightlife was a social space for people to connect and to stay up to date regarding new musical trends coming from the Caribbean.** Also, it was a space where my female informants hoped to find a romantic partner

¹ 364 800 people born in the overseas departments live in hexagonal France, almost the equivalent of the population of Martinique (www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=ip1389&page=graph).

belonging to the diaspora. The social and cultural capitals to be acquired in the scene were very relevant for participation. However, a crucial term of membership regarded racialized and ethnicized belonging.

2. If French Caribbean clubs were situated predominantly in the peripheries, it was certainly because of the financial constraints organizers faced. Moreover, black Caribbean populations suffered of racism in nightlife; this factor influenced the choice of venues to a great extent. Moreover, as many clubs within the capital were situated in residential areas, there was also the problem of the neighborhood and the public policies about noise that were increasingly affecting the urban nightlife landscape.

The combination of these reasons plus the difficulties in accessing the city center by car affected clubbing practices to a large extent. Being in a warehouse in the periphery represented a protection from racism and disturbance. Similarly, the social experience taking place in these clubs was linked to ethnicized representations. Being white was problematic because these were protected spaces where black people could enjoy leisure in a context that was not predominantly white as many mainstream leisure spaces of the capital. This meant that access to the club was granted, for instance. Similarly, many clubbers had differential access to the city center because they lived in areas poorly served by public transportation. In the end, most of the clubbing locations in the city center were too expensive for these pink collars who could not dedicate important disposable income to nightlife. These reasons show that the Caribbean club culture and forms of discrimination are tied to each other.

3. French Caribbean clubbing was an ethnic industry that must be also regarded as an entrepreneurial effort made by members of the diaspora who wanted to achieve upward social mobility. Social mobility is an ancient pattern in the French Caribbean migration that has mostly been migrating for these reasons following the promises of the French government and the decline of the sugar economy in the islands. Facing the difficulties of the metropolitan job market, many Antilleans remain in the lower middle classes of working classes often in spite of their educational achievements. To this extent, as it has been pointed out by others, subcultures offered spaces where marginalized youth could find alternative economic issues. Seen from this viewpoint, Caribbean nightlife economy was a tool for organizers to improve their lives and also for the many people gravitating around them and doing precarious jobs. Having a job in nightlife did not only signify to have social and cultural capital, it was also about

envisaging a career, and maybe a better employment in an attractive industry, that of leisure, that promised a better future.

CARIBBEAN CLUBBING IN PARIS: WHY?

1. Building diasporic relationships reflecting the model of *reversible migration*: intense migrant flows and transnational relations in both directions between the French Caribbean and hexagonal France.
2. Reacting against social, racialized and urban discrimination at play in French society.
3. Participating into a niche night-time economy situated in the panorama of the leisure industries of Paris.

