Ethno-racial statistics in France and Europe: consequences of colorblindness for policies, social sciences and epidemiology research

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Session "Racial and ethnic classifications in epidemiology: global perspectives"

What's the problem in naming race in Europe ?

- Sequences of exporting race during European expansion, de-racializing after WWII and then re-importing race through post-colonial migration

- Post WWII strategy to consider that race is a scientific fallacy and ethnicity has been ill used: *semantic elusion* as a strategy in Europe [UNESCO (1950)]

- Race as an « external reality »: civic states in Europe and race in the colonial empires

- Colorblindness means no substantive reference to race as a population category and a ban in public expressions (with the exception of UK and Ireland)

- How to deal with racism and ethno-racial diversity? Mostly with proxy: place of birth (Foreign-born) and nationality of individuals and their parents (second generation)

The need for collecting ethnic data and resistance against it

- Fears of misuse of data (heritage of history), essentialization and the colorblind strategy
- However:
  - Identity politics can be observed **in full** by assigning ethnic and racial labels as well as **by default** by not recognizing these labels
  - Statistics are crucial to implement positive actions: most of the antidiscrimination actions remain inefficient
  - Beyond (or before) statistics, **naming categories** are at the basis of scientific production, empowerment of minority groups and action
  - Ethnic statistics are also useful to account for diversity in a globalized world
- The last census round (2020) was a crucial crash test for the change in Europe and France

Categorization in 5 European countries

	Germany	France	Sweden	The Netherlands	UK
Place of birth	*	*	*	*	*
Citizenship	*	*	*	*	
Place of birth parents	* (surveys)	* (surveys)	* (two parents)	*	
Language	* (in schools)				
Religion	* (registration)		* (registration)	* (derived from ancestry)	*
Ethnicity					*
Race					*

# Ethno-racial categories in France: the choice of ignorance

- Categories in the census (and thus in public debate and social science): foreigners (citizenship), immigrants (place of birth and nationality)
- In some surveys, place of birth and citizenship at birth of parents have been introduced: "second generation" (native born from immigrants parentage)
- Endless controversies on so called "ethnic statistics" and a resistance against their introduction in census and surveys
  - Main critics: essentialization, lack of realism, brightening differences in a context of political invisibility
  - Racial categorization is perceived as an expression of racism in itself rather than a solution
- However, an increasing racialization of social life and the pervasiveness of ethnoracial inequalities in French society

The basis for Colorblindness: Article 1 of the Constitution of 1958

France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. *It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion*. It shall respect all beliefs. It shall be organised on a decentralised basis.

Statutes shall promote equal access by women and men to elective offices and posts as well as to professional and social positions.

Suppression of the word race in the article has been voted in 2020 but not implemented yet
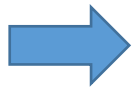
A step further into colorblindness

Controversies that have an impact on the research agenda

- The pilot of the TeO survey (2008-2009) faced a public campaign against questions related to religion and skin color

- Up to the Constitutional Council (11/2007) which has stated that collecting data on race or ethnicity is infringing article 1 of the Constitution

- Ambiguous decision which leads to interpretation and opens the door for "subjective" or third party racial classification

- Consequence on the survey design: 2 questions on skin color have been deleted

Questions on skin color TeO (2007)

D 1 /
OULAUT   **Quand on vous rencontre, de quelle couleur pensez-vous que l'on vous voit ?**

(En clair, 100 caractères avec ne sait pas et refus)

_____

Si refuse de répondre, cochez cette case : ☐
Si ne sait pas, cochez cette case : ☐

D 1 /
;OULEU   **Et vous, de quelle(s) couleur(s) vous diriez-vous ?**
(En clair, 100 caractères avec ne sait pas et refus)

_____

Si refuse de répondre, cochez cette case : ☐
Si ne sait pas, cochez cette case : ☐

What if respondents are invited to self-identify in ethno-racial categories?

- Reaction to identification by ethnoracial labels in two surveys:
  - An experimental survey (*Measure of Diversity*, Ined, 2006) in 7 firms and 3 universities collecting 1327 self-filled in questionnaires
  - Probing three types of "ethnic identification" and assessment of their acceptance:
    - by genealogy (parents and grand-parents)
    - by geographical/cultural self-identification
    - by ethno-racial self-identification

- The *Accès aux droits* survey (2016, Défenseur des droits)
  - A nationally representative survey to study discrimination, N=5,117
  - Two questions on ethno-racial classifications using (almost) the same model as in the diversity survey

- What to expect in a context of absence of experience of filling in ethnoracial categories?
  - Lack of identification / Misclassification
 - Refusal to classify into ethno-racial categories

Format for the ethnoracial self-identification questions

- **"How do you think others perceive you?"** => Reflected race
- **"How do you consider yourself?"** => Self-identified race
    - Blanc (White)
    - Noir (Black)
    - Arabe, Maghrébin (Arab/ North African)
    - Asiatique (Asian)
    - I don't relate
    - Autre (Other) with open responses (i.e. "I'm a human being" or "I am a European citizen")
- Immigrant origin identified using country of birth of individuals and their parents
    - Visible minorities (Africa, Maghreb, Turkey, Middle East, Asia, French overseas territories)
    - Non visible minorities (Europe) and the French majority

Self-identified and reflected race (Access to Rights, 2015)
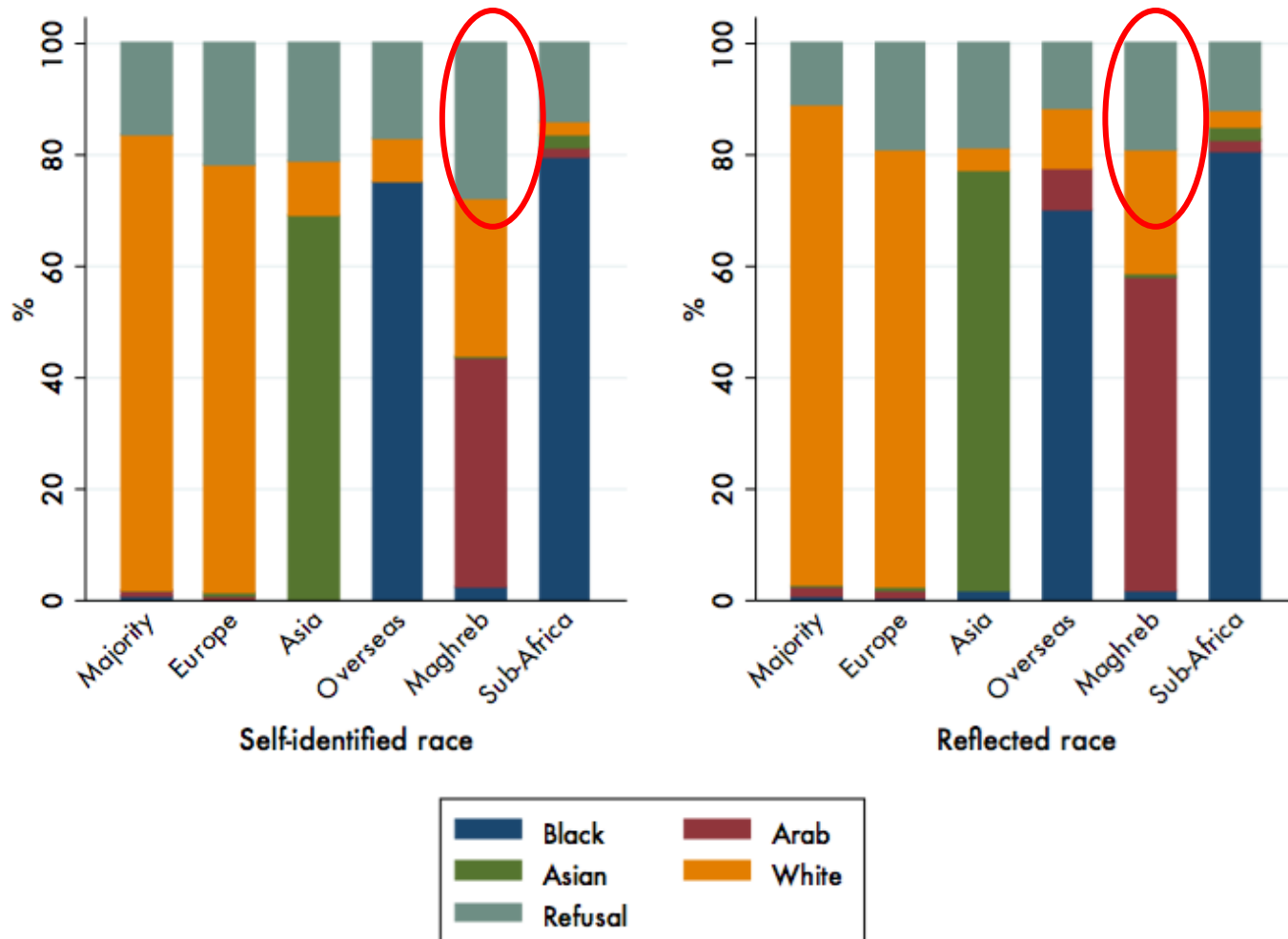
Who refuses ethno-racial categories?
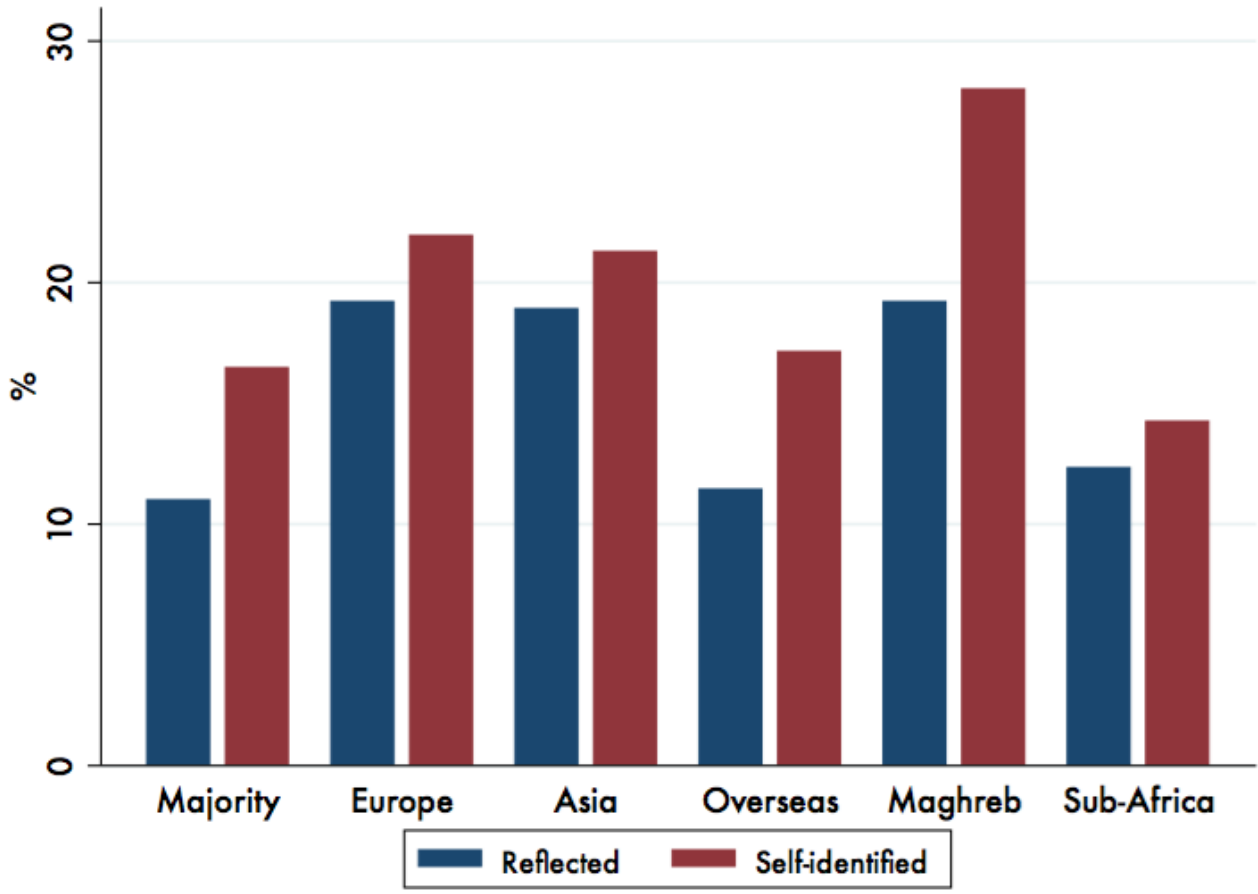
Consequences for epidemiological research

- No categorization based on race or ethnicity in health statistics
- Foreign born used as a proxy in most cases, and the information is often not available in administrative data (hospitals, social security)
- Compensation by linking personal files with census and registers samples
- Colorblind treatment: race is not referred to in diagnoses and prognosis, intead « culture » or geographical origin are extensively used
- Racialized groups (Sub-Saharan African and Carribeans) identified as group at risk in HIV research and health policy
- A growing demand for ethno-racial categories among health practicioners and health research
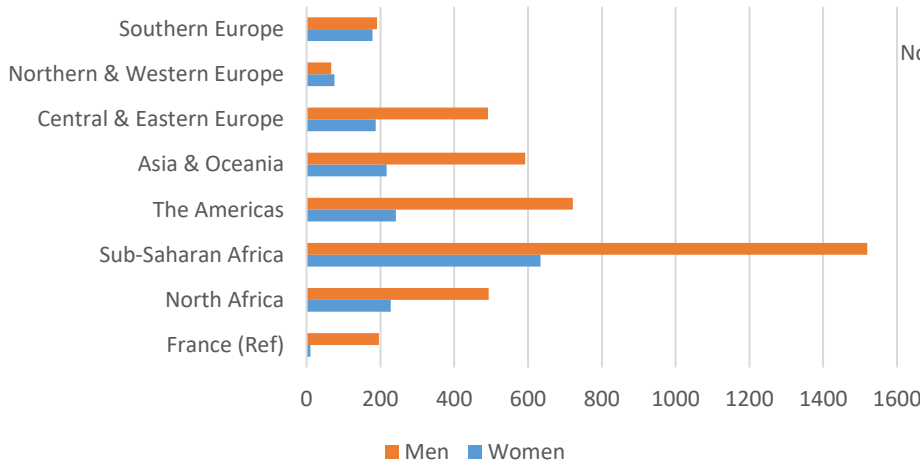
Excess mortality rate among immigrants during Covid 19

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the mortality profiles of the foreign-born in France during the first pandemic wave
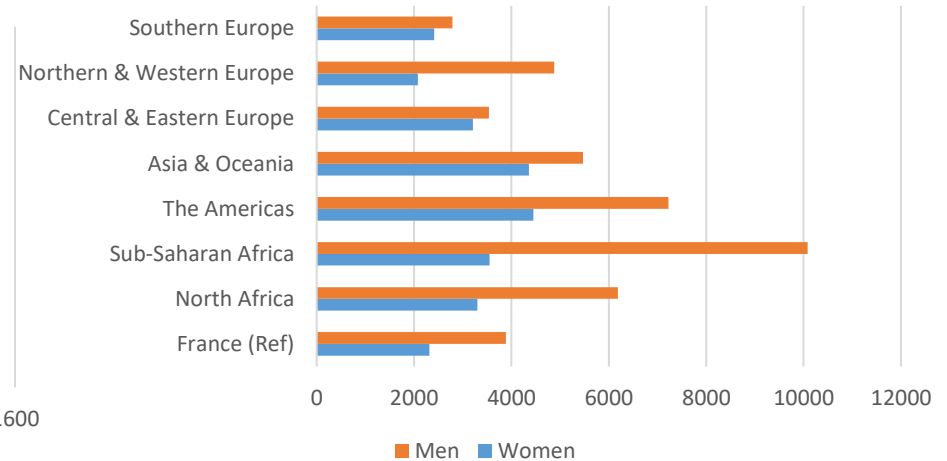
Myriam Khlat [a,1,*], Walid Ghosn [b,1], Michel Guillot [a,c], Stéphanie Vandentorren [d,e,f], DcCOVMIG Research Team

Age-standardized excess mortality rate
Weeks 12-20, 2020

Instances of racism and discrimination in health system

42 **Racial implicit biases among obstetric care providers and associated differential care: The BiP research program**

Elie Azria[1], Priscille Sauvegrain[1], Olivia Anselem[2], Marie-Pierre Bonnet[3], Catherine Deneux-Tharaux[4], Anne Rousseau[5], Juliette Richetin[6]

Figure 1. Distribution of implicit bias scores for A) Valence and B) Strength among healthcare professionals (Red: anesthetists; Green: obstetricians; Blue: Midwives)

Naomi Musenga death: Emergency operator blames pressure after mocking caller

14 May 2018

Ms Musenga called the emergency services complaining of a severe stomach ache
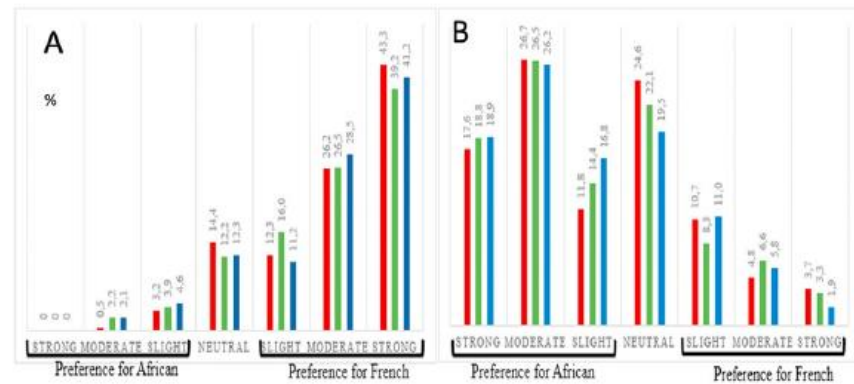
Lost in translation: the problem with proxys

- Language, culture: with acculturation and social mobility, racialized individuals change practices, but do not escape ascription

  ⟶ See Roma, Afro-descendants

- First and second generation: reference to migration as a founding criteria, assimilation as a perspective, illegitimacy as full members of the society, poor quality of representation over time

- Names: confusion between the signal and the meaning; correlation between naming and assimilation; poor quality over time

- Location (neighbourhood) can be relevant when ethnoracial segregation is intense, but often misses large part of minorities

- In all cases, avoidance of naming ethnoracial minorities increase invisibility of domination and reinforce discrimination