La Goutte d'Or

A sensory approach to Racism and Empire in a Parisian neighbourhood.

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ABSTRACT

The historical context of this thesis is the period from 2009 to present day France, focusing on a neighbourhood called La Goutte d'Or, situated in the north of Paris.

As within other multicultural European societies, France suffers from discrimination and racism, deepened in recent years by islamophobia. While the most important political value for the French state is the universalism that guides the rights of its citizens, France still struggles with the narrative, and practice, of an inclusive society. In the past 40 years this has focused on the increasing arrival of immigrants, mostly from former colonial territories, to work in the growing post-war economy.

While France has a long tradition of solidarity with political refugees, the last 20 years represent a failure in the exercise of social cohesion. Racism and discrimination have been and are rarely denounced -within the affected, Black and Maghrebin communities. Political efforts to solve this problem, through official complaints' mechanisms, have proven unproductive for small acts of racism as have social policies targeting social exclusion.

One of the motives of this thesis is the silenced voice around racism in France. Discrimination and social exclusion are terms often referred to, while "racism" is avoided. The philosophical background of universalism has tainted the purpose of true social inclusion, denying the existence of races; but in turn, denying racism as a stronger form of discrimination.

This means that daily encounters with unspoken racism and racist experiences, or with more explicit racist declarations, are constantly kept in silence, not recognised as valid complaints despite the harm caused on their victims.

This thesis addresses that aspect of racism in a larger scale but in a targeted place. Showcasing the daily life of racist experiences, in the voices of the victims. Also, revealing other facets hidden under the veil of colonial history, and cultural and social manifestations that are related in some way or another to France's colonial past in Africa.

The choice of La Goutte d'Or responds to its history, to its population, and also to its social representation in the French capital. A neighbourhood relegated for decades due to the presence of working-class sectors and later of immigrant communities, suffering from general racism from the rest of the city.

Coming from a practice of psychoanalytical therapy and having suffered the subtlety of daily racism in Paris, I developed the concept of "soft racism" to work into this research. This concept has helped me to analyse different aspects of racism throughout every chapter of the thesis. I chose to use this concept combined with a sensorial approach, allowing me to understand in a deeper way how racism operates in different manners in our societies. Particularly when it is not mentioned, but still causes harm and distress in its victims.

I concluded that the Senses were the best way to confront a problem that is rarely recognised officially, but that exists and manifests itself through the sensations of seeing, touching, hearing, tasting and smelling -as we will see in the different chapters. The senses also helped

me to look into the history of colonialism in France and its former territories in a different light, as the chapters on Touch and Taste will try to demonstrate; focusing on fabrics and foods and their different trajectories of acceptance, relegation or inclusion as imported cultural artifacts, recurrently neglected or discriminated against as symbols of old colonial oppression.

Every sense has helped me to understand and disarm the powerful construct of racist manifestations in daily life, disguised as it is in subtle performances. The cases correspond to my own materials. Having started this project in another institution in France with ethnographical observational work accompanied with interviews, I ultimately decided to keep very few of those interviews and focus more on a sensorial observational ethnography. Visiting the place several times since I retook the project, but also analysing cultural practices, such as walking, cooking or tailoring. I also worked with voices on the Radio, with streaming radio programmes, with the participation neighbourhood residents from two different age levels: youngsters and old women. Literature and media productions have also helped as materials, exposing an understanding other instances of racism, focused on the neighbourhood, such as in the core of E. Zola's novel about the neighbourhood (*L'Assommoir*) and the speeches of a former French President. These two materials have been approached through the sense of Smell and its relationship with colonial narratives and experiences.

Finally, I added myself as part of a self-ethnographic experience, in different instances of the thesis, trying to link my experiences in Africa, in France and in the neighbourhood, which helped me to understand the conflict in a deeper way. My position as a researcher corresponds to a transferred locus, where I am a subaltern, from the global South exploring the global North but focusing on problems that imply elements from the global South, such as colonial and power relationships, and racism inside academia. I have also transferred my own experiences of psychoanalytical therapies to broaden the scope of my methodology, to further understand my own condition as an immigrant living in the global North.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2009, I arrived in Paris ready to start a PhD programme. My proposal, accepted the previous year, was a continuation of my Master thesis, the relationships and connections between Latin American and African intellectuals, writers and political leaders. The main subject was about the inequalities and prejudices in a South-South context.

After some months in Paris doing archival research, I found very few pertinent materials. I was also starting to doubt the relevance of the project as well as my own motivation in pursuing it. Several years before, I attended a class given by the historian Joseph Fontana who told us: *"Always choose a topic that you feel in love with"*. I realised that it was not my case at that moment.

How it started

I fell in love with Africa in the second year of my History degree, back in my country at the University of Buenos Aires, in the 1990s. I followed that path, becoming a "southern Africanist", digging into different aspects of African Studies. My first significant steps on that path were comparing L.S. Senghor and Césaire's *Négritude* to Fanon's position on racism.

A few years later, I visited, worked, and lived in different African countries, working for different international organisations. I also met my husband in Mozambique. Personally, and professionally Africa represents many things for me.

Living in France, I was increasingly curious about the relationships between French locals and African descendants in Paris. Discovering La Goutte d'Or (LGO) was a total revelation. The neighbourhood was full of character. It made me feel at ease despite its dreadful reputation among Parisians.

I decided to change the topic of my thesis, and I proposed a second project focusing on multiculturism in France, using the neighbourhood as an example. My supervisor at the time, J.L. Amselle, seemed more captivated by this new proposal than the earlier one I had presented[1] .

My field work, interviews, archival research and ethnographical approaches, were centred on the following themes: multiculturalism in France, social politics of inclusion, and cultural manifestations (as the neighbourhood has always been an inspirational hub for music and arts -two fields I feel very close to). I invested three years in my research, until 2011, when, after my first year of motherhood and in need to move elsewhere as a family, due the high rental prices in Paris, I decided to put it all on hold.

While dedicated to raising my child and restarting my creative work, I never stopped thinking about La Goutte d'Or. Joseph Fontana was right!

But my own experiences as an immigrant living in Europe made me think differently. Feeling awkward in front of situations that were discriminatory towards me or my family was something that I had to learn how to deal with, and which I still struggle with. I realised that LGO's ill repute was the product of prejudices and racism, because of its history as an area populated by many immigrants and working-class groups.

[1] Although fast-forwarding to 2017 he would not agree to step out of retirement to retake the supervision of my research.

2015 and 2016 were terrible years, starting with the attack at the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris, and following that, the declaration of LGO as a "no-go zone" by an American TV channel. Social and racial tensions and narratives of extremism were becoming more intense than ever before in Brussels (where we lived) and Paris: a state of alert and military presence on the streets due to suspected terrorist menaces altered the norm of everyday life. This atmosphere deepened the feeling of mistrust of people in the streets against other people of black or brown skin, linked somehow with the physical appearance of the perpetrators of these attacks.

Racism was more openly visible in everyday life, not because it did not exist before but because it was now manifested more explicitly in social interactions and public behaviour. Racism in Brussels was a muted issue. I had observed the same in Paris years before, when the word "racism" was frequently replaced by "discrimination or exclusion[2]".

In 2017, I decided to retake my thesis while acknowledging that my topic had evolved. From an initial interest in the contradictions of multicultural narratives to a more sensitive and political issue: racism and social exclusion within the same neighbourhood. But I needed a more accurate perspective. A way to confront racism that could help to expose how it operates, appears and evolves in our daily life.

I was standing by the door at my child's school in Brussels, with other parents, waiting for the children to come out. The school was mostly frequented by children of immigrant families, many from Africa (North and sub-Saharan) but also from Poland, Romania and Portugal, with very few Belgian families. I realised how we were mutely encircled in a small ghetto in a city that never mentions any intention of multiculturality but is keen to show its integration policy narratives. Hearing all the

[2] D. Fassin studied this, as we will see in the next chapter. Fassin, D.: and Simon, P.: "Un objet sans nom. L'introduction des discriminations raciales dans la statistique française", in *Miroirs Transatlantiques,* Jul. - Dec. 2008) and *L'Homme,* No. 187/188, Oct. 2008.

languages spoken in the hall without seeing or hearing any integration in the communication, reminded me a bit of *La Goutte d'Or*.

This experience made me think about how the senses help to detect how the mechanisms of racism succeed in many muted instances such as this one, a school excluded by the local Belgian neighbours. I was then convinced that a sensorial approach could allow me to explore more deeply the same topic of racism in the neighbourhood, in its present life and in its history.

My new proposal was bounced around university email accounts all over France as I searched for a new supervisor; my initial one having retired. Nobody seemed interested, neither in the institution where I had started my PhD and of which I still was a student (the EHESS - *École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*), nor in any other French university.

Disappointed, I decided to look elsewhere. I found the website of the University of Sussex, where one of my future supervisors, Malcolm James, stated that he worked on Race Studies and was open to proposals for Cultural Studies projects. I plucked up the courage to send him an email.

I was extremely excited to see his genuine interest in my project. From there, everything moved amazingly fast. He proposed a second supervisor, Michael Bull, who also accepted. Together, they have been the best supervisors that I could have ever imagined for this project. After the long-drawn administrative procedures, it was clear that to continue working on the topic I would have to exile myself from a language (and its respective territories) where I had lived for many years. We moved to Brighton in the following months.

Current Status of the topic

My first interest was in the "multiculturalism" of French society, using La Goutte d'Or as an example. However, my fieldwork and life in Paris brought daily manifestations of racism to the forefront.

S. Hall relates multiculturalism in British society as "the exotic of difference", and despite the dissimilarities between British and French multicultural narratives (the former embraced it while the second rejected it), his interpretation might apply to this case. While in La Goutte d'Or (LGO), I heard multiple statements about the *quartier* being a peculiar place, characterised by its own "diversity", which essentially meant that exoticism was also part of the identity Parisians created for the neighbourhood. Hall pointed out that exoticism was implicit in the idea of multiculturalism[3], linking the latter to racism.

My focus did shift, between my original 2009 proposal and the new 2017 one. This time my core motivation is to address racism, rather than French multiculturalist practicalities or peculiarities[4].

In this regard, I detected that there was a lack of academic literature on contemporary racism in France, while media and civil society interest in the topic was on the rise. At the time there were only a handful of academic texts on the relationship between the country's colonial past and discrimination against

[3] Hall, S.: "Old and New Ethnicities", in King. A.: *Culture, Globalization and the World-System, Contemporary conditions for the representation of identity*, New edition, University of Minnesota Press, 1997. His example of "international evenings" where people are called upon to wear a costume based on their origins is highly illustrative of this situation.

[4] My first supervisor had a lot say on that subject, and I believe that in some way I was overwhelmed by his own ideas. Amselle, J.L.: *Vers un multiculturalisme à la française; l'empire de la coutume*, Paris, Flammarion, 1996.

immigrants; on the use of stereotyping[5] to characterise Otherness (as we will see in the chapter Sight); and some work on postcolonial social realities in France and Paris focusing on the Sarkozy administration, and some on cultural manifestations, supposedly related to the country's postcolonial legacy[6]. None of these were treated from a sensorial perspective.

Furthermore, there was something missing in the definitions, or interpretations, of racism in the academic literature about France and its African colonies and on the contemporary situation of those who emigrated towards the former metropolis. The work that best ties these two major historical elements: contemporary immigration and colonial relationships between France and its former colonies, is that of A. Memmi[7]. Unsurprisingly, following the historical treatment from his earlier work on racism and colonial relationships, in his later work A. Memmi establishes a strong link between these two realities.

I wanted to explore deeper into the topic of colonialism and racism in France, to see how the colonial system could have determined some of the contemporary racist manifestations against immigrants coming from former French -namely African- colonies. Focusing, as I had initially on LGO, I wondered how those relationships had modelled LGO as a district. What was the significance of the narrative of diversity and "co-existence", that was part of the official discourse on the neighbourhood, against the historically negative reputation that it had among Parisians? Indeed, what forms did racism take in the history of the neighbourhood? There are not too many options in France to denounce racism as a fact, or as an abuse, except when it is extremely

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[5] The work of Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel was one of the first to address the colonial representation and stigmatisation of Others. Bancel, N. and Blanchard, P.: *Human zoos, science and spectacle in the age of Empire*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2008.

[6] Dominic Thomas has worked on cultural aspects of French postcolonial society, focusing on cultural expressions coming to Paris from Africa. See: Thomas, D.: *Black France, colonialism, immigration and transnationalism,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006. And Thomas, D.: *Africa and France. Postcolonial cultures, migration and racism*, Indiana University Press, 2013.

[7] Memmi, A.: *Decolonisation and the decolonised*, London, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

explicit. More crucially, therefore, what forms did racism take in the daily life of those who inhabited, traded, visited or prayed in the neighbourhood? This forced me to ask myself about perceptions of racism; how is racism perceived by individuals? Ultimately, why are the measures taken to tackle racism always insufficient to solve the problem?

Academic interest in, or related to, LGO has increased in recent years. When I started my research, academic work on LGO was extremely limited. The first systematic approaches were motivated by the acceleration of the gentrification process in LGO since the 1990s, within the work edited by Breitman and Culot[8]. Their research on the past and present of social housing in the neighbourhood was useful in drafting the last chapter Smell, given its link to E. Zola's novel, *L'Assommoir*, which takes place in the neighbourhood. From a completely different perspective, Toubon and Messamah's[9] work on immigration to the neighbourhood also helped me to delimit some territories according to communities, particularly from the North of Africa. The different works of Bacqué and Fijalkow[10] about the gentrification process in LGO have gone beyond the academic milieu and into the general public. Finally, E. Lallement's[11] work on the commercial activities in LGO, which is a hub of imports from Africa and the Middle East, is extremely valuable, but it does not focus on racism or employ a sensorial approach.

Since I completed the main body of fieldwork and research, more texts have been released in the field of gentrification but also on different problematics such as the

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[8] Breitman, M. and Culot, M.: *La Goutte d'Or Faubourg de Paris,* Paris, Hazam et Archives d'Architecture Moderne, 1988.

[9] Toubon, J.C. and Messamah, K.: *Centralité immigrée. Le quartier de La Goutte d'Or. Dynamiques d'un espace pluri-ethnique : succession, compétition, cohabitation* (2 vols.), Harmattan-C.I.M.I., Paris, 1990.

[10] Bacqué, M. and Fijalkow, Y.: "En attendant la gentrification: discours et politiques a la Goutte d'Or (1982-2000)", in *Sociétés contemporaines*, 63, 2006.

[11] Lallement. E.: *La ville marchande. Enquête à Barbès*, Paris, Teraedre, 2010.

diversity of its population (M.A. Palumbo[12]). These come closer to addressing multicultural questions but focus more on the dual character of LGO -as global and local. Referencing, through interviews, some of the issues around racism in the neighbourhood, Palumbo for example, brings up the question of internal discrimination against local LGO schools by white middle-class parents living in the neighbourhood. The focus is never on racism and its links to the colonial past are barely mentioned. The senses were not part of any consideration.

A plethora of articles by young scholars[13] has appeared in the last ten years, centred around different facets of the district such as fashion, literature, social integration, and other topics without delving into the case of racism or its links to the history of the French Empire. In most of these works what prevails is a perspective from above. This could be due to the standard point of view of the scholars who conducted the research.

The fact that this research evolved over nearly ten years, has allowed me to reflect not only on the topics or points that I wanted to analyse but also on the increased interest shown by French and foreign scholars in this district. My own work has

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[12] Palumbo, M.A.: *Barbès, Château Rouge, Goutte d'Or, Ailleurs commence ici: anthropologie d'un espace d'altérité en Paris*. Dissertation, EHESS-École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France, 2014.

[13] Vuddamalay, V.; White, P. and Sporton, D.: "The evolution of the Goutte d'Or as an ethnic minority district of Paris", in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 17:2, 1991; Wolf, M. E.: "The view from the street: La Goutte d'Or", in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 6:2, 202, 2005; Firet, A.: "La Goutte d'Or: (ban)lieu(e) de mémoire littéraire", in *Relief* (2), 1, 87-110, 2008; Demissie, F.: "Reinventing Africa in La Goutte-d'Or, Paris: photographic essay", in *African and Black Diaspora*, 4:2, 213–234, 2011; Gray, R. J.: "Beyond the Margins: Identity Fragmentation in Visual Representation in Michel Tournier's La Goutte d'Or", in *Text Matters*, 2:2, 250–263, 2012; Le Courant, S.: "Moi je viens de Mars, et toi?": Le rire dans les espaces publics de La Goutte d'Or". *Terrain*, 61, 54–67, 2013; Kaplan, D. and Recoquillon, C: "Ethnic Place Identity Within a Parisian Neighbourhood", in *Geographical Review*, 104:1, 33-51, 2014; Goldring, M.: "Redonner le pouvoir aux habitants? Le cas de la Goutte d'Or", in *Esprit*, 407, (8/9), 187–20, 2014; Milliot, V.: "Remettre de l'ordre dans la rue. Politiques de l'espace public à La Goutte d'Or", in Ethnologie *française*, 45 :3, 431–443, 2015.

followed diverse channels to delve deeper into the topic of racism in the neighbourhood, and its underlying history. In this sense, I wanted a different approach, to question that "drone" perspective. It is at this point where the interaction with my own experiences in the field, helped me to delineate another kind of closeness to the subject and to the place, developing, through the importance given to my senses, a sort of self-ethnography, or more accurately a reflexive work (in which I have tried not to be too narcissistic).

About the sensorial approach

After doing my fieldwork and rereading my notes I realised that there were many uncomfortable situations confronted in the process of obtaining some of the interviews, and that this feeling of unease was replicated in my daily life. My senses were able to distinguish between situations when I felt not welcomed, or simply ignored. These feelings grew in the years I paused my research, until I started to connect them with the thesis and its topic. It actually started to feel more interesting to use the senses to focus on the situations of discrimination that I was observing happening in the everyday life of the neighbourhood and of course in that of many of its inhabitants.

My adoption of the sensory perspective evolved over the years. Those fieldnotes and self-reflections on my work were giving me more details about how I saw people during my fieldwork, which was different to what it was in the moment of the interview. The fieldnotes contain reflections about what I considered my inability to obtain all the interviews that I wanted to have, quantitatively speaking. However, those notes actually speak for themselves.

In this way, senses, and the sensorial approach as a methodology is a differentiating factor in my research. In the following chapters, I have tried to approach one or more cases of racism that I could understand from a sensorial perspective. This gives me five different points or perspectives on the neighbourhood which are related to its

history, as well as that of racism and colonialism in France. This approach could also easily be transposed for further, future explorations into other cases with similar historical contexts.

I have used the senses to delineate different levels and characteristics of racism in contemporary and historical French society, focusing on the experience of LGO.

Two main sensorial approaches have been taken in this thesis. Firstly, the sensorial approach that comes from my own view and experience, essentially as a point of departure to analyse the complex mechanisms of racism operations. In this sense, the focus on the sensorially interpreted ethnographical account, highlights different ways in which the materials could be understood. In this aspect, the works of M. Serres[14] and M. de Certeau[15] have been very helpful to enable the materials to express their sensorial properties. Secondly, the senses have been the tool employed to enquire into the racist history of the connections between the migrants of today, and the former citizens of empire of the colonial past. These categories are very present in the neighbourhood today, while its history contains several connotations and backgrounds that help to comprehend the history of those racist situations, characterised by discrimination against its population and to what they brought to France in the form of cultural baggage.

I wanted to transmit the sensorial exploration of those experiences as well as inquiring into how racism disguises itself and affects the social life of people of the neighbourhood today, as it has done in the past. The works of A. Corbin were crucial for the chapter Smell, in the same way as those of C. Classen[16] were for the chapter Touch.

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[14] Serres, M.: *The five senses, a philosophy of mingled bodies,* Bloomsbury, 2008.

[15] De Certeau, M.: *The practice of everyday life,* Vol. 1, University of California Press, 1984.

[16] Classen, C.: *The book of Touch*, London, Berg, 2005; and, *The deepest sense, a cultural history of touch,* University of Illinois Press, 2012.

The daily life of the place was the stage on which these forces expressed themselves, sometimes explicitly (as we can see in the case of the Mosques in the chapter Touch, or in the case of J. Chirac in the chapter Smell), but also in the subtle, non-explicit form of *soft racism* that I was more interested in. Thus, the use of the senses in the thesis varies from chapter to chapter based on two interconnected perspectives:

1. Using them as tools to discover and uncover hidden, manifestations of racism (of old and new forms). Using our senses to detect these manifestations, implies subjectivity but also sharing the context of objective power relationships or historical backgrounds of unequal relationships.
2. Using the senses to understand how different manifestations or experiences of racism have been consolidated through sensorial experiences, such as the rejection of odours, the refusal of different tastes and the reproval of corporeal proximity (touch) from Others. In this context, the sensorial perspective allows us to explore and analyse the sensorial impact or sensitivities of racist accounts in different situations and times.

Soft racism is only detectable through the activation of the senses. Moreover, but not coincidentally, these soft attitudes present themselves in both short-term sensorial experiences (a gesture of discomfort about the proximity of the Other or a judgemental gaze in the street) as well as in long-term perspectives (historical naturalisation of racist prejudices against colour, sound, odours and taste, and the fear to be touched or of being too close to Others, are general examples explored through specific cases of racism in the neighbourhood). Two important works that already established some precedent on working on racism and the senses, such as: O. Obasogie[17] who questions the US' colour-blind system; J.L. Stoever's[18] work on listening to racism and Rhys Taylor also works in the relationship between senses and racism through taste[19]. A precursory work about senses and racism has been also Mark M. Smith's work on Slavery, and also his further contributions to the field of

[17] Obasogie, O.: *Blinded by sight. Seeing race through the eyes of the blind*, Stanford University Press, 2013.

[18] Stoever, J.L.: *The sonic color line. Race and cultural politics of listening*, New York, NYU Press, 2016.

[19] Rhys Taylor, A.: *Food and Multiculture, a sensory ethnography of East London,* Routledge, 2017.

sensorial history, although my research does not completely can be aligned on all his considerations.[20] [21]

Senses will work synchronically, helping to understand the moment of some interviews and interactions. They will also work diachronically, working through the history, towards the past of some racist narratives still present today.

Self-ethnography and psychoanalysis

Old and more recent works helped me to understand the benefits of allowing myself to actually be in my research and to consider my own background experiences of racism and discrimination. The practice of psychoanalysis (as a patient) awakened me to make this switch. Self-ethnography or reflectiveness has been well-established in anthropological perspectives for some time, since the first marginal steps taken by M. Leiris or C. Lévi-Strauss.[22] More recent and relevant, in my case, is the work of G. Balandier in "The colonial situation. A theoretical approach"[23], originally published in

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[20] Smith, Mark M.: "Producing sense, consuming sense, making sense: perils and prospects for sensory history", Journal of Social History, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Summer, 2007), pp. 841-858. And also Smith, Mark.M.: *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

[21] Another work also relevant on the field of racism, colonialism and senses is Back, L.: "Trust your senses. War, memory and the Racist nervous system", Senses and Society, Vol. 6, Issue 3, 2011. Although in this case senses and racism are focused on the construction of racist attitudes of the oppressive forces more than from the perspective of the subjects which had experienced racist sensitivities.

[22] Leiris, M.: *L'Afrique fantôme*, 1934. *Phantom Africa*, Seagull Books, 2017. Lévi-Strauss, C.: *Tristes Tropiques*, Penguin, 1955, (2011). These might not be the best of takes on colonialism in Africa (or in South America), but they represent one of the first times in which anthropology allowed itself to show its more intimate thoughts.

[23] Balandier, G.: "The colonial situation. A theoretical approach", in Howe, S. (ed.): *The new imperial history reader*, Routledge, 2010. The original was Balandier, G.: "La situation coloniale. Approche théorique", *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, Vol. XI, 1951.

1951, he questions for the first time his own role as a French researcher in a colonial environment, putting in question not only his own authority but also the power relationships in which fieldwork in Africa has been conducted for some time.

The work of R. Rosaldo[24], helped me to understand another aspect of self-ethnography that convinced me to add part of myself into the process of writing this thesis. His dialogues with the Ilongots at a time when he was bearing the grief of loss, showed me the ways our own painful or uncomfortable experiences can help us understand the complexity of Others' concerns or conflicts. The work of K. Narayan[25] was another important trigger pushing me to write this thesis in a key that I would not have dared before, leaving aside some of the more constraining boundaries erected by standard academic work. This proves in part why an ethnographer can be more than what Clifford jokingly defines as "a hand that writes"[26].

According to a well-established tradition in my country, I have engaged in psychoanalyst therapy for several years. In Paris, a therapist once told me that she believed that some of the experiences that I often mentioned to her could be described as soft attitudes of racism. I continued these reflexions a few years later with my long-term therapist, Claudio, in Argentina, now communicating digitally, and we started to discuss racism more deeply. Racism is not only that verbal or aggressive form that we can easily identify as explicit abuse; it is sometimes a look, a veiled word, a gesture, an attitude that lingers in the air. While arguably "softer", this soft way to discriminate could make me feel as if my soul had been battered.

Thus, self-awareness of the subject led to awarding a significant role to subjectivity and everyday life. The work of S. Ahmed[27] has shown how feelings are connected to

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[24] Rosaldo, R.: *Culture and Truth. The remaking of social analysis*, Beacon Press, 1989.

[25] Narayan, K.: *Alive in the writing. Crafting ethnography in the company of Chekhov*, University of Chicago Press, 2012.

[26] Clifford, J., and Marcus, G.E.: *Writing Culture, The poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, University of California Press, 1986 (Introduction).

[27] Ahmed, S.: *The cultural politics of emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

political triggers and how those are often used for political purposes. In this thesis, subjectivity and objectivity are methodologically playing in unison to analyse how the mechanisms of racism in sensorial expressions work, always within its historical context. The work of S. Ali[28] was also important in this process, helping me as a researcher to identify my voice and recognise it as valid in terms of subjectivity while working with an objective goal, in this case to recognise different forms of soft racism and how to disarm its diverse resources in the hope of making a difference in the battle against it.

Subjectivity, as you will see, meant that I would allow myself to be in some parts of my research, and that I would take tools learned, as a patient, from psychoanalytic reflexive practices (mostly from Freud and Lacan) applying them to understand how soft racism works on people and communities from diverse backgrounds in the neighbourhood of LGO. Through conversation and talking, which are implicit to therapy, I have learned to observe and understand a variety of situations from a different perspective. My analyst's help has been invaluable to allow me to add this element to the thesis' general analysis, especially in the last chapters Sight, Hearing and Smell.

About Soft Racism

Once I felt myself inside the research, and after having reviewed my materials and defined the topic as racism in the history and the experience of the neighbourhood, I started to work on the design of a concept that I would soon define as *soft racism*. This concept helped me to articulate those grey spaces and interstices of racism situations that I had previously not been able to explain more objectively, because they were not openly explicit. My concept of soft racism is original and helps to identify those acts of racism in daily life that operate through muted channels,

[28] Ali, S.: *Mixed race, Post race. Gender, new ethnicities and cultural practices*, London, Taylor & Francis, 2020.

sometimes based on gestures, and manifestations of disguised racism. This could be partly in line with the idea of "coded" racism rescued by M. Banton[29] referring to J. Solomos when he talks about the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948, "Racialization *was 'done through coded language', 'but "race" itself was not always mentioned as the central issue'*"[30]. Another proximate reference can be found in Gillborn's reflections on racism, as *"the more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the effect of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups*"[31].

However, neither of these scholars has referred to the close relationship that these subtle demonstrations of racism have with the senses. The inner significance of soft racism is that it is not explicit, or openly demonstrated. For that reason, I will talk about hidden forms of racism, that, regardless of their subtleness can be felt by those who experience it as generating equally violent harm. The focus will not be solely on how people perceive this racism, but also in exploring these manifestations of racism. How do they take shape? In what circumstances do they occur within the framework of the neighbourhood's history, its daily life, and the people who inhabit, work, or pass through it?

The difference and originality of the concept is that it requires a sensorial comprehension to understand how it works, and in which ways it manifests its racist preconception.

The concept of Soft racism needs to be thought of as Muted racism, which is often implicit rather than explicit. It is important to clarify from the beginning that soft racism must not be associated with a "soft" experience of racism -rather the opposite-, but with a non-verbal or spoken manifest act of racism, potentially just

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[29] Banton, M.: *Race relations*, Basic Books, 1967.

[30] Solomos, J.: *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain*, London, Macmillan, 1989.

[31] Seen by Cole, M.: *Racism, a critical analysis*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016 (p. 4) in Gillborn, D.: "Critical Race Theory and education: racism and anti-racism in educational theory and praxis", in *Discourse*, 27, 1, 2006. (p.20).

as, or even more, harmful to the person who receives it. Given its characteristics, soft racism is exposed through the use of senses, and thus, also received by sensorial experiences. Soft racism occurs usually in public spaces, and is, unfortunately, part of the daily life of those who are subjected to this kind of treatment.

Acts of soft racism can appear in daily life situations: walking, shopping, in interactions with other people, in brief instances of our daily routine but also in situations of leisure or entertainment. These acts frequently also occur in public areas, in shared places such as streets, public transportation, supermarkets, at school gates, in airports or in any other type of space that we share with strangers.

Acts of Soft racism are hidden (they are not overt or obvious verbal or gestural abuse). They are muted expressions of reprobation, misjudgement, mistrust, disgust, repulsion and rejection of the body of others that look different because of our/their skin colour, physical aspects, our/their names or surnames, or even accents or other forms of difference, which denote that we/they are foreigners in a foreign land.

Soft racism as a sensorial form of racism express itself in corporeal reactions against the body presence of the Other. To facilitate the understanding for those who may have never experienced it, I will reference some common practical examples of daily acts of soft racism.

The look towards others that contains reprobation, rejection, mistrust, and sometimes disgust is a muted act of racism, and can be felt when entering some shops, while queuing in the supermarket, getting on the bus or accessing public services such as medicine in a pharmacy or at the school gates, when we are the object of the looks of other parents. The look can also be accompanied by a bodily reaction, a distancing from the Other, for example when people clutch their bags more tightly or move away from the Other as we/they happen to be closer, even if just strolling or jogging. The physical reactions of mistrust that appear when they

notice that the Other is walking behind them, as if we/they were following/stalking them. They tense up, they stop, they wait, and they look sometimes with disapproval and mistrust, as if we were potential aggressors or robbers.

The body reactions also expand towards other senses such as smell, in demonstrations of disgust towards Others' cuisine, or scents and perfumes; and hearing, when people complain and condemn the volume of music or voices from people of non-white appearances. The tone of our voices and the accent of our speech are also easily targeted with looks (or even words) of reprobation.

These are only some of the most common examples which illustrate the moments of soft racism that some people experience daily. This softness does not relate to the intensity or the impact of the act of racism but to its more muted expression. What also makes soft racism particularly harmful is the experience of repetition, living within a Groundhog Day of muted racist acts, where most of these experiences appear day after day.

About racism

My approach in this thesis focuses more on racism than on race as an isolated concept. This is perhaps because my own background is within the field of African history and the ensuing implications of colonialism in the future of African independent nations. Colonialism and its consequences have always been at the heart of my research interests, especially analysing how postcolonial legacies have shaped realities.

In this regard, I started my path researching *Négritude* as a literary movement with political implications and its contradictory links and rivalries with other perspectives such as Fanon's. Senghor and Césaire, together and separated, the former's anticolonial discourse and the latter's multiple contradictions, achievements, and critiques, have long been a focus of my interests. Fanon's work I have analysed in-

depth, but also his influence, notably in the nationalistic and anti-colonial narratives of South America, and the interpretation of his work from a "Third-Worldist" perspective[32].

This is the background from which my work on this thesis began. Arriving to the discussions on racism through the works of A. Memmi, J. P. Sartre, and F. Fanon.[33]

In this sense, my reflexions on racism are also imbued by historiography about Africa and Africans; as developed by J. Thornton[34], F. Cooper[35], P. Lovejoy[36], G. Balandier[37], J. Jamin[38], J. Copans, J.L. Amselle[39], E. M'Bokolo[40] and so many others from a myriad of perspectives, as I will discuss in the section on geopolitical positioning. In addition,

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[32] My MA Dissertation, Silva Aras, S.: *"Africa en América Latina: la construcción de identidades colectivas poscoloniales en los años '60 y '70",* Universidad de San Andrés-UDESA, 2005. *Available to see here: https://repositorio.udesa.edu.ar/jspui/handle/10908/17850*

[33] I have tried to find these authors' common elements: the colonial relationships from a dialectical view, but with the new elements of the impact on both sides; the psyche of the colonised mind, and the mutations and in part reproductions of the same relationship after the decolonisation processes. Anti-Semitism has been paired with racism from a Sartrean perspective and it later has been retaken in similar keys by Horkheimer and Adorno.

[34] Thornton, J.: *Africa and the Africans, Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[35] Cooper, F.: *Decolonisation and Africa. The labour question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[36] Lovejoy, P.: *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa,* Cambridge University Press, 1983.

[37] Balandier, G.: *Ambiguous Africa. Cultures in collision*, New York, Pantheon, 1966.

[38] Jamin, J. and Copans, J.: *Aux origines de l'anthropologie française. Les Mémoires de la Société des observateurs de l'Homme en l'an VIII*, Paris, Ed. Jean Michel Place, 1994, (1978).

[39] Amselle, J.L. and M'Bokolo, E.: *Au cœur de l'ethnie. Ethnie, tribalisme et État en Afrique*, la Découverte, 2005, (1985).

[40] M'Bokolo, E.: *L'Afrique au XXème siècle. Un continent convoité,* Paris, Seuil, 1985, (1980).

the works of Ngugi Wa Thiongo[41], V.I. Mudimbe[42], W. Soyinka[43], Ch. Achebe[44], E. Said[45], M. Mamdani[46], A. L. Stoler[47], have also been foundational in terms of my continued explorations in the field of African Studies. Moreover, as noted above, the topic of racism presented itself from another perspective once I started to live in Europe as an immigrant. These readings started to take on another, more palpable, form.

This is the context that has shaped my perspective. My treatment of racism in this thesis does not cover discussions about race or race relationships given that my point of view differs in terms of what race is as a category. This is an aspect with which I am not comfortable. As a category with a heavy burden of colonialist ideology, it feels uncomfortably close to actual definitions of racism. As M. Banton would say, it is a construction of the dominance, but in his case, race and racialisation are part of the discussions expanded in the US and in the UK, which I do not consider completely helpful in developing my research. Furthermore, racialisation is a concept that I will not employ as I have not found its application to be appropriate to the case that I worked on. Nevertheless, I have found some points in common with Banton that I will mention soon.

Among other texts on racism that have been instrumental for this thesis, I must cite the work of I. Wallerstein and E. Balibar[48] which is critical to understand how racism

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[41] Thiongo, N, W.: *Decolonising the mind*. *The politics of Language in African Literature,* Harare, East African Educational Publishers, 1986.

[42] Mudimbe, V.I.: *The invention of Africa, gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge*, 1990; and, *The idea of Africa*, Indiana University Press, 1994.

[43] Soyinka, W.: *Myth, literature and the African world*, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

[44] Achebe, Ch.: *Things fall apart,* Penguin Books, 1958.

[45] Said, E.: *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, 1978. Also, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Publishing, 1993.

[46] Mamdani, M.: *Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism,* Princeton University Press, 1996 and 2018.

[47] Stoler, A.L.: *Race and education of Desire. Foucault's History of Sexuality and the colonial order of things,* Duke University Press, 1995.

[48] Balibar, E. and Wallerstein, I.: *Race, nation and class, ambiguous identities,* Verso, 1991.

has transformed its manifestations as the racist narrative started to switch to the culturalist discourse in the late 1980s. Also mentioned by Taguieff,[49] what was called "new racism" is more about the mutations of old narratives, which proves how unfortunately versatile and resilient they have been.

First Materials and Ethnography Account

The ethnographical work that I conducted between 2009-2011 was based on interviews that I tried to collect within the neighbourhood with people who inhabited, worked, or were frequent visitors. This was not an easy task because I am not a very sociable person and even if I could manage the language barrier, people were generally dismissive when approached to conduct a short interview.

Despite these difficulties, I gathered nearly one hundred interviews, covering different people with varied interests in the neighbourhood and with diverse backgrounds and life stories. My tape recorder was not always on, and I also took notes on different notebooks as some of my interviewees did not want our conversations to be recorded. I started to collect a good part of the interviews scribbled onto the notebook and rewrote them once I was back home.

In parallel, I also started to collect different forms of interaction, such as short informal conversations with people in the place, and materials such as flyers, magazines, and newspaper articles referring to the field and/or to the subject of discrimination. I also compiled materials from artistic exhibitions on, and in, the neighbourhood, as well as different kinds of resources, comics, and songs that mentioned LGO. Even if I was in situ, several sources were contacted through the Internet: messaging bloggers or other interlocutors first, and later meeting them in person.

[49] Taguieff, P.A.: *The force of prejudice*. *On racism and its doubles*, London, University of Minnesota Press,2001.

As a historian, I also visited archives, and attempted to find materials referent to LGO with a more historical context; poring through old journals and local publications, notably in the Association St. Bruno's small library, which is the most comprehensive in LGO. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) also provided me with some materials, such as old photographs of LGO, and other mentions to the district in different publications from the past. The BNF's resources referent to E. Zola and his work, notably his preparatory notes for *L'Assommoir*, were crucial for the last chapter Smell.

The materials were revised in 2017 once I was accepted at University of Sussex. Certainly, when I transcribed and translated the interviews from French to English, I confronted them in a different way. I found myself questioning all of them, realising they were perhaps insufficient, dated or not relevant for the purpose of the new project. Perhaps it was the passing of time and the awakening of new interests as the project was changing. If I wanted to work with the senses, I needed to reconsider bringing new materials, or new perspectives or approaches on the old ones.

The fieldnotes were my first steppingstone. They were full of details about the context and the situation of the interviews, but they also contained observations about the atmosphere that accompanied them. Understood in a dialogic perspective my fieldnotes were considered if not textual in the corpus of the thesis, as part of a background that helped me to recreate elements of the atmosphere of some of the interviews and situations that were still relevant (as you will see in the chapters Sight, Hearing or Touch).

To the corpus that I had, I added new materials. I returned to Paris on three more occasions, ensuring I *walked* in LGO at various times and at different paces. Walking[50] as an exercise to cover the field and recognize the neighbourhood from a different perspective was crucial. More on this in the chapter Sight. Walking also pushed me

[50] De Certeau, M.: "Walking in the city", in *op.cit.* (91-110).

to uncover a more historical landscape of the place, which I complemented through traditional archive research, facilitated by the greater availability of on-line materials, such as Zola's sketches and notes, old photographs, and other materials related to the neighbourhood, many of which never did find their place herein, but which I secure for future research interests.

Social media, and French media coverage were also part of my materials, as was fashion and its different manifestations. Films were also analysed, not just to be referenced or focused on specifically, but as part of the underlying context of some of the main materials. Literature, novels, and comics inspired by the neighbourhood[51] or simply mentioning it[52] also helped me to appreciate different views, even if I could not find a specific place for them to be relevant. The same goes for music, as you will discover in the chapter Hearing.

In other words, cultural products and practices became, together with the stories and interviews from the neighbourhood, my main source of materials.

Before concluding this section, I must add a word about photographing the neighbourhood. I was always extremely reluctant to take pictures. Among other reasons because I never felt comfortable portraying the place literally; understanding that act as an exercise of visual power on something that I preferred to investigate from bellow. For this reason, I only have a few images taken by me, and pictures borrowed from my friend Ricardo who accompanied me to discover the neighbourhood on a visit to Paris and who took several photographs. My pictorial recall comes from the illustrations I made at the time, which are relative to my own perceptions of the place, as you will find in the chapter Sight. Some of my illustrations are also included in the chapter Touch, where I have drawn images of an exhibition of Martin Parr, portraying the place with my eyes in a different way. Lastly, in the chapter Smell, in addition to my own illustrations, you will see caricatures of Zola

[51] Such as Tournier, M.: *La Goutte d'Or*, Paris, Folio, 1985.

[52] Abouet, M.: *Aya de Youpogon*, Vol 4, Paris, Gallimard, 2009.

taken from old journals and magazines, as well as his own sketches of LGO, taken from the BNF's on-line database.

Geopolitical position

I was conflicted about the ethnographic work I conducted in Paris between 2009-2012. In contrast with the more traditional values of ethnography, my standard point would never be from a higher place. I never felt as if I was observing and taking notes from a more powerful place than that of my interviewees; "the standpoint", as Clifford calls it from where the ethnographer reads a piece of reality[53]. It was difficult to obtain people's approval or even to get them to talk to me. To the extent that I almost felt that they had more power on the situation in these participant observations. The same applied to the circumstances in which I was participating, as a volunteer (in the neighbourhood *Fête* or in other activities organised by local associations), as you will read in the chapter Sight ("The Projection"). My standpoint was confused, or at least, it felt that way to me as a researcher.

The uncomfortable place where I was situated during my fieldwork helped me to shape this project's methodology. My authority was questioned, and I needed to take control of my research. I was constantly reminded that I was not from there. Perhaps this is what happens in every fieldwork setting, in every new discovery of a new place, culture or social group?

However, that reminder that I was from the "outside" had other connotations for me. I was in the capital of a European country; and while we can argue about the subalternity of La Goutte d'Or in its context, I was not from there. I was (am) a researcher from South America (more recently known as part of the "global

[53] Clifford, J., and Marcus, G.E.: *op.cit.*

South"[54]). I was neither a European nor a (North) American researcher with a scholarship doing a fieldwork on a subaltern place of the globe. Similarly, I was not coming from Africa, even though I had recently been working in Africa and have always felt that there is some sense of closeness within the Southern world.

It was unusual, I agree. An Argentinian interested in the complexities of racism and colonial heritage through the senses, in Paris. This gave me the place where I was able to "read" as Clifford would say, or "sense" that same complexity in a different way to the previous research conducted on the subject or close to it. Nonetheless, I was aware of racism as my own country's history is built on a racist history of the building of the nation-state.

Who speaks for whom is another recurrent and yet current discussion in the field of ethnography and in this case, it is in relation to who I was as a researcher. I was trying to do research work about, and on, a field that is not normally the subject for researchers of the global South. While it is common for European (or American) scholars to be interested in fields located in the global South, the opposite is much rarer. My location in the research could therefore be defined as being *upturned*. Being a "*sudaca*[55]" has made me author this thesis from a different geopolitical perspective, as a Southern researcher focusing on Northern topics, (yet, ultimately, related to the South).

[54] There is a certain reticence from the South, especially from South American intellectuals or scholars to accept the idea of "global South". This is based on the conception about globalisation which is considered as a neoliberal model. This is a discussion that deserves greater attention. I will use the term global South, for the purposes of naming the southern hemisphere in relation to its historically conflictive relationships with Northern economic powers, normally the US and Europe.

[55] *Sudaca* is a colloquial term that means South American, first used in a pejorative and xenophobic sense in the 1980s by Spaniards to refer to South American immigrants that arrived in Spain in that period. Still employed to a lesser degree, it has been transformed by South American populations as a way to self-identify and express pride as a community of immigrants, inverting its initial discriminatory sense.

This opposition to a standard point of view, shapes my positionality in the research. This might be close to the recent trend on "decolonial" perspectives around the geopolitics of knowledge sustained originally by W. Mignolo[56] and by D. Chakrabarty[57]. Both authors remind us how Western influence in the Southern academic milieu continues to be a powerful paradigm, for example when we learn European history as the core of our studies on History. However, this thesis does not fully correspond to that tradition, because I was lucky enough to be trained in (and later had the opportunity to teach) African Studies from a non-Eurocentric perspective[58]. This reality has inspired me and corresponds to the type of research that I had previously conducted in relation to Africa and Latin America[59].

Other major works influenced my practice. Firstly, E. Dussel[60], whose research assured me that from a "Southern" position[61] we can nurture another perspective on Europe and, in my case, European colonial history. Secondly, the work of Ch. Anta

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[56] Mignolo, W.: *The darker side of renaissance: Literacy, territoriality and Colonisation*, Duke University Press, 1997.

[57] Chakrabarty, D.: "Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: who speaks for Indian pasts?", in *Representations*, 37, 1992.

[58] At the University of Buenos Aires, where the module "History of colonisation and decolonisation of Africa and Asia", has been working with non-Eurocentric historiography about Africa (and Asia) since the early 1980s, largely influenced by Eric Wolf, Immanuel Wallerstein, Frederick Cooper, and the UNESCO History of Africa, to mention just a few.

[59] Silva Aras, S.: *op.cit.* 2005.

[60] In 1966, Dussel defended his doctorate in Paris, with a dissertation about the construction of a Latin American view on Europe. It was a precursor for the understanding of a non-Eurocentric perspective on the history of the continent. Dussel, E.: *Hipótesis para el estudio de Latinoamérica en la historia universal. Investigación del "mundo" donde se constituyen y evolucionan las "Weltanschauungen",* 1966. http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/otros/20120408102154/latino.pdf

[61] I am myself an immigrant in Europe, despite being married to a European man and becoming a Spanish national after several years of procedures. I am also a daughter of immigrant parents, and I also gave birth to a child in a different country to that of his parents'. Immigration is in my family's history and in that of my ancestors.

Diop, whose doctoral thesis about the African component of ancient Egyptian civilisation was refuted by the University of Sorbonne in the 1950s[62].

This thesis attempts to bring a different perspective on the subject of racism in Europe, and the influence of colonialism and empire on the contemporary relationships between the migrants of today and the local populations. In addition to academic interests, my other passion is art and music. An illustrator, musically trained from an early age, I have been able to see and understand the challenges of this thesis from a broader (not purely academic) perspective. The drawings that I have made for this purpose reflect this approach.

Chapters

Below is a very brief account of the following chapters. I will not enter into any great detail, preferring to give the reader the opportunity of discovering all for themselves.

Each chapter has its own story and dynamics, and is focused primarily on a single sense, while recognising that there are -of course- connections between all the senses. However, the connections between them are grounded in the history and experiences of the same place, the neighbourhood of La Goutte d'Or.

Each chapter contains its own framework of analysis, following the principal hypothesis on the connections between racism and colonialism, but with multiple variations based on each case. Each chapter develops how the senses operate in the practice of racism situations and how through them, racism and soft racism are

[62] This situation not only established a precedent regarding the positionality of an ethnographer or a historian about Western hegemony in the academic world, but also about contested literature and inversed views on the traditional paradigm of Western historiographical approaches to Egypt and Africa, much before the movement of Subaltern Studies had born. On this last point I must acknowledge the inspirational quality of this school; having recently discovered that Ranajit Guha, the founder of the Journal of Subaltern Studies, was a student at the same university where I am today.

perceived. Reading them will help to understand the way in which my theoretical options were taken.

Chapter I: Discussions about racism

In this chapter I review the discussions about racism. The focus is on the French case, as it is the most relevant for my research, but I also ask myself about the lack of international exchanges in the studies dedicated to racism, which had in the past been able to cross language barriers. I will address what could be the causes of this new isolated situation in which the development of Race and Racism Studies have grown independently, without significant debates or discussions with other intellectuals or scholars from different parts of the globe. Not only are there no clear contemporary exchanges between the North and the South, but also within the North itself, as French, US and UK traditions on the subject have solidified on divergent paths, rendering real dialogue between them ever more challenging.

Chapter II: Sight

Starting with a visual discovery of the district and presenting some flashes of racism from LGO, I introduce a trip to the neighbourhood through my visual sense, following the experience of walking (paraphrasing M. De Certeau). Once there, I share and analyse a specific experience from my fieldwork that I have called "The projection", playing with the term of what we see on a film screen, and what we see in the room, and how those different gazes and looks express different accounts of racism; the analysis based on experiences of racism and exclusion, with a game of crossed points of view concerning the past, and the present, and the different individuals involved - including myself. In this chapter I also work with the origins of the representation of the Other during French colonialism, but in the location of an urban space, in Paris, and analyse how that can be related to the neighbourhood's contemporary reality, in terms of race relationships and racism.

Chapter III: Touch

The sense of Touch is understood herein in its corporeal capacity, in relation to Touch through our bodies. Firstly, the chapter focuses on Touch according to the proximity of the Other's body considered as a menace in manifestations of soft and not-so-soft racism. The space, covered by the body of the Other provokes a fear and demonisation of that possible touch, leading to rejection and separation from them. I will present a case study around the conflict surrounding two local Mosques, whose lack of space pushes the faithful to pray in the street. The political responses to this conflict, and the way it ultimately unfolds, are interesting to observe, particularly in contraposition with a parallel photographic exhibition depicting the same realities of praying bodies in the streets.

Secondly, I present Touch once again in relation to the body, but now in the act of its covering. African fabrics lead me to trace discussions on authenticity and exotism and ask why covering bodies with particular garments and symbols can also hide racist attitudes. There are also positive ways to battle and resist racism emerging in the neighbourhood. I introduce some of these through the work of young entrepreneurs of LGO, to show how the district continues its struggle against historical prejudices.

Chapter IV: Taste

In this chapter, the focus is on food and on how it can be subject to colonial misadventures. The resistance of the palate can also expose racism through taste. I trace a possible history of couscous as a dish that is now among the most popular in France. Analysing its history enables me to consider how taste also implies the selection, and the rejection of the taste of Others. I also introduce other examples of how African cuisine has tried to become part of the gastronomic offer in France, where food is elevated to national symbol status.

Chapter V: Hearing

In this chapter the sense of Hearing operates on three levels:

A) how the neighbourhood's soundscape is produced, for example in a song about the history of immigration in France.

B) listening to interviews and the sounds that go with them. Hearing is understood in terms of listening to different statements of social politics about the neighbourhood and at the same time, asking myself how are the voices of the neighbourhood listened to?

C) voices on the radio. Through two different on-line radio-stream shows, we listen to different voices of the neighbourhood talking about racism. How do these voices represent the soundscape of the neighbourhood? I reflect on how to listen to these voices that broaden the scope of working with situations of racism, through conversation and dialogue.

Chapter VI: Smell

What do Emile Zola and Jacques Chirac have in common in relation to LGO?

A narrative of rejection based on odours, which stains the neighbourhood's reputation.

I work on Smell as a sense, from two sides. Firstly, in the construction of prejudices about the Other through smell. Odours and especially bad odours are powerfully linked to rejection throughout LGO's history. Hence, I analyse E. Zola's novel *L'Assommoir* which is located in LGO, with the help of Corbin's work (*The Foul and the Fragrance*). I also address how Zola establishes his different ambitions within a Darwinist framework, akin to the racist narratives of the colonial era, to build a story about the working sectors that inhabited the neighbourhood. Sensorial expressions, particularly odours, emanating from the novel have had a long-lasting negative

impact on LGO's reputation, which I link to the neighbourhood's more contemporary history of bad standing.

In the second part, I bring a new element to Smell -memory- which continues and perpetuates its association with bad odours. A simple anecdote still remembered in France, and especially in La Goutte d'Or, about a speech of former president J. Chirac, illustrates how memories of colonialism can connect to a racist narrative, through the triggering of memories by the sense of Smell.

CHAPTER I: Discussions about racism

Participants of the 1st International Congress of Black Writers and Artists. Paris, September 1956.

Source: ©Présence Africaine

"During the next sessions you will hear about the responsibilities of Western culture on colonization and racism"[63].

Alioune Diop. Inaugural speech at the

1st International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Paris, September 1956.

A place for exchanges

[63] "Actes du 1er Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs", *Présence Africaine*, VIII-IX-X, June-November 1956. Original in French, my translation.

What do I find most striking about this picture? That I can see, at the same time and in the same place, relevant and fundamental figures from different locations discussing and fighting against racism, and colonialism.

With the organisation of this international Congress, the literary magazine *Présence Africaine* achieved an unprecedented, and perhaps unique, gathering of leaders, thinkers and representatives at the core of what would later be Black, Race and / or Racism Studies, in Francophone and Anglophone (and even, Lusophone) contexts. These individuals were to be the inspiration for many of the discussions on racism developed years later.

I can see different nationalities, different backgrounds, different futures, and different languages in this image. There is Aimé Césaire, from Martinique, not just embedded at this time in the *Négritude* movement but also dealing with the reality of colonialism[64]. Frantz Fanon, also from the Antilles, who had already published at that moment what remains his masterpiece[65]. Cheik Anta Diop whose thesis about the Black roots of Ancient Egypt[66] was rejected, but which initiated a new and non-

[64] *Discours sur le colonialisme*, (1955) and *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (1956) by A. Césaire. In addition to his interest in poetry, he was a member of the Communist Party of Martinique for years until he decided to resign (see the "Letter to M. Thorez") arguing that Communists had always been accomplices of colonialism in his land. He became a senator and public figure in Martinique and together with L.S. Senghor was included in the Pantheon of the French Academy after his death in 2008. See Césaire, A.: *Discourse on colonialism. A Poetics on Anticolonialism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972.

[65] *Black Skins, White Masks* was first published in French in 1952. Fanon also participated in the 2nd Congress of Black writers and Artists in Rome in 1959; by then he was politically engaged with the anti-colonial movement in Algeria. Fanon F.: *Black Skins, White Masks,* Pluto press, 2017.

[66] Cheik Anta Diop prepared his Doctoral Thesis at the University of La Sorbonne on the subject of the African origins of Egyptian Civilization. His dissertation was rejected by the committee at that time, in 1952, unanimously considering it as invalid as it was against the *canon* of an Ancient History as told by Europeans. Some years later as the chief publisher of the magazine *Présence Africaine* he published it with the title *Nations Nègres et Culture* (1955). His work marks a turning point in Egyptology and Classical history but also inspired later authors such as Martin Bernal, or even Edward Said. Today,

Eurocentric perspective on Ancient History, inspiring later authors and postcolonial theory. I can also recognise René Depestre, who years later will be exiled in Cuba and will discuss the pros and cons of the *Négritude* movement[67], coined by another man in the same picture, Léopold Sedar Senghor, together with Aimé Césaire. On the other end, I can see the future leader of the independence movement in Mozambique, Marcelino dos Santos[68] and also Richard Wright, seemingly enjoying himself despite the reproaches of his colleagues at the Congress who were in shock that W.E.B. Du Bois[69] was denied a passport to travel with him.

There were two more gatherings of this kind, in 1959, the 2nd International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, and in Dakar, in 1966, the World Festival of Black Arts, organized by the then president of Senegal, Léopold Sedar Senghor. However, this first event is the culmination of the intense political and intellectual activities and discussions that African, West Indian and Afro-Americans held in Paris between the wars, around the issues of race, racism and colonialism[70]. These initiatives were part of a powerful commitment from intellectuals, thinkers and political leaders that felt

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one of the most prestigious universities in Africa, in Senegal, bears his name. Bernal M.: *Black Athena. The Afro-asiatic roots of classical civilisation*, (3 Vols.), Vintage, 1991 and 1999. Said, E.: *op.cit.*

[67] Depestre, R.: *Bonjour et Adieu à la Négritude*. Published initially in Présence Africaine (1980).

[68] A poet, Marcelino dos Santos led his country, Mozambique, in the anti-colonial fight against Portuguese colonial rule in the 1970s. He founded the Liberation Front of Mozambique that, with some changes, still governs the country. A minister in the first independent government, he held several other political engagements in Mozambique's nation-building process.

[69] The father of the "Harlem Renaissance" was invited especially to the Congress but the US government denied him the right to obtain a passport. The writer sent a letter to the Congress explaining this situation and denouncing this flagrant act of racism and discrimination.

[70] Between 1929 and 1940 two major publications were born, *Légitime Défense* (1932) founded by another Caribbean intellectual, Léon Gotran-Damas, followed by *L'Étudiant Noir (1935)*. Both reflected the major discussions around *Négritude*, racism, Africa, discrimination and colonialism. At the same time, several Afro-American writers were in Paris, such as Claude McKay and Lanston Hughes among others*, "who transmitted the black experiences from America to the black poets and writers in Paris"*, as Irene L. Gendzier mentions in Gendzier, L.: *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study*, New York, Grove Press, 1985, (1974). Also see Vaillant, J.G.: *Black, French and African*, *a life of Léopold Sédar Senghor,* Harvard University Press, 1990.

that racism and colonialism were on the same side of the equation. Faced with this situation, they called for resistance and fighting back under an anti-colonial programme. This extended to supporting the struggle of Afro-Americans against segregation and for the acquisition of Civil Rights.

What is also shocking from the picture above is that it seems almost impossible to imagine such a gathering today. Black, Race and Racism Studies have diversified in some contexts (namely in the US and UK) while they have been slightly downplayed in others (particularly in France). Despite the greater facilities to communicate, the level of dialogue between different intellectuals, writers and scholars around topics that continue to have powerful effects on societies, such as racism, and now neo or postcolonial relationships, has waned. The language, or context barrier, seems to have solidified around superficially divergent evolutions of local realities[71].

As academic literature and discourse grows within each language, the sharing of perspectives on the topics of race and racism seems to decline, making a gathering such as this seem so much more unlikely at present. Whether it be in France, in the UK or the US, students and academics rarely focus on other language content in this field. This linguistic insularity clearly limits the potential, and value, of broader international debates. The more Universalist and unifying commitment that the picture so vividly represents now seems antiquated.

What happened next with Racism and Race Studies?

The tradition of Black or Afro-American Studies is extensive in the US. Originating in W.E.B. Du Bois and the "Harlem Renaissance" movement of arts, it generated several interpretations and discussions around the black population in the United States, African heritage and discussions about race and mixed race. The connections established from the figure of W.E.B Du Bois to the first anti-colonial manifestations

[71] See for example Claire Alexander, regarding only the vicissitudes of Race Studies in English language, and how they are completely fragmented at present. Alexander, C.: "Breaking Black: the end of Black Studies", in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:6, (1034-1054), 2018.

were through Pan-Africanism, thereby spanning the Atlantic and finding echoes in several European cities, such as in Manchester[72].

There is also a legal or juridical context to US Race or Racism Studies, stemming from Law Studies scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois. Eminent public figures like Martin Luther King Jr. or even Malcolm X, added a cultural and historical component to this tradition during the most militantly active periods in the 1950s and 1960s.

During those same times of intense civil rights movement's political activity[73], influences and discussions on different political actions were still part of a shared canvas. Anti-colonial movements had grown since the first independence wars of Indochina and Algeria[74], and these political causes were extensively discussed in France, but also in the African territories still under French control. Once the African independences were won, different positions surfaced making these meetings and discussions more difficult. Ultimately, anti-colonial narratives followed different paths.

The Festival of Algiers in 1969, of which the film that documented it has recently been discovered[75], represented the end of the togetherness that we saw in previous encounters, such as the one portrayed in the picture. Planned as a response to Senghor's Festival of Black Arts (1966) in Dakar, the Festival of Algiers offered a clear glimpse of the dissenting voices within those precedent discussions. Fanon died a year before the end of the Algerian War, and by 1969 Algeria was the epicentre of the period's anti-colonial struggles. Combined with this narrative, the arrival and

[72] Adi, H.: "The Comintern and Black workers in Britain and France, 1919- 1937", in *Immigrants and Minorities*, 28:2-3, (224-245), 2010.

[73] The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colour People) founded in 1909, made a turn to more political action since the first pacific protest of Rosa Parks in 1955. From there, their actions will also be seen as influential for other Black and Anticolonialist movements. See Davies, Tom A.: *Mainstreaming Black Power*, University of California Press, 2019.

[74] Especially after the Setiff massacre of 1945, and the Malgache massacre of 1947.

[75] Hadouchi, O.: "African Culture will be revolutionary or will not be. William Klein's film of the First Pan-African Festival of Algiers (1969)", in *Third Text*, 25:1, 2011.

participation of so many black artists[76] from the US who were politically active against the American system of racism and segregation, and with the support of other political leaders, from Asia and Latin America, close to anti-colonial movements, the festival became a demonstration of the change of axis of the discussions about racism and colonialism and it was certainly the beginning of a new order.[77]

During the 1960s and 1970s, the most remarkable approaches to race and racism came from the UK, through the works of M. Banton[78] and J. Rex[79], laying the foundations of what several years later would become a myriad of different interpretations and takes on the discussions around racism. The studies on racism became more complex, not only because of the emergence of new views, changes in the historical context and the theoretical frame, but also because social realities were being included in the analysis. Theoretical frames from Marxism started to discuss the relationship between race and class, as in the work of R. Miles[80] who established a different approach to Banton's and Rex's. The life experiences of working-classes from immigrant origins were the basis from which to focus on class and race in the context of the social and economic relationships in Britain in the 1970s.

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[76] Archie Shepp was the most notorious artist, remembered by his introduction of African sounds to jazz music. Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba were also present, the latter exiled from South Africa.

[77] What was once anti-colonial for the leaders of African independence, became "anti-imperialist" for the Latin American revolutionaries who were influenced by Fanon, representing the idea of colonialism with the idea of imperialism in the hegemonic figure of the United States and its interventions in the continent's South.

[78] Banton, M.: *op.cit.*

[79] Rex, J.: *Race relations in sociological theory*, London, Wendelfeld & Nicholson, 1970.

[80] Miles, R.: *Racism and migrant labour*, Routledge, 2003, (1982). It is important to note the important role of the CCCS-Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the production around the discussions about race and class.

Soon after, P. Gilroy[81] and P. Parmar[82] proposed a different interpretation to that of R. Miles. The same workers from foreign origins (from former colonies of the British Empire), also had different stories related to their experiences with colonialism and their lives in multicultural England. They had political and cultural practices beyond the "racialised class" model presented by R. Miles. In this way, their work laid the foundations for some of P. Gilroy's future work, where, among different new approaches, race became not just a point of stigmatisation, but also a "base for action" and political mobilisation[83].

Meanwhile in the US, after the Civil Rights battles were surmounted, new discussions on race relationships progressed towards the inclusion of new realities such as immigration. Despite the influence of the American sociological tradition on Race Studies[84] in the UK, the paths had diverged in terms of the discussions about racism (race and race relationships). Each scholarly location was concentrating increasingly on its own individual case.

In the late 1980s, the emergence of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the US established new ways to understand racism. Inspired by Derrick Bell's work[85], a group of American scholars (of different origins), explored racism from different angles, questioning the

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[81] Gilroy, P.: "Steppin' out of Babylon, race, class and autonomy", in *Empire Strikes Back, race and racism in 70's Britain*, Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Routledge, 1982.

[82] Parmar, P.: "Gender, Race and Class, Asian women in resistance", in *Empire Strikes Back, race and racism in 70's Britain*, 1982.

[83] Gilroy, P.: *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, Routledge, 1987.

[84] Back, L. and Solomos, J.: *Theories of race and racism, a reader,* Routledge, 2000, 2009.

[85] Derrick Bell worked in the field of law related to racism. He and some students started to explore how the legal system did not apply equally in society. This was a way to put under scrutiny the colour-blind policies that had forged the idea of racial integration. Derrick Bell's most cited work in the CRT is *Faces at the bottom of the well* (1992), where he reflected about his case at Harvard, denouncing and fighting against the discrimination of Black women scholars seeking to be integrated into the teaching staff. Bell, D.: *Faces at the bottom of the well*. *The Permanence of racism*, Basic Books, 2018, (1992).

idea of a society where colour-blindness operates as a narrative of integration. Their approach, identifying different phases to consider racism as an experience, is still very current. Particularly, Derrick Bell's work focuses on the historical experiences of black people in the United States. He developed a new rhetoric, which he identified as "storytelling", to strengthen his thesis about how racism operates in daily life. Storytelling or "counter-narrative", as it is often labelled by CRT scholars, is based on the notion of sharing a story, which could be fictional, under the form of a parable exercise (without the moral component); allowing the author to demonstrate his or her point. In a way, it is a kind of a maieutic method revisited, in written form -of course, leading the reader to reflect on social and philosophical conclusions regarding the experience of racism.

While counter-narratives serve as a mode of explanation for some CRT authors, the actual debates that were held, as demonstrated within the sizable CRT edited publication[86], contain extremely valuable insights into the new challenges against racism in the US. Perera's article on the "The Black-White paradigm on race"[87] and Richard Delgado's "Rodrigo's portent"[88] are among the most relevant works in this context. From slightly different perspectives, both articles highlight the reality that a white-black binary focus is no longer sufficient to measure the effects of racism in America. The Latino[89] and Asian experiences reflect that the traditional race categories

[86] Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (eds.): *Critical Race Theory, an Introduction,* NYU Press, 1995.

[87] Perera, J.F.: "Black and White paradigm on race", in Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (eds.): *Critical Race Theory, The cutting edge*, Temple University Press, 2013

[88] Delgado uses the counter-narrative method to show how the State of California evolved a new colonial façade within its boundaries. See Delgado, R.: "Rodrigo's Portent" in Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (eds.): *op.cit*.

[89] The work of E. Bonilla-Silva has also worked on the colour-blind system and its relation to racism in the United States. See: Bonilla-Silva, E.: *Racism Without Racists: Colour-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

in the US are more complex, without even mentioning the historical racist discrimination against Native Americans[90].

Rediscovering Fanon

The 1990s and the new century brought about a rediscovery of F. Fanon and his work on racism, linked to experiences of colonialism. H. Bhabha[91] and G. Spivak[92] are among the most renown scholars from the field of Postcolonial Studies to reintroduce the debates originated by Fanon. Most of the references to his work have concentrated on *Black Skin, White Masks*, (originally published in French in 1952, and first translated into English in 1961). Interestingly, his last work, *The Wretched of the Earth*[93], is far less referenced, while it was a major influence for anti-racist and anti-colonial political movements[94] in the US and in countries where anti-colonial movements were in their heyday in the 1970s. Although it has started to be more considered recently, this neglect is reflected in the fact that it was out of print in English for several decades, until it was reprinted at the turn of the century[95].

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[90] CRT recently gained mainstream notoriety, following the introduction of the history of racism in the US, as part of the education curricula, provoking heated resistance and critiques from different conservative sectors.

[91] Bhabha, H.: "Remembering Fanon, Self, Psyche and Colonial condition", Foreword to the English re-edition of F. Fanon's, *Black Skin, White Masks*, in 1986.

[92] Spivak, G.: *A critique of postcolonial reason, towards a history of the vanishing present*, Harvard University Press, 1999.

[93] Fanon, F.: *The wretched of the earth*, Grove Atlantic, 2007. (1961)

[94] Especially among leaders of the Black Panthers, such as S. Carmichael who praised him as a saint. Carmichael, S. and Hamilton, C.: *Black Power. The politics of Liberation in America*, Cape, 1968. This would
spark an argument with Hannah Arendt about the chapter on violence. See Arendt, H.: *On Violence*, New York,
Harcourt Brace, 1969.

[95] It was reprinted by Penguin in 2001, which has since printed several more editions.

While Fanon was present, in spirit, in the works that revived him, his figure started to be blurred within different interpretations of his work in the English-speaking academic world. The reappropriation of Fanon's ideas about racism, race, colonialism and the psyche, which began in the 1990s has been extensive and has almost acquired trend status in different debates or discussions on racism from the Postcolonial Studies perspective.

The focus on Fanon has largely been on the philosophical approach to the relationship between racism and colonialism, accentuating the psyche of the colonised mind where he was inspired by different clinical cases as well as by his own experience. In his strong opposition to O. Manoni[96], Fanon establishes his first clear ideas on how colonialism defined race, and how racism cannot be separated from colonialism. Together, *Black Skin*… and *The Wretched of the Earth* tried to resolve that problem through political action. Critics like H. Bhabha, after all the complex analysis of Fanon's oeuvre (mostly *Black Skin*)[97], seem to be closer to what Fanon criticised of Manoni[98]: a complex scrutiny of the psyche of the colonised, that in fact keeps its own damage unchanged. The influence of the called French Theory[99] on postcolonial scholars has also brought

[96] See Fanon, F.: "The so-called dependency complex of the colonised", in *Black skin, white masks*, 1967. Fanon criticised O. Manoni's views about the unsolvable resolution of mutual dependency between colonised and coloniser, in Manoni, O.: *Psychologie de la colonisation*, 1950. English version Manoni, O.: *Prospero and Caliban. The psychology of colonization*, University of Michigan Press, 1998, 2001.

[97] Postcolonial scholars and their followers focused more on this first work, perhaps neglecting *The Wretched…* as it was considered too politically engaged. However, the last chapter of *The Wretched*… ("On National Culture") clearly explains the risk of identities created around the idea of race leading to a dead end. This has been reworked by S. Hall on several occasions, for example: Hall, S.: *op.cit.* and Fanon, F.: *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Atlantic, 2007.

[98] Manoni's fieldwork was conducted in the Malgache territories of France, today the independent Madagascar.

[99] The current of post-structuralist philosophy has been adopted as tools of analysis by H. Bhabha, G. Spivak and others, particularly the work of G. Deleuze and J. Derrida (of whom Spivak has translated some of his texts into English). However, they have been criticised in France given the perceived contradiction of employing these, profoundly Eurocentric philosophers, as anchors. See Amselle, J.L.:

about different understandings to Fanon's ideas, provoking a distancing from the totality and the core of his work.

Fanon is read in different keys, through multiple understandings that have been applied to different cases. For example, in the case of Bhabha to his own definitions of *mimicry* and later *hybridity*. Racism ceases to be the focus and disappears in the elucidations of race relationships, working on the psychoanalytic perspective of that same dependency that Manoni had already worked on, with the twist of mimicry: how the new subjects from the global South living today in the North incorporated the new frame (culture). That conflict is resolved, in theory of course, with the idea of hybridity[100], which corresponds fully to the idea of global immigration since the post-independence (or postcolonial) period. There is something truly attractive in the idea of *liminal* spaces[101] that I fell in awe of, in my youthful days of discovery.

However, returning to the topic of racism, there is little of it remaining in those interpretations, and that shows how disconnected racism became as a topic of intellectual (or even political) discussions in that period. In some way, the level of complexity that the works on Fanon, and the applications of Fanon's ideas had experimented had neutralised the figure and his own narrative and work.

L'occident décroché, Enquête sur les postcolonialismes, Paris, Stock, 2008. See also Bongis, C.: *Friends and Enemies, the Scribal politics of post/colonial literature*, Liverpool University Press, 2008; and Simek, N.: "The Criticism of Postcolonial Critique", in Di Leo, J. (ed.): *Criticism after Critique, Aesthetics, Literature and the Politics*, Springer, 2014.

[100] The concept of Hybridity applied to culture has been adjudicated to H. Bhabha from his 1994 work *The location of Culture, Taylor & Francis, 2012, (1994)*; however, the anthropologist N. García Canclini introduced the concept in his book (in Spanish): *Culturas híbridas, estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, in 1989. This is but one small example of how the lack of exchanges of international discussions have marked the development of academic debates, largely due to the lack of multilingual exchanges and/or lack of timely translations. García Canclini, N.: *Hybrid Cultures. Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity,* University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

[101] Here, the influence of the work of G. Deleuze and F. Guattari is striking, see Deleuze G. and Guattari, F.: *A Thousand plateaus, capitalism and schizophrenia*, Bloomsbury, 1980.

While Fanon has received so much attention, at different times, the field of Race Studies has grown on both sides of the Atlantic, increasing the panoply of interpretations, complex definitions (that are not always related to the social or political -or cultural- complexities of the subject, but rather to theorisation exercises) and conceptualisations that have resulted in the replacement of racism by race, as the central axis of analysis.

Fanon as a sensorial thinker

Fanon's work is openly based on experiences, his psychoanalytic perspective is formed in the place and voice of the patient, as he too was a victim of racism. In this sense, the extensive literature on Fanon developed and labelled as psychoanalytic, leaves aside the idea of the practice of psychiatry or psychoanalysis, that Fanon had used to talk about racism through the experiences of his patients, and trying to put himself as one, as he certainly was the object of his own work.

Another important element from Fanon's work, also omitted in his recent rediscovery, centres around the sensorial element of his psychoanalytic perspective. *Black Skin*... is a compendium of experiences about racism, analysed, of course, *a posteriori*, but still, told as different sensorial situations (sight, hearing and even touch are present in the narrative of the analysis and the cases he cites). Those different moments[102] and experiences of daily life of the relationships between colonised and coloniser are reflected in a deep sensorial perception, which is later analysed through multiple tools, not only psychological or philosophical, but also with a political emphasis. His sensitiveness (and by this I do not mean a sense of weakness but rather the awareness of how senses work) opened the conflict of racism to a broader analysis on colonialism and the mind.

[102] Despite his strong critiques of Hegel, Fanon's interpretation of racism is still dialectic.

It is remarkable that the multiple interpretations and uses of Fanon lack this approach, and I suspect that this is in line with the mistrust or dismissiveness regarding sensorial approaches, in relation to the links between subjectivity and objectivity[103]. Moreover, the distance that most scholars have taken from Fanon's political discussions about the future of Africa[104], might also be at play. It seems that making Fanon's work more complex than what it really was, has succeed in the academic world, whereas the opportunity to construct a more contemporary anti-racist narrative, which was clearly not on the scholarly agenda, has been missed.

As I will try to demonstrate, the sensorial approach to racism, first made by Fanon and also by A. Memmi[105], has a powerful relationship to the experience of racism itself. Racism as an experience, is what Fanon worked on; talking (he was an accomplished storyteller[106], even transforming these stories into poems) and thinking about what he was saying regarding these experiences, from himself, or from others. His narrative corresponds to different sensorial experiences of racism, which unfortunately, have been somewhat deactivated by new terminologies.

What Fanon's broader and globalised figure should not obviate (although it often does) are his strong roots in French colonialist history and to the French experience of racism, which is not necessarily comparable to other realities. His experience is understandable and explainable from the self, his explanation and experience reveal his psychoanalytic approach, and his work on the fight against colonialism is most

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[103] D. Howes mentions how the field of Senses Studies battled serious misconceptions from other fields in relation to subjectivity, and the values of veracity. See Howes, D.: *Empire of the senses*, Berg, 2005.

[104] Which are still related to racism, as A. Memmi reprises in his work *Decolonisation and the decolonised*, *op.cit.*

[105] A. Memmi's work on racism has also been revalorised. His first work, *The coloniser and the colonised*, also represents another sensorial point of departure to work with and discuss racism and its relationship with colonialism in a given historical context. Memmi, A.: *op.cit.* and *Le Racisme*, 1982.

[106] This is what CRT has been experimenting with in its approach to racism. See D. Bell: *ídem*.

accurately understood within the framework of his own political and cultural experience.

Race and Racisms

"Racism is a notoriously difficult concept to define. Early writers concentrated on criticising the legitimacy of the 'idea of race' (Banton 1970) or they accepted the existence of 'races' and focused on the way in which they were constructed in congenitally superior/inferior relationships (Benedict 1983). (…) These are invested with negative connotations of cultural difference and inferiority, whereby the presence of other 'races' can be correlated with the economic and social health of either a specific region or the nation as a whole (Miles 1989). Racism is defined within particular historical and social contexts where past racial ideology can be used alongside new elements (Fanon 1967, Hall 1980); thus, there is no one monolithic racism but numerous historically situated racisms."[107]

We can agree with L. Back about the several historical realities of racisms, and this quote also helps to illustrate the multiple interpretations regarding race, racism or race relationships. In contrast with the spirit of the shared deliberations of the past, discussions about racism have become ungraspable, sometimes difficult to apprehend, given the numerous variations and definitions that have appeared in the last seventy years if we think back to the date of the picture at the beginning of this chapter.

At the same time, there are no real international (the adjective *global* applies here as well) discussions or exchanges about it. Neither are there significant shared debates about actions to be taken to battle it, to fight against it, or at least to connect theoretical discussions with political action, as P. Gilroy mentioned back in the 1980s, or as S. Hall had done.

[107] Back, L.: *New Ethnicities and Urban cultures*. *Social Identity and Racism in the Lives of Young People*, London, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.

We have seen how racism and colonialism derived into multiple and different perspectives and reconceptualisations, such as race[108], racialisation[109], race relationships, blurring the subject of racism into those many divergences, in a festival of complex terminology. The focus on the conceptualisation of race (sometimes more than on racism) is what Banton considered when he mentioned that the creation of concepts and definitions by intellectuals[110], have in some way impeded the possibility of more crossed discussions about racism, as had occurred in the past. Discussions and debates confined themselves within the scholarly space, through the publication of materials, leaving outside the different realities of racism that had evolved since Fanon's time. The connection with racism experiences was, paradoxically, a bit lost[111].

There are no significant references (or at least this is a field to develop) about connections between the different academic worlds. Between the UK, the US, France and Other worlds, as G. Spivak would say referring to what is now called the global South[112]. They are all studying race and/or racism, in parallel, with their own different

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[108] Solomos, R.: *Race and racism in Britain,* third edition, 2003.

[109] Murji, K. and Solomos, J.: *Racialisation studies in theory and practice*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

[110] *"It is intellectuals who produce the ideas and classifications in the first place. Often, they begin by exposing errors in the prevailing ideas and by attempting to develop concepts that better represent the nature of the phenomena in question. Finding better concepts is a process of discovery. Yet, when they seek to persuade members of the wider public, intellectuals have to use a language the public understands and therefore they often employ, and thereby reauthorize, folk concepts, when they should be trying to supersede them".* In Banton, M.: "Historical and Contemporary modes of racialization", in Murji, K., and Solomos, J. (eds.): *op.cit.*

[111] Murji and Solomos have covered some new insights about Fanon (including the aforementioned chapter about "National Culture") and his legacy (Lewis and Phoenix, 2004; Cohen, 2002), but focusing more on the process that they called "racialisation", admitting that Fanon had only made "brief remarks" about racialisation. It seems that scholars continue to read Fanon through the key of "racialisation" rather than racism. See Murji, K. and Solomos, J.: *op.cit.* "Introduction", (6-8).

[112] CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) and SEPHIS (South-South Exchange Program for Research on the History of Development) both organised several instances of transregional meetings and workshops with scholars from different countries from the South. However, there have not been similar experiences of concrete South and North exchanges about racism.

theoretical frames and approaches. With some exemptions, translations do not seem to have helped these relationships, which did exist, as we have seen, not so long ago [113].

In the picture at the beginning of this chapter we saw intellectuals, political thinkers, activists and also postgraduate students. A good mix of scholarly environment and outside real life. That image is in clear contrast with our reality of how racism is focused today.

Now, perhaps contradicting my own critiques, but given its relevance to my case study, I will start focusing on just one case, that of France.

France from theory to practice

Studies about race and racism in France or, rather, by Francophone authors, contain a powerful, explicit link between racism and the experience of colonialism. This goes beyond F. Fanon's consciousness of being black in a white world or acting as a white person being black[114] in an alienated world. There is an asserted commitment by a number of authors to discuss the situation of French colonialism beyond the borders of the metropolis (*la métropole*).

[113] This reflexion focuses on the lack of connections in studies about racism between places that have been linked in the past or have shared a community of discussion; notwithstanding the enormous advance and positive growth that the field has achieved in all these years, with the diversification of intersectional works and more sensorial ones as well. For the purposes of this chapter, I will not dwell on them as they deserve a level of attention that is not applicable in this case. See: James, M.: *Urban Multiculture. Youth, politics and cultural transformations*, 2015. Back, L.: *op.cit.*; Alexander, C.: *The art of being Black. The creation of Black British Young identities*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996; and Titley, G.: *Racism and the Media*, Sage, 2019, among others.

[114] Fanon, F.: *op.cit.*

L.S. Senghor and A. Césaire brought together a philosophy, forever remembered (recognised and criticised), of *Négritude*, which claimed a place for African thought, for African culture and African literature. Both authors were well received in the 1930s as part of a new African rationalism that tried to respond, or reflect (as in a mirror), to Western philosophy. Senghor would say, "I write, then that means that I thought, and if I thought, I exist"[115]. This was the affirmative component of *Négritude* which has had detractors and admirers over the years and around the globe[116]. But the beginning of all this process, both, for Césaire and L.S. Senghor, was the experience of racism on themselves.

Senghor recounts his moment of inspiration stemming from a train journey in which he was seated in front of a girl and her mother. Suddenly, they began to giggle, staring at his clothes and the way he wore his shoes and trousers. He realised at that moment that he was being mocked. The visual scrutiny of these white women was centred on the notion of him being black. This terrible feeling helped bring to the fore his idea of *Négritude*, a sort of affirmation of his real African and black being against the Western culture which was denying him.

Fanon also related his own experience of racism when he wrote:

"Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me. "Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. I

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[115] Senghor, L.S.: *The foundations of "Africanité"*, Paris, Presence Africaine, 1971.

[116] *Négritude* has been cited and demonized by recognized literary figures such as Wole Soyinka in his famous phrase: *"A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces". In other words: a tiger does not stand in the forest and say: I am a tiger. When you pass where the tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker you know that some tigritude has been emanated there"* (1962). Or the long discussion from René Depestre "Bonjour et Adieu à la Négritude", published in the Magazine *Présence Africaine* in 1980.

could no longer laugh (…) then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema."[117]

Discussions about racism in France have always played out against the backdrop of colonialism. Racism was a cornerstone of the colonial system, for M. Foucault[118]; setting the high point of racist discourse in the 19th century, especially the second half, through the biological differentiation of species made in the time of imperialism. In this way, his view on the subject is based on his idea of a *war of races* replaced in the era of industrialisation by a war of classes[119].

An arguably less well-read author within English-speaking academia, particularly as compared to Fanon; Albert Memmi, building on past authors, reacts against colonialism and racism under the form of a dialectic relationship where coloniser and colonised were both part of a racist experience. Memmi incorporated the subject of racism to his fictional and academic work. Echoing Fanon, he lays down his own experience to analyse it: *"Racism is a lived experience"* [120]. Memmi also coincides with Fanon regarding the process of "dehumanisation" (or alienation) that racism (and colonialism) implies. It strips away all that is seemingly respectable, all that conforms an individual's way of being[121].

As with many other Francophone authors Memmi is opposed to the concept of race based on biologic purity. This rejection marks to this day much of Francophone thought on racism. Furthermore, he also worked on the relationship between colonialism and racism, forging a new concept defined as "heterophobia"[122]. Heterophobia strives to

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[117] Fanon, F.: *op.cit.* (p.84).

[118] Foucault, M.: "*Society must be defended*" Lectures at the Collège of France, 1975-1976, Penguin Books, 2020. (Lecture of 28 January 1976).

[119] Foucault, M.: *ídem*.

[120] Memmi, A.: *Le Racisme*, Paris, Folio, 1982. My translation.

[121] Memmi, A.: *op.cit.* and *Portrait du colonisé*, 1957; *The colonizer and the colonized*, Souvenir Press, 2016.

[122] Memmi, A.: *op.cit.*

enlarge the scope of racism as an act, which can change its form historically. In this way, heterophobia is conceived to describe racism against all those who are considered inferior, avoiding the colour line.

Heterophobia implies that when we talk about racism, it is not against a particular biologic belonging, but an act of discrimination against a group, a community or one individual. The idea that racism is a discrimination based on biological differences between human beings was explicitly rejected in the 1950s by the UNESCO[123] in its debates about how to deal with racism.

One of Memmi's most important recent works is "Decolonization and the decolonized"[124] where he develops the idea that the new immigrants are the old colonial subjects. Within a different historical framework, they are following similar tracks to those that marked the relationship between the French national state and native colonised populations. While focusing on Arabic and Muslim populations who migrate to France, he also incorporates other examples of racism linked to immigration, adding key reflections about Islam.

Michel Foucault and the *war of races*

As we advanced, Michel Foucault refers to racism from a different perspective. He is more interested in the workings of power within regular institutions and on its historical analysis. In the history of power, racism has a secondary, although non-negligible role. According to him, it is more accurate to talk about a *war of races* than of racist discourse. The latter being merely an episode within the broader history of power, led by the bourgeoisie, over institutions and popular classes, over those

[123] "The Race Concept. Results of an inquiry" UNESCO, Paris, 1950. It is worth noting that this work was influenced by the recent end of WWII where race was profoundly involved in the holocaust committed by the Nazis.

[124] Memmi, A.: *op.cit.*

affected by poverty, madness or illness. In this context, racist discourse has been reshaped as a weapon and as part of a process of "counter-history". Foucault sustains that the *war of races* that marked the history of our civilization until the French Revolution, evolved once this war became a war of classes, or a class struggle from a Marxist perspective. At some point towards the end of the 19th century, Foucault contends that the ruling bourgeoisie decided to retake the idea of the ancient *war of races* and in that process, reactivated racist discourses, trying to legitimise and normalise the control by an upper class over others.

> "*(…) the resumption in any case, (during) the nineteenth century, of the discourse of the war of races, a resumption of this old discourse, already secular at that moment, in socio-biological terms, with the goal essentially of social conservatism and in a number of cases at least, colonial domination.*"[125]

Moreover, he also considers that the *war of races* has a key element: a biological-medical perspective, around which racist discourse gravitates.

> "*And that is when you see something, that is going to be the racist discourse. (…) No longer the battle in the warrior sense but in the biological sense: differentiation of species, selection of the strongest, maintenance of the more adaptable races, etc.*"[126]

Memmi[127] also sees something of this *war of races* in the colonialist state, affecting the social, political and economic sphere:

> "*The purity of race in a different group opposing those who are weakest, but in a biological sense, allows colonialism to take care of them in all aspects of their lives.*"[128]

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[125] Foucault, M.: *op.cit.* My translation.

[126] Foucault, M.: *op.cit.*

[127] Memmi, A.: *op.cit.*

[128] Memmi, A.: *op.cit*.

This biological argument states that race superiority is a reason to control others. Not just to discriminate against them, but to dominate them, as was true in colonial states.

From *Différence* to discrimination

In 2019, the book "Race, Nation and Class, ambiguous identities" celebrated its 30th anniversary. The authors, Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar[129] were honoured with a symposium, conferences, interviews and a new book[130], following the impact of the original book on later researchers.

What Balibar discussed was the idea of a new racism in the late 1980s, early 1990s in France. He linked this to precedents, such as Foucault's ideas on the problem of biological racism, to explain that new racism was based on ideas that replaced others but generated the same results. New racism, according to Balibar, is the substitution of the biological strand, the bio interpretation of races, by the concept of cultures. Cultural racism employs the same discriminatory concepts of superiority, as a disguised form of racism. It is not **race that is discriminated against but foreigners' culture**.

This extension to the cultural field responded in part to the influence of the cultural turn taken from cultural anthropologists, but it was apprehended as a subtle way to exclude -in the same way as had been done before with the idea of race. Culture in this sense is a dangerous term. Balibar's call is clear, discrimination will be made based on origins, and it will be referred to as culture instead of race. This type of racism is

[129] Balibar, E. and Wallerstein, I.: *op.cit.*

[130] Bojadzijev, M. and Klingan, K. (eds.): *Race, Nation, Class: rereading a dialogue of our times*, Berlin, Haus der Kulturen Welt-Argument Verlag, 2019.

the most palpable in the cases studied in this thesis; I will therefore return to Balibar's ideas in subsequent chapters.

In parallel to Wallerstein and Balibar, the work of P.A. Taguieff[131] is also an important anti-racist analysis. Taguieff focuses on the juridical and philosophical interpretations of race and racism. The notion of ideological racism, that also resonates in the narrative of antiracist movements, is one of his important contributions. Taguieff demonstrates how political groups that had and still manifest themselves against racism also include some narratives based on division, or races, which contradict the original scope of their fight[132]. Biological bias is replaced by cultural bias, and then used against their own precepts. The biological foundation of the concept of race re-emerged from different angles within French society in late 1980s and 2000s.

During the demonstrations by the *Sans Papiers* movement (in defence of illegal or undocumented immigrants in France) in the 1990s, French society was confronted with the realities of discrimination, racism and inequalities. Racism narratives appeared, linked with biological prejudices about the recent immigrants coming from former colonies. This was a turning point, as the 1998 elections brought the Socialist Party to power, with the promise to initiate the process to legalise the status of *sans papiers*. A contemporary poll revealed that one of three young people surveyed on the issue of immigration said that all undocumented immigrants should be awarded official legal residency in France[133].

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[131] Taguieff, P.A.: *op.cit.*

[132] Something that Fanon also noted in relation to Africans and their fight against colonialism. Fanon, F.: "On national culture", in *op.cit.* 1961.

[133] Fassin, D.: "The Biopolitics of Otherness: Undocumented Foreigners and Racial Discrimination in French Public Debate", *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (February 2001).

What was becoming clear, and as synthesised in D. Fassin's[134] work on biopolitics, was that the concept of discrimination was taking the limelight in the French public sphere. Crucially, discrimination was entering the political space[135].

It is interesting at this stage to compare this with other experiences, particularly in the US and the UK, as sketched above. Unlike these two countries, France does not allow the collection of references or statistics on ethnicity. Beyond the theoretical debates on race classification, in practical terms the notion of inequality -be it in access to jobs, education, health or housing- can therefore not be made in terms of racism. Explanations (or justifications) for inequality gravitate therefore, almost naturally, towards variables such as social sectors and discrimination regarding access.

Before continuing with the historical process that places the concept of Race, and with it that of ethnicity, in the public forum[136], it is worth addressing some legal and juridical contradictions within the French system. These contradictions help to explain why multicultural politics have not developed in France as they have in other parts of the world, such the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States or even The Netherlands[137].

As J.L. Amselle says:

> "*At the core of the French Republic, there is a contradiction between natural law or human rights on the one hand and the supervision of cultural difference on the Other. Natural law (…) human rights, as propagated by the French Revolution, seem at first*

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[134] Fassin, D.: *ídem*.

[135] Fassin shows how the narratives of discrimination gained ground in public, mediatised, debates. See Fassin, D.: *ídem*.

[136] Political and social debate is common practice in French society, regardless of social sector.

[137] Milena Doycheva has written a very substantial work on how multicultural politics are applied in sensitive neighbourhoods in France, especially in the outskirts of big cities. She also highlights how official discourse denied this use of a multicultural approach. Doycheva, M.: *Une discrimination positive à la française? Ethnicité et territoire dans les politiques de la ville*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007.

sight incompatible with the French multiculturalism applied formerly in the colonies and which finds a current extension in the creation and the manipulation of the communities who now live on the national territory. (...) Indeed, in the long-term, foreigners and colonised peoples (were) supposed, according to the principle of republican integration, to become citizens; and even if based on a fiction, there is no way to hide that these entities are in a blind spot in the system. It is in this sort of holding zone that the status of indigène is situated, which served to manage the barbaric categories of the French colonial empire."[138]

This assimilatory process has been translated in our days into the contradictory approach towards addressing difference.

In the 1980s a new not-for-profit organisation was created to fight against racism, it was (significantly) called *SOS Racisme*. It became the first public agent to speak out openly about racism, in a society where the presence of immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa was increasing. Over the years, *SOS Racisme* became increasingly involved in politics, exhibiting a clearly partisan approach (it has been close to the Socialist Party for many years).

It is therefore extremely relevant that Didier Fassin locates the introduction of the concept, and term itself, of "discrimination" within the French political space in the 1990s[139]. A period that was marked by social protests, discontent and challenges stemming from the presence of large numbers of "illegal" workers originating from Africa. Discrimination, yes…but not Racism! *SOS Racisme* took on the term and the fight, and called to campaign for the "*Droit à la différence"* (Right to be different). This

[138] Amselle, J.L.: *op.cit,* 1996. My translation.

[139] Fassin, D.: *ídem*.

slogan helped to move the discussion about racism towards "tolerance", "cultural differences"[140] and "discrimination"[141].

This can be seen as one example of what Taguieff considers the racism of anti-racist groups. As far as the slogan is shifting into the category of culture, the call for acceptance is based on a segregation which contradicts the goal of their campaign[142]. A critique akin to Alexander's claims regarding the divisions in the scholarly field around racism[143].

On the other hand, Fassin demonstrates, with some Foucauldian tools, that the government's only response to the issue of racism was to apply body politics. While political refugees were viewed with suspicion by the relevant authorities, one of the only ways to be legally accepted in France was to be able to demonstrate a state of illness or the impossibility of being healed in the country of origin. This became one of the main qualifying conditions for the acceptance of new refugees in the 1990s, in a context marked by tougher requirements, measures and borders.

Resorting to the body, to its biological and clinical frailty is a clear echo of one of Foucault's premises. The dominant power opting to "help" and "control" those who are weaker; in this case immigrants, refugees, or undocumented immigrants who, in this case are residing in the country.

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[140] *SOS Racisme* was promoting acceptance of cultural differences, notably after the national debates about the Muslim hijab in 1989. As the main immigrant groups originated from North Africa (often called Arabs or "*beurs*") and Sub-Saharan Africa (especially young Black men -often Muslim), the differences in religion and their observance emerged as a major issue, considering France's pride in its secularism.

[141] A replacement of the word "racism" that I will discuss further in chapter Hearing.

[142] See Taguieff, P.A.: *op.cit*. Part II, 6, "Antiracism and Antiprejudice ideology", (180-195).

[143] Alexander, C.: *op.cit.* 2018.

The return of Race

In the Sarkozy years (2007-2011), we find Race making new inroads. That administration decided to retake an old source of political discontent, based on the immigration issue and the 2005 riots in several *Banlieues*[144]. One of the most provocative measures was the project to compile Ethnic Statistics to count and classify the ethnic origins of the population in France. A new official body was established called COMEDD[145], opening the door to one of the most heated debates of the period.

The debate on how to incorporate the concept of ethnic origin was clearly linked to the resurgence of Race not just in the public sphere but also in the scholarly milieu. The debate divided society, intellectuals, public figures and scholars. Interestingly, the place given to Race and Ethnic origin as a mode of classification was interpreted in two different ways, and both included something of the Foucauldian concept of racism and the *war of races*.

According to one of the most fervent and outspoken opponents to the project, J.L. Amselle, the relocation of Race originated in what, as Foucault mentioned in his

[144] *Banlieue* means on the outskirts of a city centre. The 2005 riots occurred mostly in what in the UK would be defined as council estates outside large French cities (Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Lille, and others). The riots marked a break in the history of popular sectors and immigration issues and inequalities, showcasing the problems of social inclusion in society as a whole. The riots largely involved youths self-defining themselves as *Bleu-Black-Beur*, alluding both to their Northern and Sub-Saharan African origins and to their place in France. In addition to this, the concept itself of *Banlieue* refers to a geographical limit, powerfully delimited not just in the imaginary of French citizens but also physically marked by boulevards or motorways around the perimeter of what is considered to be the centre of cities. This accentuates the difference of being "in" or "out" of the city itself, and carries numerous social, economic and cultural connotations.

[145] The *Comité de la Mesure et l'Évaluation de la Diversité et des Discriminations* (COMEDD) was created in 2008 with the goal of preparing a report on discriminations based on ethnic origins, using Ethnic Statistics. The results, presented in 2010, raised significant criticism and had little ulterior effect. Months later, Sarkozy lost the elections, and the project was closed. It remains a heated topic of discussion.

courses on racism, was part of a *"return to a biopolitics and to a politics of surveillance"*[146]. Going deeper into the classification of ethnicity or race meant going against the very, and perhaps only, principle of sovereignty and universalism of equality that French law has developed, albeit in a contradictory way. Furthermore, as Amselle[147] sustains this can never be useful as a tool against racism, because, despite facilitating the denunciation of the perpetrators of racist acts, measures and politics; it puts the accent on the victims of racism, classifying them as the object of the act and then blaming them or making them responsible for those acts of racism. The scholarly (and political) fight against the return of Race revolved around those arguments. Its opponents considered that the use of Ethnic Statistics was not a guarantee that racism would be treated and eliminated. On the contrary, it would lead to new racisms and more state control over the population. It was a clear reflection of Foucault's description of the history of power, as outlined above.

A group of scholars who were opposed to the concept of race as a useful tool in the fight against racism united and published their writings in a book[148] which compiles different views on this controversy. Some texts refer to past (failed) attempts to develop ethnic statistics in France, while others bring up examples of assimilation policies in colonised territories which certainly resonated in many people's minds. The context, with the beginning of the Obama administration in the US, also fostered comparisons with other countries where race was a concept used to hide other (mainly social and economic) inequalities[149] as with positive discrimination.

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[146] Foucault. M.: *op.cit.*

[147] J.L. Amselle is one of the first Africanist anthropologists to readdress the Ethnic issue in terms of the colonial system. Amselle, J.L. and M'Bokolo, E.: *Logiques Métisses*, *Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs* (1990), *Au cœur de l'ethnie, tribalisme et état en Afrique*, Paris, La Découverte, 1993.

[148] Badinter, E. (ed.): *Le retour de la Race, contre les statistiques ethniques*, Paris, L'Aube, 2009.

[149] The work of Michaels, W. B.: *The trouble with Diversity. How we learned to love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, Picador, 2016, (2006) was referenced and even translated into French within two years. This is a testament to its relevance, as translations of academic texts from English into French usually take more than four years -if at all.

On the other side of the ring were representatives of very mixed social groups, led, of course, by those who were championing the project, those close to the government and old alliances from the very strong right-wing, who retook racist public discourse from a not-so-distant past[150]. Moreover, the Race and ethnic classification (or statistics) project was well received by some scholars who were working on the notions of "visibility/invisibility" of black French in France. Academics from different fields such as History and Anthropology, Didier Fassin[151], Pap Ndiaye[152] and the ACHAC group, working on colonial history, including Pascal Blanchard and Nicolas Bancel[153] defended the project from a more long-term perspective.

Fassin wrote:

> *"If the word 'discrimination', has been belatedly accepted and gradually imposed, the 'racial' qualification is much more problematic, favouring euphemisms or periphrases. Just take up the political speeches of this period and note the lexical embarrassment that reigned in the public space at the very moment when the problem, now recognised, begins to be denounced and fought against. Here we find the terms of the famous debate on the expression 'without distinction of race', in article 1 of the Constitution, already criticised by some for its performative effects (Lochak 1992) and defended by others in the name of a principle of reality (Balibar 1992). The dilemma is the following: can naming/designating, contribute to make what we name, or designate, exist?"*[154]

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[150] The 2005 riots opened a Pandora's box on different sides of the French political spectrum. A plethora of racist comments and public discourses was brought into the public space, focusing on the youths who were victims of police abuse (including fatalities), but who were blamed for initiating the riots.

[151] Fassin, D.: (*ídem*), and Fassin D. and Simon, P.: *ídem*.

[152] Ndiaye, P.: *La condition noire*, Paris, Folio, 2008.

[153] P. Blanchard and N. Bancel have engaged in several historical projects within and beyond academia. Very popular in the public sphere, they employ different tools (exhibits, divulgation texts and documentaries) to demonstrate their points.

[154] Fassin, D. and Simon, P.: *ídem*.

These scholars sustained that the recognition of Race as part of the statistics project would help to fight racism, at the level where people should be recognising themselves in their own supposed identity. While also acknowledging that the root of the problem lies in the colonial system, they incorporate elements from the American case (as outlined above), highlighting the need to officially recognise the ethnic/race aspect.

If these scholars' interpretations of Racism continue to be linked to colonialism (due to the assimilationist aspects), they do so from a diametrically opposite angle to that espoused by scholars who were against the project. The former, are trying to put an end to a long legal and juridical tradition of what they call "invisibility". It is a complicated, yet equally fundamental, position to maintain, but which curiously also ties in with another aspect of Foucault's considerations and even in Fanon's interpretations of racism. They contend that a word must be given to that corporeal existence -the physical body- against which all the abuse has been directed. They aim to use Foucauldian tools on body conceptions (of illness and madness), considering that it is the only possible way to fight against racism.

A new concept: Soft Racism

This thesis is about racism, social exclusion and discrimination in contemporary France, studying the small urban perimeter of a neighbourhood in Paris, called La Goutte d'Or. The neighbourhood is known for its multicultural flair and its history, which is deeply rooted in that of its immigrant populations, mostly from Africa and the Middle East, often from former French colonies. It is also a place that is often rejected and demonised by Parisians from other neighbourhoods.

Postcolonial (or neo-colonial) relationships between newcomers, immigrants from the global South and European populations have been dismissed or blurred in the daily and practical life of multicultural societies across Europe. New problems have arisen as second generations, born from immigrant parents, become European citizens and

new immigrants still come in search of better life conditions[155]. But racism remains an unresolved problem, despite the disparate policies of diversity and inclusion that different municipal councils have tried.

I will try to show that even though many years have passed, the relationship between France and its former colonies (now independent countries) is still marked by colonial elements. Furthermore, that these can be perceived through indicators of racism and racist experiences in daily contemporary life in the 21st century[156].

Within the French socio-political and economic context over the last twenty years, postcolonial relationships harbour a type of racism that is not envisaged in the official complaint procedures put in place to provide legal support to victims of hate crimes. The body is the first place/corpus that is aggressed through this kind of racism. As it is so subtle and does not always come with an openly racist attitude, it is not contemplated by the law, and it is not named. Some of these experiences, which are literally felt in the flesh, relate to common daily life situations.

This subtlety is what I finally decided to name as "soft racism". Soft racism is an act of derision, disguised in the muted attitude of denying the existence of the Other. But even if it is muted, the violence of rejection is open and directed against that Other. It is a dual experience. The racist and his or her muted violence against the Other, and the Other, whose body has been exposed, damaged in a subtle way, because of an act of reprobation or of reaction against a fear.

As noted in the introduction, the concept is original, and I have devised it to facilitate the analysis of racism that is transmitted or understood based on sensorial experiences. The only two close references that I have found have been in definitions

[155] For some examples, see Small, S.: "Theorizing visibility and vulnerability in Black Europe and the African diaspora", in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:6, 2018.

[156] See: A. Memmi (1987), E. Balibar (1989), S. Hall (1989), L. Back (1996), M. James (2015), C. Alexander (2018), and J.L. Amselle (2000, 2014).

of racism in Solomos (‘*done through coded language’)*[157] and in Gillborn (‘*subtle and hidden operations of power that have the effect of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups’*)[158]*.* However, neither proposes any kind of analysis or pairs racism to the senses to utilise them as a practical concept to analyse and understand muted forms of racism or racist narratives.

Addressing the senses was the manner I found to break down the ways that soft racism acts on our bodies, in the context of our daily social lives. To analyse these situations, relationships, interpretations and experiences from a sensorial approach helped to disassemble the mechanisms that are used today to relegate and exclude; be they immigrants, foreigners and all Otherness (like those who do not conform to a genetic conception of whiteness) in people who share the same urban space.

[157] Solomos, J.: *op.cit.* and Gillborn, D.: *op.cit.*

[158] Gillborn, D.: “Critical Race Theory and education: racism and anti-racism in educational theory and praxis”, in *Discourse*, 27, 1, 2006. (p.20).

Advertisement flyer for the First Festival of the neighbourhood: "Beyond the borders of my neighbourhood, there is another body, another voice and another gaze other than mine". Source: Archives of the Association "Salle St. Bruno".

Part I: My trip to La Goutte d'Or

Going to La Goutte d'Or from my home took about 30 to 40 minutes. I lived in the south of Paris and had to head to the north using two modes of transport. Crossing the Peripheral Boulevard (the ring-road that surrounds the centre) until the Metro station of *Porte de Vanves*. From there I would take Tram 3. Since I conducted my fieldwork, this tramline has now been extended. It now spans a vaster area, bordering the city from the southwest (*Pont du Garigliano*) connecting with another tramline (B section) to the northeast (*Porte de La Chapelle*). Always in parallel to the Peripheral Boulevard, it completes its journey with a third tramline (section C) which covers the west all the way back to its starting point.

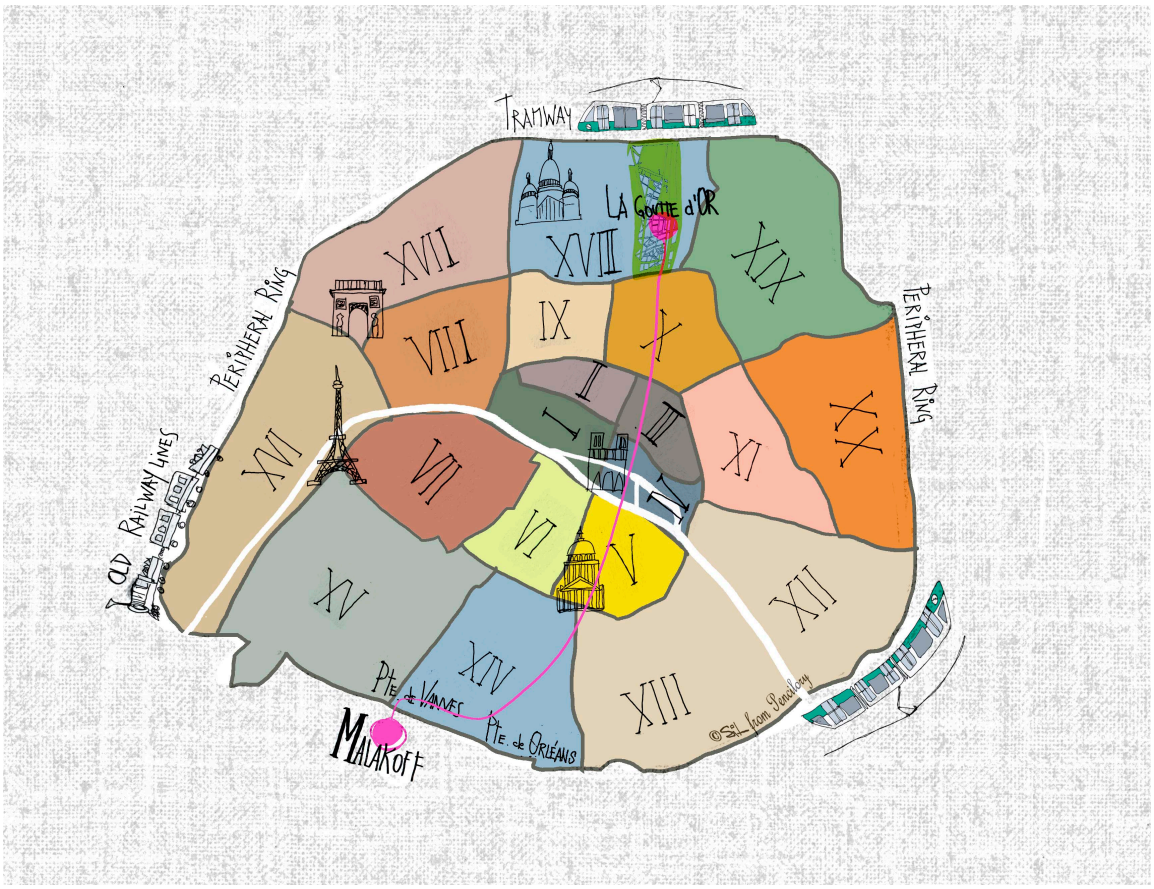
This tramline is a visible manifestation of the fact that Paris is an enclosed capital. Throughout its centuries of existence, it has been repeatedly closed, initially due to the fear of foreign invasions (or invaders)[159]. Its boundaries consolidated into the formation of two separate spaces, the City and the Suburbs. The tram's itinerary follows a previous set of tracks, used by a small railway between 1852 and 1869, which transported goods along Paris' outer border (referred to as "*La petite ceinture*"). This railway was soon adopted by the public, to move along the route outside the city and towards the city or its outer limits. Crucially, in the second half of the 19th century, the "*petite ceinture*" helped to transport commuters and passengers towards Paris, notably during the years when the Colonial Exhibitions were held. Subsequently, it would be partly replaced by the new Metropolitan line, Paris' subway or *métro*.

The reintroduction of the tram in 2006 confirmed the growing need to access the city from the outside and to access its suburbs from within. The RATP, the company in

[159] While these limits, currently represented by the Boulevard Périphérique (the *Périph*), were set in 1958 and completed as it is today in 1973, several and different encircling borders had existed around the city, gradually extending the urban area over the centuries.

charge of transport in Paris, confirmed that this tram line transported 25 million users in its first year, averaging around 100,000 users per day[160].

The borders of Paris, which are currently entrenched behind the 35 km of the Peripheral Boulevard (which in parts, is more of a highway than a boulevard) have always been a headache for architects and urban planners. Despite hundreds of completed and planned projects, this physical (but not only) border has survived all attempted reforms[161].



Map of Paris with references to my starting point (Malakoff), the tram line and the distance covered on my way to the field. Illustration by ©Sil from Pencilory.

[160] *Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens*, the state-owned public transport operator; RATP Press statement: "Le T3 commence sa marche à blanc!" 20 November 2006.

[161] For a commendable analysis by urban planners and architects see the Documentary: "Paris-Berlin, crossed destinies", by Fréderic Wilner, Iliade and Odysée Productions, Arte TV, 2016.

Heavily criticised, it responds in some way to the concept of the city itself and its history. The latest erection of a wall around Paris dates to 1870, when it was intended to repel invasions during the Franco-Prussian War. Moreover, the triumph and consequent arrival of Prussians in 1871 demonstrated the futility of defensive fortifications in what was becoming modern warfare.

Regardless, the city continued to build on this structural division between the inside and the outside. This separation has engraved itself deeply into popular consciousness throughout the centuries and persists to date. In a contemporary context of exploding demand for more housing (and better prices), Paris and its suburbs (known through different monikers: *Région Parisienne* (Parisian region), *Banlieue* (Outskirts), *Île de France* (the name of the administrative department of Paris) continue to display a conflictive relationship of inclusion and exclusion[162].

This historical urban division, evoking two confronted sites as in and out of the city, will also affect the history and constitution of La Goutte d'Or (or LGO) in different ways, evoking the same contradictions but in a smaller space. A neighbourhood that will battle for its belonging to the interior of the city, having been originally part of the rural environs, before its inclusion in Paris in the mid-19th century[163].

In *Porte de Vanves* (see the map above), I wait for my tram (it usually takes its time and is often so full I sometimes need to wait for the following one). Right in front of the tram stop, which at this level is built within the *Boulevard Brune*, I can smell roasting corn. It is emanating from a small stand in front of the entrance to the Metro station (*Porte de Vanves*), where a man of African traces, is roasting corn on the cob and selling it to passers-by in an improvised barbecue inside a supermarket trolley.

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[162] Ironically, some say that Parisians' worst fear is to be forced to live on the other side of the "border" (state pressure and high prices have made access to housing in Paris among the most challenging in the world), transforming them into "*banlieusard*s" (Outskirters) – commuters, etc.

[163] I will discuss more about this in-between situation of LGO in the chapter Smell when I address its administrative history as a neighbourhood of Paris.

Roasted corn on the cob (on a skewer) seems an odd sight in the capital of France. But it can be seen (and smelt) outside a handful of other Metro stations in the city, most often those frequented by African populations[164]. I know that nearby there is a refugee centre, and some of the corn sellers come from there, working informally to earn some money.

This powerful image reminds me of African countries where I have worked, as well as evoking home in a gustative manner.

Inside Tram 3, as in other forms of local public transport, a voice announces the next station. The announcements are accompanied by sounds and short music recordings, mostly chords. Arriving at *Porte d'Orléans* station, you can hear guitar chords, reminiscent of blues music, and a male voice announcing that this is "*Porte d'Orléans*"; backed-up by a female voice repeating "*Porte d'Orléans*" in good tempo.

The RATP, takes its sound identity very seriously. In its ever-expanding tram network, every new stop has a unique sound and voice. Interestingly, some of these snippets refer to the station's name or to its immediate surroundings.

The blues chords at *Porte d'Orléans* are somehow an acknowledgement of Afro-American sound identity. Even if the tone of the voice does not resonate with African accents; looking out the tram window and listening to the announcement generates a powerful composition of the place where we are. *Porte d'Orléans* serves as a doorway to an area where several African families settled back in the 1980s and 1990s. Here, in the south of Paris, African families are still very present. Different buses stop at *Porte d'Orléans* which traverse the neighbouring regions of *Hauts-de-Seine* and *Val-de-Marne*, travelling through areas characterised by a highly mixed population, comprising groups of "older" migrant groups, mainly from former

[164] Several Métro stations serve as connection hubs for other forms of transport that cover the outskirts of Paris, where there are several African immigrant communities.

colonies in Northern Africa, as well as others of Italian and Portuguese origins. Do these sounds correspond to a sonic choice made by the RATP, according to the colour of people that we can see through the window? Did the RATP select these sounds to make a link between Afro-Americans and Africans, which sounds more like a racial way of thinking? These questions merit more exploration in relation to what is at stake, ideologically, in the sound attached to these places, and to see to what extent a company such as the RATP is interpreting race issues (and maybe further instances of racism) in their public presence[165].

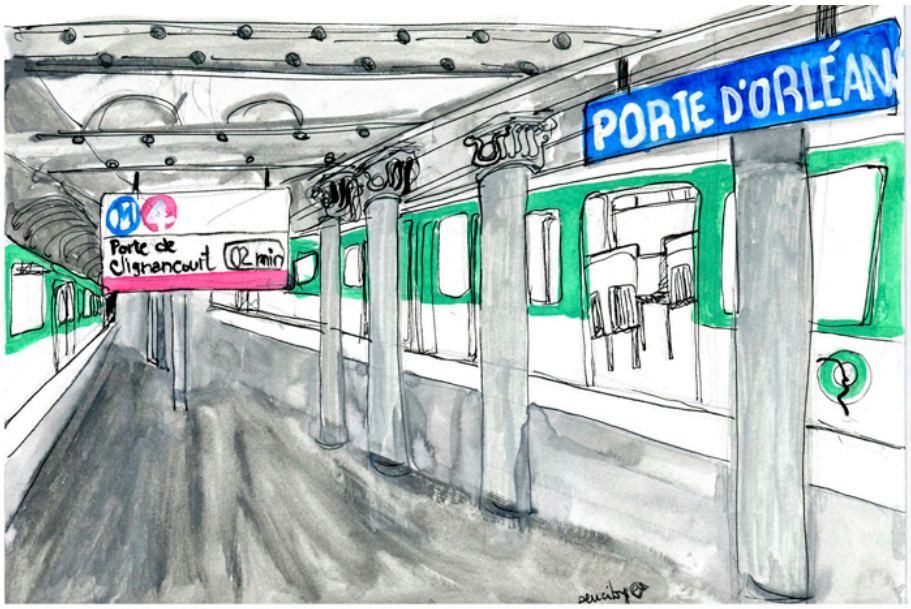

Illustration of the platform of the underground Line 4 at Porte d'Orléans, by ©Sil from Pencilory.

I get off the tram at *Porte d'Orléans* to take the Metro -Line 4 (pink)- towards *Porte de Clignancourt*. In that period, 2009-2012, Line 4 was composed of old carriages, which were extremely noisy when in movement and even more so when they applied

[165] Other examples are the *Rosa Parks* and *Ella Fitzgerald* tram stops, where local voices are accompanied by other voices speaking French with an American accent, as a reminder of their American origins. There might been a political and (corporative) decision regarding these two names and voices, as they powerfully represent Afro-American communities. Those peripheral stations are close to regions on the outskirts of Paris where several African communities are established. These decisions regarding sonic choices from the RATP, merit further study.

the brakes. Within its carriages, Line 4 was a motley world in constant movement, innumerable different faces, gestures and outfits entering and exiting…[166]

An end/beginning of the line station, I usually managed to find a seat at *Porte d'Orléans*. This facilitated my observational journey until reaching my destination.

It would have been nice to just observe. But the old purpose and definition of wandering, of "flâneurism" in Benjamin's words, is arguably no longer possible, as it might have been in another era[167]. Being in the Métro, going to *La Goutte d'Or* is a sensorial experience and I could not avoid living it.

Twenty stops until the very heart of *La Goutte d'Or*, which can be reached by getting off either at the *Barbès* or *Château Rouge* metro stations. A couple of stops before, I can already perceive some of the sensorial characteristics of LGO (sounds, voices and colours) and also of the 10th arrondissement at the level of *Château d'Eau*, *Gare de l'Est* and *Gare du Nord*.

The people getting on and off the Metro in these stops wore colourful dresses, hairstyles and talked with a different volume and pitch, as compared to the people who were travelling and getting off at the previous stops. African faces and gestures were occupying the train.

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[166] Over thirty years ago, Marc Augé conducted a fascinating piece of ethnography on Paris' *Métro*, discovering the diversity of the Parisian population. He revisited his work (Augé, M.: *Un ethnologue dans le Métro, Pluriel,* 1986) twenty years later with, Augé, M; *Le métro revisité*, Paris, Ed. Du Seuil, 2006. In both, Augé refers to the *Métro's* colourful users as representative of the city's population. In English, Augé, M.: *In the Metro,* University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

[167] M. Bull already suggested that the *flâneurism* concept had to be reviewed with the advent of technology in our societies. While I agree with that conclusion regarding the constraints of the term within more recent urban studies, I will refer to *flâneurism* more as an engaged form of wandering. More accurately, wandering with the purpose of seeing and learning from those paths. Bull, M.: *Sound moves. iPod Culture and Urban experience,* Routledge, 2007.

One of the many times I was travelling standing up, three African women entered the carriage. They were with a young boy that judging by his height could not be over 12 years old. A man was seated in front of me, with his head leaning forwards, shoulders hunched, he appeared unhappy. His clothes were undistinctive. His face looked sad or worried, or both. The colour of his skin was brown, and from his features he could be perhaps from South Asia. One of the ladies made a gesture to get his attention; signalling with her finger and her hand that he should offer the seat to the boy -her son. The boy was corpulent and seemed to be in good health. However, his mother considered that he was entitled to that seat and pressured the man to stand up and move along. Surprisingly, the pensive man got up and conceded his seat to the boy. He got off at the next station.

It was compelling to see this happening. Several interpretations come forth. The lady might have expected a seat to be given to a child, it might have been “customary” for her, but the asking gesture was not gentle, it was firm and mandatory towards the seated man. There was something about this scene that made me reflect on how the new immigrants and refugees have to confront power relationships with older immigrants settled in France for a longer period.

I have recalled this anecdote not with the purpose of generalising a type of discrimination that is difficult to recognise, but present in a short timeframe, in the context of public transport, and in silence, but with the purpose of showing how small attitudes, gestures, looks, actions and reactions can be observed in the daily life of public transportation. This can be regarded as a myriad of subjectivities of course, but once there are patterns in the way people transmit their fears or mistrust against others, these can be interpreted as signals of the power of our senses interpreting gestures from outside.

L.S. Senghor identified this feeling, or sensation, in his anecdote aboard the train, which pushed him to theorise about "Négritude". Similarly, the famous moment when F. Fanon [168] finds himself in the eyes and (in the voice) of a child; both experiences worked as a sign of sensorialities with a meaning, in this case racism or discrimination. It is true that there is a small world of subjectivities within gesticulation, but there is also significance, histories and reasons that push forwards, expressing themselves and perceived by our senses[169].

In my journey towards my field research site, I usually continued until the *Barbès-Rochechouart* station. The stop that provides the most direct entrance to the neighbourhood of *La Goutte d'Or*.

Arriving

Once there, I get off the carriage, into the station, and suddenly the noise of loud voices takes over; different people coming and going, many appear to be in a hurry. Some carrying bags push me along. This is not that different to what one can experience at any other central Paris *Métro* station at rush hour. But once out of the station, in the open air, the sound of klaxons, the din of the other metro (Line 2) which rolls overground over my head joins that of loud shouting from hawkers selling contraband cigarettes, SIM cards, etc.

[168] Both anecdotes are discussed in the previous chapter.

[169] Some neurobiologists have also worked with the force of senses favouring consciousness, as a more rational, in a Cartesian sense, value given to senses. Contrasting this view, cultural anthropologists, led by A. Damasio, still attribute the sensorial experience to cultural construction, thus changing in time and/or space. In this aspect I ascribe to subjectivities as valid channels of interpretation, as in psychoanalysis, and as we will see in other parts of this thesis. See: Geurts, K.L.: "Consciousness as 'Feeling in the Body'", in Howes, D.: *op.cit.*

Métro Barbès. Illustration by © Sil from Pencilory

It is not market day, but the atmosphere is no less intense. I am captivated by the number of colours. Reds, blues, yellows, appear intensely in different large signs with small lettering which are telling me so many things that I cannot quite process or fully understand instantly. It is a low-tech version of commercial signalling, in contrast with the hyper-modern signalling that we can see in the film *Blade Runner*, for example, where aerial transportation, sounds, lights, colours and moving images occupy the entire landscape. In LGO, the adverts do not move, but there is aerial transportation, in the form of the overground metro, with its large and distinctively 19th century viaducts and structures, cold and grimy grey. LGO also has innumerable voices speaking in countless languages over each other.

Ambling about the neighbourhood with no particular goal, confronted with colours, noises and people I could sense I was being exposed to various types of vivid and bright details. These initially imperceptible marks of the neighbourhood would (and will) make more sense later. I came to think of LGO as a cultural performance. A place where everything (or almost everything) refers to an African experience, but in another context, which is the city of Paris. The presence of Africa is clear, it is evidently visible and nearly palpable.

Colours

Colour seems to flood these *boulevards* and some adjacent streets, such as the entrance to the daily food market *Dejean*. From the improvised signs above and in mobile phone shops, to the wax fabric shops, to the various bazar-shops that expose their cheap plastic and metal wares around their window frames. So much to see and watch, without even factoring-in the people who are all around, coming and going but also participating in various forms in the public space. The grey shades of Paris contrast oddly with these bright colours. The overall picture is initially disconcerting, confusing to the eye given the endless juxtaposition of every imaginable colour.

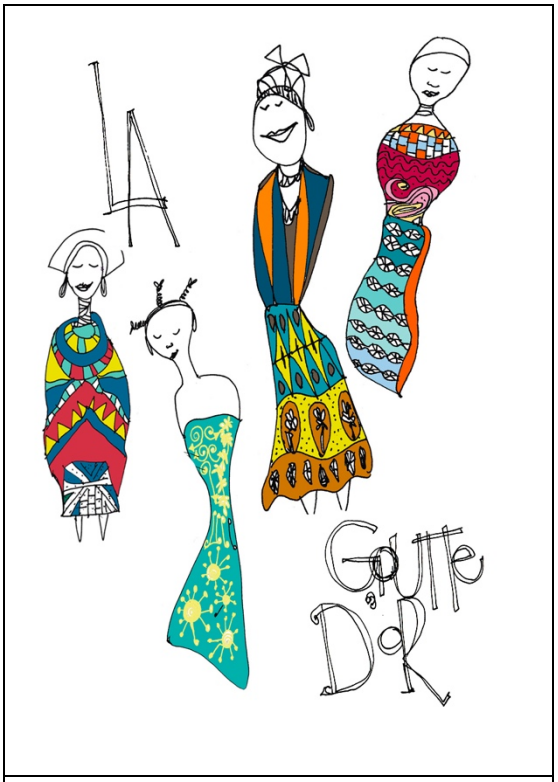

Illustration by ©Sil from Pencilory

Colours also stand out from people's clothes, some of them entirely covered in patterns. Several men are wearing long dresses, some *bubus* and *djellabas*[170]. it is Friday, prayer day in Islam. They mix within a crowd that also includes women in shining outfits with golden chains, large earrings, jackets and jeans. Some of them look like the woman in the *Métro* who ordered the forlorn man to stand up and give up his seat. Other women walk with their heads covered. There are voluminous hairstyles, and multicoloured headbands in matching patterns.

[170] *Bubus* and *djellabas* are types of garments used frequently in West Africa and D.R. Congo, and Northern Africa respectively, often on Fridays, coinciding with Prayer Day in Islam.

The patterns are easily recognizable; they are made from Wax fabric, as I have seen before in Africa (namely in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana and Mozambique). Wax fabric is a commodity that represents an ironic twist from the colonisation era, (more on this in the chapter Touch) which was reintroduced successfully in sub-Saharan African countries. There have been several works on this subject, dwelling on the meaning of African-ness, on global fashion and trade, and on a marketing invention from Western agencies[171].

There are artefacts on sale in LGO bazars which I have seen in African villages as part of daily life and culture: stools made of woven plastic fabric, multicoloured plastic kettles and large plastic carrier bags (often used in European contexts to store or transport large amounts of goods), for example. Consumerism, exotic décor or curiosity for ethnic fashion trends[172], have brought some of these artefacts into European homes. This contrasting images between objects that we can recognise from daily life in African countries and the urban environment of LGO in Paris could be understood as a product of globalisation in the sense that A. Appadurai offers, as a *"world characterised by*

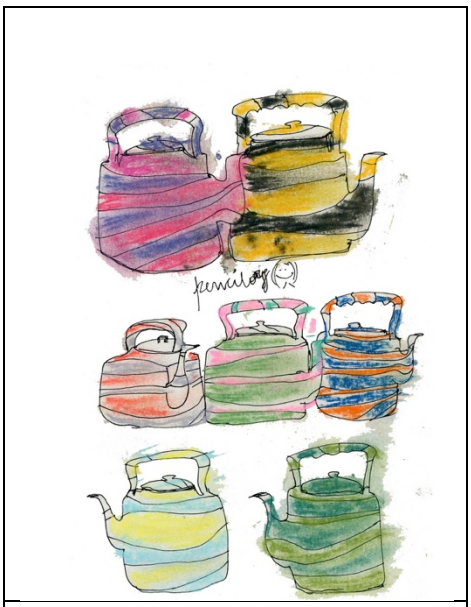

Illustration by ©Sil from Pencilory

[171] See Sylvanus, N.: "The fabric of Africanity, tracing the global threads of authenticity", *Anthropological Theory*, 7:2, 2007.

[172] For the topic of ethnicity and consumerism of authenticity see Commaroff, J.L. and J.: *Ethnicity, INC*, University of Chicago Press, 2009; also, Thomas, D.: *op.cit.,* 2013; and Amselle, J.L.: *Branchements, anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures*, Flammarion, 2005. I will discuss this further in the chapter Touch.

a new role for the imagination (in the sense of group of images, following J. Baudrillard[173], for example) *in social life"[174].*

The consumption and sale of African artefacts as cultural goods in other neighbourhoods of Paris, like the classy and touristic area of Marais, at higher prices and endowed with the aura of exoticism[175], made me think of the different ways in which Others can be discriminated, as the same artefacts sold in LGO are considered vulgar or tacky. It also made me think of how Others can find ways of turning parts of that Otherness into marketable commodities -a case that I will analyse in the chapter Touch.

Part II: The Projection

Within the framework of *Barbès l'Africaine*, a significant event run by local non-profit organisations in the neighbourhood in 2010, I was invited to lead a debate following the screening of a documentary for some pupils of a nearby secondary school.

The documentary in question was *Paris Couleurs*, directed by Pascal Blanchard, the historian, and Eric Ridoo[176]. I had been there a few nights before at a music concert by Alemayehu Estete and Mahmoud Ahmed[177]. On the day, a damp April morning, the projection room was dark and silent.

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[173] Baudrillard, J.: *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1994, (1981).

[174] Appadurai, A.: *Modernity at large, cultural dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, 1996. (p.31).

[175] Also observed by Amselle, J.L: *op.cit.*

[176] E. Ridoo and P. Blanchard: *Paris Couleurs*, 2005. France 5. (Total: 52 min). It is possible see it here divided in 3 parts. https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x23djl.

[177] The event *Barbès l'Africaine* offered a vast array of musical shows from different African artists at a very reasonable price, allowing the neighbourhood's residents to access to them. However, most of the attendees were from beyond LGO.

The room

The chairs were still empty. I took off my coat and went through my notes one last time before the students arrived. While seated, I could not avoid being aware of the enormous space, the microphones and the curtains, the lights in place but turned off. The stage was empty as well. Instead of the musical instruments I had seen there a few nights ago, there was a screen. Not a huge screen, but large enough to view the film comfortably.

I had already seen the movie at home, Margo[178] lent me the DVD. I knew the topic well, but still had some doubts about its contents, about the purpose of this projection, and the reactions of the students. They turned out to be teenagers, 15 or 16 years old, from a school in the neighbourhood. They arrived a bit late and entered the room talking loudly but following the teacher's instructions regarding seating arrangements. I was observing the scene at an angle across the room. Moving my attention from the chairs to the students taking their places on them. They never stopped talking, silence disappeared.

Timidly, I approached the teacher to introduce myself. He nodded; keeping quiet and looking at me while I talked, from the corners of his eyes he was checking-in on the students. He looked at me poker-faced and agreed that I would lead the discussion after the projection. That was the purpose of my presence, as a volunteer, at this event. He informed me that this activity was part of his teaching programme and of the broader school curriculum which he never mentioned in detail, nor did I ask about. He was a serious looking middle-aged French white man in a jacket.

The students continued laughing and talking loudly across the room. They used their hands to signal something that I could not understand. Perhaps they were referring to me? The teacher talked in a gradually louder voice and then silence returned.

[178] Margo's interview is included in the chapter Hearing.

There was a very soft light, barely allowing us to recognise each other in the room. Their faces were looking at me. Some were taking notes in open notebooks. Others were posing defiantly with one arm behind their chairs. They listened, but even as they kept quiet, I was nervous, listening to my own voice in front of them. It was tough. I took the microphone. Hesitated about how to turn it on, until somebody came up to help me, and then I spoke:

"*Hi! My name is Silvina. I am a historian researcher, and a teacher as well, (I smiled). I am originally from Argentina, but I have worked on African Studies for a long time and am now doing my PhD research on LGO here in Paris, at the EHESS and am volunteering for Barbès l'Africaine here today, to present this short film to you. This is a documentary about racism, discrimination and colonialism… It was directed by a historian called Pascal Blanchard who works on French colonialism and its consequences. More recently, he has been getting quite a bit of publicity because of his belief that we should be more conscious of the harmful treatment that French colonialism brought upon populations overseas"*.

Silence. You could see some pages turning in-between bouts of swift handwriting. I continued:

"*We will try to address the images that appear in the documentary and discuss what they evoke regarding this subject"*.

Keep it short! I decided not to talk anymore and let the film begin.

Black-out, the images start, a voice speaks off camera:

"(…) second generation, third generation (…) five million today in the city of Paris. But even though they are French nationals, stereotypes persist: Black, Yellow and Brown.

This is the story of how these racist stereotypes were built and how hundreds of millions of immigrants also built Paris, and continue to do so …"[179]

The film starts with that narration, spoken over images of crowded streets of Paris where we can see some kind of technicolour society. Silvery images start to appear. I moved to the back of the room, to the side of the rows where the youths are seated; to see the movie from a better angle. I heard someone coughing, and then the images of the *Jardin d' Acclimatation*[180] came up.

These were archival images, evidently taken from the INA[181], followed by a sequence of silent images in black and white. Some of them dating as far back as 1896, including the Lumière brothers' short film "*Baignade de Nègres*", showing several relatively undressed people with African traces –to represent the way they were supposed to be, back in their African lands-, jumping into a lake and pretending to swim. Young men and children were filmed, playing and smiling to camera[182].

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[179] E. Ridoo and P. Blanchard: *Paris Couleurs*, 2007. (Min 2:00).

[180] The *Jardin d'Acclimatation* was a park inside of what it is now the *Bois* (Forest) *de Boulogne* at the western edge of Paris. Between 1896 and 1934 an annual curiosity fair was held, exhibiting elements from the colonial world called "Exposition Colonial(es)". It was a private undertaking, following a request from the French government to expose to the general public in Paris, examples of the different human beings, with their supposed costumes, that France had colonised. In the exhibition visitors could see from some distance *Other* human beings: Black people and Asian people dressed in regional or folk costumes and occasionally naked. They were sometimes fenced in relatively large enclosures within the garden, sometimes even in cages. The experience was meant to cater to the visitors' curiosity, who did not seem to be outraged or stunned by any of this.

[181] *Institut National de l'Audiovisuel:* The National Audio-visual Institute of France. See www.ina.fr.

[182] "*Baignade de Nègres*" is a short film by the Lumière brothers, filmed in 1896. According to the Lumière catalogue, this short film and another one entitled "*Village de Nègres*" were shot in the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* which housed these exhibitions. The catalogue adds that both short films were projected as part of a recreational spectacle in Lyon on several days the same year it was filmed. See https://catalogue-lumiere.com/baignade-de-negres/.

Students sniggered at the nudity depicted on screen. Some even laughed as nearly naked black bodies smiled as the camera focused on their white teeth. The laughter on screen brought laughter in the room, although none of us were too sure about what we were laughing at or about. Some students started to compare the characters on screen with their peers - "*he looks like you!*"*;* more laughter. The black colour seemed to be a recognisable feature for them. Most of the students had different shades of dark skin.

Still silent, in black and white, African and Asian-featured faces stare at the camera lens -or at us? Dressed in costumes. There is an entire family in a cage[183]. Some are working on handicrafts; others are just there, half-dressed. Even when it is not clear if they are merely performing -playing the Other for an audience[184]; the images of people in cages are shocking, challenging, sad. The obedience of the "actors" who represent the role of Others is showcased as a documentary, a general reproduction of colonial features. Were they forced to be behind those bars? The striking images of human beings exposed inside a locked cage were received with "*awws...!*" from the crowd of students who also raised their voices in complaint. From the back of the room, I could hear "*that's not fair!*"

Judging by the shots of the persons visiting the *Jardin*, the idea of exhibiting a human being in a cage did not seem have caused any moral quandaries at that time. Monochord and low, the male narrator's tone of voice added to the uncomfortable feeling in the room, echoing the sadness and cruelty of the images. It was a sorrowful

[183] Cages and fenced-off enclosures were usually present in these exhibitions to the extent that in another documentary, the same researcher/director, Pascal Blanchard, refers to them as "Human Zoos", the name of his 2005 film. Blanchard, P.; Bancel, N.; Boetsch, G.; Snoep, N.J.: *Human Zoos, The invention of the Savage*, Distributed Art Pub Incorporated, 2011.

[184] Intersectionally, we could extend the interpretation of the performance (gender and race) as a cultural and manipulated act towards these images. See Butler, J.: "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4, 1988, (519-31).

tone (particularly when it recounts how the "*sauvageries*" were exposed[185]), with hints of hostility and bitterness, related to what was portrayed.

The room was shrouded in silence. Some students started to look visibly unwell. I approached one of them to ask her if she wanted to step out, she said she was fine. Nobody was talking anymore. I moved forward once again, nearly to the edge of the screen. I could see their faces now under the silver light of the projector. The majority looked shocked, some had their heads down -writing or scribbling in their notebooks.

I could not pick-out the teacher. I wondered if he had wandered off. But no, he was seated, head down. He was at the opposite end of the room, apart from the group and near one of the exits.

Illustration by ©Sil from Pencilory

Moving forward, the irony in the narrator's voice becomes more pronounced when he talks about the enhancement of "*black* people" in culture over images of

[185] *Sauvageries* (savageries) was one of the names given to these exhibitions. Private undertakings at Governmental request, which aimed to recreate environments from North and sub-Saharan Africa. They exhibited people in these recreated open spaces as part of their educational and entertainment offering. The natives brought to perform were unpaid and were often in a situation of slavery, or in exchange of favours. See Bancel, N.; Boetsch, G.; Snoep, N.J. and Blanchard, P.: *Human Zoos, The invention of the Savage*, Paris, Actes Sud, Musée du Quai Branly, 2011.

Josephine Baker and American jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong whose large smiles appear on screen. They were performing as artists in Paris. This brings laugher back into the room, sympathy, and some comments on Josephine Baker's nude dancing.

The film

The documentary is structured chronologically, from the late 19th century to the present day. It tells the story of rampant, yet discreet racism in France, without actually mentioning the term. The narrator is more focused on concepts of Otherness, exoticism and stereotypes. Towards the end of the documentary there are many references to integration when talking about immigration; about those who arrived from former French territories (identified mostly as *indigènes*[186]) and their descendants.

Suddenly, some students flared up. I turned my head back towards the screen, there were old images of Parisian neighbourhoods. Poverty was on display; street merchants peddling their wares, kids in distressed clothes playing in the streets, hollow faces looking at the camera inquisitively. It certainly looked like LGO. They

[186] The *Indigénat* was a colonial legal system created in order to manage the population of French territories overseas, first introduced in Algeria in 1875 and extended to the rest of the French Empire in 1887. It was a set of rules to control offenses against the colonial administration. Over time, the status of indigènes was considered as a way to control any intention of anti-colonial revolt by fixing colonial labour to the site that the colonial administration required. This means that every *indigène* should ask for permission to the colonial authorities to move in order to pursue other labour activities. Later, French administrators realised that adding the idea of half-way citizen of France would give greater incentive to follow the colonial rule. This was a conflictive point after the process of decolonisation because France had to authorise and grant French citizenship to the *Indigènes* residing in the metropolis once the independences started, something which was resisted by the French state. Gueye, O.: *Histoire de l'Indigénat, histoire de l'Afrique Francophone 1887-1946*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2019. Le Cour Gramdmaison, O.: *De l'Indigénat. Anatomie d'un monstre juridique: le droit colonial en Algérie et dans l'Empire français*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010. Amselle, J.L.: *op.cit.* 1996.

cheered and shouted, happy to discover a familiar environment. The teacher stood up and called for order, *"Please sit down. Now!".*

Back in their seats, the screen displayed more colourful images. The focus was on people from the former colonies (*indigènes*) that came to Paris (or more broadly to France) to serve as soldiers in the Second World War. They were collectively known as *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* and they fought for the French Republic against the Germans on French soil and throughout Europe. They never appeared in any military parade during the Liberation festivities, responding to an explicit requirement from the American military forces called "Bleaching"[187]. Although occasionally recognised and decorated, they never acquired full French citizenship as stressed in the documentary[188]. This was the first group of African immigrants settling in Paris; soon followed by other immigrants this time from French Indochina (today, Vietnam). The images were of hardship, people living precarious lives. Sadness reigned once again in the room.

The last part of the documentary focuses on the history of the *Sans Papiers* movement, from its origins in the 1980s, in which incidentally LGO played a key role. Several recognisable images appeared, including the nearby Church of Saint Boniface, and numerous media interviews. However, the original sound had been muted, replaced by music and the same monochord and by now depressing voice of

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[187] Scheck, R. M.: *French colonial soldiers in German captivity during the WWII*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[188] The case of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* is a great example of the colonial relationships between France and its subjects from sub-Saharan Africa, more specifically West Africa in this case. Their citizenship status remained undefined as they were supposed to return to the colonies at the end of the war. Although they helped to liberate Paris from Nazi occupation, they were officially not allowed to extend their stay after the Allied victory. Many however, did stay behind. Precariously, without the necessary identification documents (*Titre de séjour*). They were potentially the first "*Sans Papiers"* (undocumented) in the history of immigration in France. For more on this subject see: Cooper, F.: *Citizenship between empire and nation, Remaking France and French Africa 1945-1960*, Princeton University Press, 2014; and Moure, M.: *Thiaroye 1944. Histoire d'un massacre*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2016.

the narrator. Compared to the rapid succession of images of colonial brutality and violent clashes seen just minutes ago (archive footage from Algeria and Morocco), these shots of black, African immigrants (some of them dressed in colourful fabrics) from former colonies fighting peacefully for their rights to have the legal status to live and work in France were accompanied by slower, sadder music.

"*My uncle was there…! He took part in that, I know that!*", said one of the students proudly. Lower voices were heard but they were indistinguishable.

The first images on the screen showed people in Paris looking like foreigners, without any real bearings, whose physical features were different to those of the crowd (they were black or dark skinned); people working hard (street cleaners, window cleaners, people selling carpets on the streets).

Accounts of immigration have always touched me a lot. This hit me, bringing up images of immigrants on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. My country has a strong history of immigration flows, my own family story is one of migrations. I remembered letters, stories my parents told me, and tales from my grandparents. I remembered the empathy that we have for our ancestors, stronger even than the idea of roots. Immigrants have different concepts or feelings regarding roots, they have different perceptions of nations, and this has always led to a different approach to the sense of identity[189].

I was thinking about the students seated there, who were probably thinking and/or feeling similar things. I guessed they were mostly French, or were born in France, but they were likely to have parents or families from abroad. I too was an immigrant in

[189] According to K.A. Appiah, identity matters so much that we can choose the one that fits us best. There is a chance that we might not find one that fits us completely and so we might continue to search forever. For more on the subject: Appiah, K.A.: *Ethics of Identity*, Princeton University Press, 2007; also, Appiah, K.A.: *The lies that bind: Rethinking identity. Creed, Country, Colour, Class, Culture,* London, Profile, 2018.

the same space. As we used to say in my country, I too was "a toad from another pond"[190]. Perhaps I felt like one of their parents or family members. I realised that my son would be born in a few months on French soil as well and yet, he would not be granted French nationality automatically. I was disappointed and felt it was an absurd case of inequality[191]. My personal involvement made me feel closer to the audience.

The lights went on again, gradually. The screen stayed still, until the last remaining characters vanished from the scene. Like the lights, the volume of voices grew. There were some comments, some laughter. It was now my turn to step into the circular space in front of the students.

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[190] In the last thirty years "identity" as a concept has become very popular both as a community shared idea or a construction (Anderson, B.: *Imagined Communities*, Verso, 1983); and as a changing self-construction of belonging and existence (Hall, S. and Du Gay, P.: *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage, 1996; Bhabha, H.: *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, 1990 and *Location of Culture*, Taylor & Francis, 2012, (1994); Appiah, K.A.: *op.cit*. The latter idea of a self-identity built on the move, or as a *Hybrid identity* (H. Bhabha, 1994) or *Hybrid cultures* (García Canclini, 1993, English version), is crucial to understand narratives and experiences of immigration as pieces of a huge puzzle that does not have a set shape but is interpreted as different possibilities according to our own family or personal histories. *"Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about"* (Hall, S.: "What is this "Black" in popular Black culture?" in, *Essential Essays Vol.2 Identity and Diaspora*, Duke University Press, 1992).

[191] Complaints regarding immigration are often based on the conceit that France grants citizenship and nationality automatically to all those who are born on its territory. This is no longer the case, even if it is often claimed and believed to be so. For the last twenty years, many right-wing and centrist politicians complain that immigrants from former colonies come to France to give birth to obtain automatic citizenship. On the other hand, left-wing politicians insist that this should be the case, as a demonstration of solidarity, of the "fraternity" that France has allegedly always had towards its former colonial subjects, to repair the damages of colonial rule. In reality, the naturalisation process is more complex, it depends on proofs of residence and is adjudicated by a court that decides if the applicant fulfils all the conditions. There are a number of age-bound instances with differing requirements which can enable the granting of citizenship under specific circumstances (see: https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F295). Despite what people say and believe, nationality is not acquired automatically at birth for children born of immigrant parents on French soil. Such children must reside and study in France uninterruptedly until they are at least 16 years old to apply for nationality.

The room again

We were all adjusting our eyes to the light. It was like entering another dimension, after the screen, the stage, the images, the characters and people we had been watching. They settled back into their chairs, the noise of pages turning returned, some bags were also moving. I caught the teacher's eye, he was staring at me, prompting me to speak-up as if I were another of his students.

I started with a simple, basic (perhaps dull?) question "*what do you think about the movie?*". The ensuing silence did not bode well, but soon voices were heard. Some had engaged with the images. "*It was injustice, but that was like that at the time, wasn't it?*" "*Colonialism*!", said another slightly more loudly; some started to laugh. "*They used people to do things that they did not want to do, that's unfair…*"

I continued, "*Do you think that this is still possible?*". More laughter (I knew I could be funny, but not to this extent), followed by silence… "*Well… that is racism, and racism still exists, of course!*" said a girl in a slightly annoyed tone. Another student raised a hand, "*I know that can be possible, but not in the same way, it is different…*"

Several voices rose simultaneously, like a choir. It was becoming chaotic; they were nearly shouting. It was impossible to distinguish one voice from another. It felt like a storm was approaching. Everyone was trying to say something over the voices of others. I tried to get them to listen to each other, but their tumultuous enthusiasm overwhelmed me in some way, with joy and confusion.

The event had turned. It was no longer about me asking anything; they were discussing (loudly) among themselves. They had brought the discussion into another space -their own space- and I thought that was positive and let them talk among them, taking a step back. The atmosphere was charged, electric, like young children in the throes of a sugar rush. They were expressing their views, their fears, their

observations. Although I was excluded from this many-headed dialogue, I was delighted that things had turned out this way. It felt like it was their moment.

It did not last long. I cannot quite say how many minutes this went on for, but suddenly I felt a hand pushing down my shoulder, wresting the microphone from my hand. It was abrupt, almost violent, without any explanation. Startled, I turned back to grasp what had happened. The teacher was standing, talking into the microphone which was now firmly in his hand.

I was stunned. All I managed to do was to take a step back, to let the teacher speak in front of the students. He appeared irritated. He talked even louder than the students, referring to something they saw in the classroom. Once the students registered that I was no longer in charge of the discussion (if I ever was) and that their teacher had taken over, they quietened down. They settled back into their chairs, as in the heat of the discussion many had stood up and moved around the room.

The teacher was firm. He spoke with the confidence of knowing his audience well. He was in front of me, his back turned to me; I could no longer see the -now quiet- students. He talked about some of the documentary's topics, such as stereotypes and integration. But he never mentioned the word "racism". I felt ashamed and completely useless, incapable of achieving my task of leading the discussion.

I cannot remember when or how exactly, but the students stood up in silence and started to leave. Soon I was on my own. They had all left, teacher and all, and nobody had said goodbye.

All the lights were now on. I was on my own in the same room where just a few minutes ago, different rays were shining from multiple directions, from the screen to the audience, from the audience to the screen, from the teacher to the students, from the students to me, from the teacher to me, from me to the students, from the screen to me…

This game of reflections was over. I put on my coat and left this house of mirrors.

Mirrors

I tried, on several occasions, to describe this experience, from a mobile -not fixed- perspective. Paraphrasing Richard Sennet[192], I decided to use a perspective in a discovery way[193], wherein I was moving around the space in which we were in, and I walked around as if I was in a huge building.

Perspective can be tricky. If we stick to the traditional definition from the Renaissance, it is a point in a plane. But my eyes do not move, they just blink and build impressions in relation to a fixed point[194]. But other uses of perspective could be different. Instead of watching all from the same point, as in a panoptic, we can be watching different parts of the whole (which are not always connected) by moving the position[195]. This use or interpretation of perspective allowed me to see what was happening in the room from different angles. It also allowed me to define, or understand, what was happening with every actor in this scene. Indeed, Sennet defines this type of perspective as if no single point of view gives a pilgrim the answer[196], it is about discovery and exploration.

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[192] Sennet, R.: *The conscience of the eye, the design and social life of cities,* New York, London, W.W. Norton, 1992. Chapter 6, "The streets full of life".

[193] Sennet, R.: *op.cit.* (p.156).

[194] Sennet, R.: *op.cit.* (p.154).

[195] Pope Sixtus V's conception of Piazza del Popolo in Rome serves as an example in Sennet's book. Its layout allows us to walk discovering new entrances through the different lines shaped by the streets leading us to see other places, while walking around the square. See Sennet, R.: *op.cit*. (p. 157).

[196] Sennet, R.: *op.cit.*

There were four actors in this scene: the audience (the students), the teacher, the screen projecting images (projecting a story and a particular point of view) and myself as an enabler.

I would like to represent this experience as a progression of looks and sights, like a game of mirrors, that in the end was commingled. Because we were all traversed by these rays of light in the case of images and sights, from every direction, from the screen itself, from ourselves, from me to the audience, from the teacher to the students, to me, and from all of us to the screen projecting its own message on us.

Using the image of a mirror helps us to understand that each of the actors had their own experience of the scene, and because we all felt at some point represented, reflected in the film or in the sensorial experience of watching it. I will try to explore these reflections as sensitivities about racism and exclusion.

The concept of soft racism becomes particularly useful at this point. While the images were violently marked by racism, in the situation of watching, there were also different instances of discrimination and racism in the form of allusions or subtle manifestations. As I mentioned before I am interested in the subtle ways in which racism and discrimination (as well as social exclusion) appear in our daily lives in such a way that we, often, let them pass, without reacting to them. If we were more aware of these signals and their meaning, we could continue to defend ourselves from these infringements to kindness and humanity, we could consider fighting against them - perhaps in a similarly subtle way.

Let us begin with the screen itself and what it had been telling us in a luminous and sonic way.

As noted, the documentary is structured around one main thread, how the cultural stereotypes regarding people from abroad, more specifically those from former colonies, were constructed. While the documentary is almost a history of racism in recent French history, this has to be read between the lines, as the concept and the

word itself are never openly mentioned. We noted this in the previous chapter, racism as a concept still seems difficult to verbalize in French society in general and even within the academic milieu[197]. The most frequently used term is "stereotype", offered as the main reason for discrimination. In this sense, the historical archive footage is used to build the powerful sense of credibility that such images provoke, giving to the word "stereotype" more relevance than racism. In this way, we know that stereotyping is equivalent to a racist act, but in this context its prevalence hides the act of racism, thus converting it into a soft act of racism.

The historical approach also serves the documentary's ultimate objective, symbolically addressing the question of "how did we get to this situation?" Meaning, how can it be that French people living in Paris still have to deal with racism (although without referring to it explicitly).

The actual purpose of the film, as it states at the beginning, is to tell a story; to re-define what we think about immigrants living in Paris, who are often defined in numbers ("*hundreds of millions of immigrants*"). Opting for imprecise statistics alters the sense of humanity (or inhumanity -which is present throughout the documentary); perhaps in the quest for veracity, as also happens with its use of the historical images themselves. But "*hundreds of millions*" is a vague figure; it hints at a large number, reinforcing notions also portrayed in the documentary: "they are millions", and "they are in Paris". Assuming that we confront the images with a first prejudice based around three ideas: quantity (many), them (Others), and our city (Paris); as Sarah Ahmed says, "*The narrative works through othering (…) those who are 'not us', and who in not being us, endanger what is ours*[198]".

[197] Recall the work of D. Fassin and P. Simon, mentioned in the previous chapter, about the substitution of "racism" by "discrimination" in the regular usage of language in French society. Fassin, D. and Simon, P.: *op.cit.*

[198] Ahmed, S.: *op.cit.*

But here the narrative is about something that is *ours* (for the public for whom the film was projected) which is Paris, and something else which was Other (history). The film explains how those Others are almost ours, as part of what is originally ours (Paris). Which is another way to objectivize and separate those Others, through the following operation: it says We (we do not know who "we" are in the narrative of the film, perhaps *white French people of European origins*?) will make them "ours" by telling this story, which in the end will demonstrate (or at least attempt to) how those Others became a part of what is still ours[199]. It is important to see here that those "Others" will never be "us" in this city that is Paris. The narrative of integration expressed at the beginning of the film, seems very distant[200]. Others are here in Paris, and this category is treated also as a fixed value. Paris and Others are finally exclusive, fixed in a non-real historical sense, and yet are part of the main narrative of integration (not multicultural) that the documentary claims[201].

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[199] The use of history as a basis for veracity and credibility in the main narrative of the film lets escape the fact of constant change, and paradoxically, fixes the idea of Paris as a city that does not move, though it seeks to incorporate foreign elements to its still fixed existence. This contradiction reveals, how disguised the recognition of racism is, making it soft, or as M. Banton would say, coded.

[200] It is interesting to see how social problems like this were treated years ago by the social sciences and humanities. In the case of Todorov, T.: *The Conquest of America: the question of the Other*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1982; for example, when the treatment of Otherness was new but not the idea of colonialism linked to it. It is indeed such an old subject that we can also see it in the work of Enrique Dussel about the history of the Americas and the decentralisation of Western philosophy in Latin America. Otherness as a problem to analyse reconfigures itself in this so-called "era of globalization", but ideas of human superiority persist against any kind of rational deduction. This forces us to revisit those older texts despite their age, because they are still relevant to our enquiry. Dussel, E.: *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the Other and the Myth of Modernity*, Continuum, 1995.

[201] There is some aversion to the concept and the term *Multicultural* in France (see Doycheva, M.: *op.cit*., 2007). French politicians, social scientists, and intellectuals have always discussed *multiculturalism*, as an Anglo-Saxon experience that recreates the sense of ghettos, often quoting the US, Canada or the United Kingdom as ultimate examples. The discussion can be anchored in different juridical concepts of state, citizenship and the building of a nation. All this forged after the era of revolutions but also reconsidered in the case of French Colonialism. See Cooper, F.: *op.cit.* 2016; Smith, A.: "A comparative study of French and British decolonization", *Comparative Studies in Society*

In this way, the film is showing, in a very subtle way through the projection of its images, how racism can be disguised behind good intentions, while remaining, still racism. Social conflict is not mentioned, because racism is not in its narrative. But for the filmmakers, the conflict lies in the reproachable actions taken against those who look or are different and the proposition is simply to accept them in some non-clear way.

It is important to stress that there is no mention to other migratory flows in France, other than immigrants from former colonies (in this film Asia and Africa mostly). Numerically significant migrations from Italian, Spanish and Portuguese nations were also largely dismissed or discriminated against[202]. The focus is on the *indigènes* who always had a right to work in the metropole. Within the set of immigrants, the narrative of the film has chosen to deal with those with "papers", and less with the "*sans papiers*", even if they are also mentioned. It indicates a preference for legal and colonial status as prerequisites to allow them within the space of "their" Paris. This subtle insinuation extends to the avoidance of the word racism, which is simply replaced by "stereotype". There is no real consideration of those Others that came in what they would term "an illegal" way. Ultimately, immigration is still condemned.

The narrator's voice is also an important feature. It adopts a sorrowful tone very early on in the projection. We know from the very first sentences that this is going to be something sad and mournful. In the end, addressing the root of this gloom, there is an explanation ("*…they also built Paris and history still goes on…*").

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and History, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1978, pp 70-102. Also, Schnapper, D.: *Community of Citizens*. *On the modern idea of nationality*, Taylor & Francis, 1994; and Qu'est-*ce que la citoyenneté*, Folio, 2000.

[202] It is true that these migratory flows were more concentrated in the 1960s and 1970s when Spain and Portugal suffered from totalitarian governments and economic poverty. Many Portuguese and Spanish women worked in the cleaning sector (*femmes de ménage*); an object of discrimination not just for themselves but also their descendants. See: Pereira, V.: *L'État portugais et ses migrants en France,* Paris, Presses de Science Po, 2012. See also Lillo, N.: *La petite Espagne de la Plaine St. Denis*, 1, (900-1980), Paris, Autrement, 2004.

The unambiguously selected images combined with the mournful voice perambulate through the *sauvageries*, the military use of colonial subjects, the colonial nostalgia of French administration in Indochina. All of this leaves us with a certain *goût* for exoticism, while the narrator's voice expresses sadness.

Visualities

The film presents a series of colonial postcards. All are real and were presumably taken at the time (judging by the happy faces on most of them). However, the narrator's voice drags us in the opposite direction, towards a sense of wrongfulness; making the narrative as reprehensible as the idea of enjoying others because of their difference. Every postcard of rampant racism alludes to colonial allure and domination, but the voice jumps ahead of our senses, as if it were trying to inhibit our own conclusions. In some ways, the intentions of the film were lost on the audience. If the film was trying to tell us what we should think or feel (judging not just by the selection of the images but also the tone of the chronicler's voice) it was not entirely successful.

Moving on to the audience. The youngsters were seated; they were still talking and giggling at that point. The first images were powerful, but they laughed. First, because of the speed of the projection (typical of silent films from the early years of moving pictures) which appeared comical. They found humour within those anachronistic images. This chasm in time, in history, is also worth dwelling on.

I found a subjective mirror in the youngsters' humorous interpretation. It was not because they did not care about the sorrow that was ingrained into the storytelling and what they were hearing, but because they saw those characters as characters performing something comical. Later, some of the images reminded them of their neighbourhood.

The environment might have contributed. We were seated in a room that looked like a small theatre, watching a movie, with characters that seemed to be acting comically. We were in the neighbourhood and despite the distance being in a cinema implies, the students could not avoid making the connection between what they were seeing and what they knew as experiences or stories they had heard. They clearly made a personal and collective translation of those images, which they saw as funny instead of seeing the violence or cruelty in them, which the narrator stressed with his tone.

In this regard, those performative acts were part of history, representing what the French population of the time used to think or expect about those Others that France had finally conquered. In the public's imaginary, for the audience in the *Jardin d 'Acclimatation*, people brought from the colonies to entertain them did not have to act as themselves, whoever they were, but as what they were told to be. I believe the students were aware of this when they exercised their laughter.

It is not a minor conflict to accept that those imprints were based on the ideology of French superiority over those subjects, which was part of the classic rhetoric of the Colonialist system. It was about what they wanted to see rather than a genuine desire to discover something new. Racism and discrimination share this sort of prejudice, a pre-conception of the Other that makes a clear statement about how we approach those Others[203]. This reminds us how in the contemporary scene, as foreigners we are often asked to act as those Others into the idea of multiculturality. A situation that perhaps the students knew from their own experience, but which was not mentioned here. Racism was present, but disguised in a way that seemed casual, as a normality, which in fact hid the act, turning it into a soft act of racism[204].

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[203] For more on this, Said, E.: *op.cit.*, 1978; and Todorov, T.: *op.cit.*

[204] S. Hall was already suspicious about multiculturality when everybody is asked to appear *"in their own native costume".* This approach is helpful to understand how multiculturalism could hide the fact of segregation linked to racism but disguised as political correctness. Hall, S.: *op.cit.* 1991. (55-56).

Performing as Others turned out to be humorous for the audience in our own scene. The students acknowledged the performative nature of the act. Furthermore, they interpreted those little scenes of the *sauvageries* as part of a theatrical representation of Otherness, which they did not seem to find aggressive or offensive -but rather comical. This might also be the effect of soft racism in some way, as they might have established some similarities between performances of the past and the present.

At this point, the audience of students came to a new interpretation. Not because they did not care about the wrongfulness portrayed by the images but because they chose to see, to understand, another level of that snippet of historical reality. Giving another sense to that performance. Those Others were just exhibited for the filmmakers' purposes. To some extent this is akin to how the organisers of *sauvageries* wanted to catch the public's attention. They will still be Others at the end of the movie even after the claim is made that they are part of the same place - Paris. The switch is made by the mirror effect: who they are for the filmmakers, and who they were for the students.

The students built another narrative of those images, and this was in clear disruption of the major narrative of the film as we could see and hear. They condemned the images, but they knew, at a certain level, that it was also a performative act forced by the Colonial ideology of superiority, and they seemed to have understood that those people on display were acting to an audience, in the frame of a racism account. The context of domination and cruelty was missed or perhaps replaced by another notion.

The images that brought up similarities with LGO, transmitted a level of sympathy, showing in some way the level of belonging that they had with their neighbourhood. It was celebrated, and in fact they were not certain that those images were of LGO, but they appropriated them as if they were.

Postcard showing the street called La Goutte d'Or, Paris, circa 1880. Source: BNF (Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

A street of La Goutte d'Or. Photograph by ©Ricardo Watson

Those Others on the screen seemed to be closer to the students (they even laughed at the physical similarities). The students knew that what was in front of their eyes was an attempt to ask forgiveness -which ultimately does sum-up the documentary.

When the people in cages appeared, the volume of the voices in the room went down. Those images were full of visible meaning for all of us.

This brings to mind a case study based on the performative work of the artist Coco Fusco with Guillermo Gómez-Peña between 1992 and 1994; notably a piece performed on the grounds of the Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Both artists got into a cage; she was doing some art craftwork; he was pacing inside the cage. They were almost naked, covered with minimal garments with echoes of some indigenous origin. Most of the museum's visitors believed they were from foreign lands, exhibited there for their curiosity. While the museum does have various montages with human reproductions in different scenes behind large glass walls; it is shocking that nobody seemed to think that this performance was as such, purely fictitious, but opted rather to consider that it was real[205]. What is even more astounding is that nobody seemed concerned or annoyed; there were no complaints or criticisms by the public about those two persons in a cage.

This demonstrates how perceptions of racism continue to survive over the years. It is somehow being allowed to exist without denouncing the act -not even in blatant cases such as this one. On the other hand, this also shows how the new narrative operates. How political correctness covers itself with excuses and aims to hide every single form of racism. It is still there, it is not new, it is merely hidden[206].

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[205] Coco Fusco & Guillermo González Peña: *The couple in the cage: Two undiscovered Amerindians visit the West* (Performance Art Piece), 1992-1993. Available to see here: https://www.artandeducation.net/classroom/video/244623/coco-fusco-and-guillermo-gmez-pea-the-couple-in-the-cage-two-undiscovered-amerindians-visit-the-west

[206] The recent debates about Unconscious Bias (another euphemism for racism) in the UK come to mind. Several articles referred to the existence of a "Modern Racism" or "New ways of Racism", all of which underline the apparent difficulty of calling things by their names. Moreover, the term "new

Back in the days of the Lumière brothers nobody seemed to think there was anything wrong about filming black people jumping in a pond or putting them in cages to be exhibited. In both cases, representing how they thought the natives lived in the far (but colonised) lands of Africa appeared legitimate. Different forms of violent racism, including verbal abuse and discriminatory practices are now, in the 21st century, more likely to be legally condemned. But there are also different, undeclared, more subtle but existent levels of racism. This brings us again to the configurations of soft racism, in this case channelled by the sense of sight.

The experience of visual snaps of history, showing obvious representations of the Other, that persist to some extent, despite the historical changes, make the idea of soft racism useful to understand how racism was disguised in the images that accompanied the narrative about integration. Here, two dimensions are manifested, the major historical and colonial background of the images with some references to LGO, and the present of the neighbourhood as the place battled by social policies to integrate it to the rest of Paris, as if it were separate, different, isolated in its "diversity". That is the message expressed by the narrative of the film, aiming to surpass instances of racism with a discourse of integration, while in the neighbourhood, several political, media and general public references are constructed in a similar way, as a place that does not integrate completely[207].

Racism was visually present there, in those images, but it was not only as part of history and its colonial background, it came up also as a reminder of how the idea of race was built in that past to perpetuate to this day the level of racism that we still can see in the way the neighbourhood is usually represented, as a diverse place. The

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racism" has been around for about forty years. See Barker, M.: *The new Racism*, London, Junction Books, 1981. After the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and different events such as Rhodes must Fall in Oxford and the actual fall of the E. Colston statue in Bristol in the summer of 2020, there is some hope for more open discussions about racism between civil society and scholars.

[207] Balibar already showed how the state's narrative blames immigrant communities as being responsible for their failure to integrate socially. Balibar, E.: *op.cit.*

narrative of diversity overflies the intricacies of race relationships and the racism caused by the colour line, the construction of an image of the Other, that pointing out their visuality establishes a barrier, a differentiation first, and later the fact of racism.

All this makes us think about how the visuality of LGO has changed throughout its own history, as we can see in the two pictures above. Historical changes have occurred, and yet the discrimination that the neighbourhood still suffers as a place with contradictory representations, tells us that its visuality, still provokes the same reaction.

Sight thus, as a sense allowed us to explore different manifestations of racism, at different levels, historical, visual in the form of a film, but also in the way the visual idea of diversity has been constructed around La Goutte d'Or.

The images of the film and its narrative exposed how racism was perceived in the frame of the history of French colonialism, under the category of "stereotyping". But this omission of the use of the term racism was not casual, it might be in line with the tendency to avoid mentioning the term "racism", therefore the replacement of the word leads to some degree to diminishing the offense. [208]

In the room, the discussion was being steered towards the problem of "stereotyping" rather than towards racism. Despite the initial response from the students, the teacher changed the direction of the debate, as had the film, towards a softer territory, avoiding the conflictive reality of a history of racism, linked, in this case, to France's colonial past. In this way, the concept of soft racism can take form in these actions and representations through visual experiences. It is not only about the kind of gaze or look that we can receive, that condemns us as foreigners, as Others, it is also about the treatment of visual experiences that speak in a low voice about racism.

[208] This has to do with the sound of words, we shall see this pattern repeated through some case studies in the chapter Hearing.

CHAPTER III: Touch

About Touch

The sense of touch is in many respects linked to the sense of sight. When we cannot see, when we cannot look, in darkness for example, we tend to straighten our arms, trying to reach out towards whatever there might be in front of us, trying to keep safe, trying to keep walking and sensing what there is around us. This sensing through touch gives us confidence of what is there but which we cannot see. When we can actually see, touch manifests itself through our bodies, and how our bodies interact with our environment, moving, sensing, and approaching or distancing ourselves from people or objects.

Our bodies can react in different manners and according to our other senses. We can also touch with other parts of our bodies, other than our hands, and we can also touch to reach something, or approach something or some-body, or we can move back, distancing ourselves from others, from somebody.

In her work on touch in medieval times, C. Classen highlighted the tendency in social sciences to avoid the discussion of, or research on the act of touching:

"*The omission of tactile experience is noticeable not only in the field of history, but across humanities and social sciences. It seems that we have so often been warned not to touch that we are reluctant to probe the tactile world even with our minds*"[209].

This omission responds to a historical repression regarding the senses, "*we can find this attitude already in the historical writing of the nineteenth century when the notion that high culture requires suppression of the lower senses was formalized*"[210].

The separation of higher and lower culture is well developed by M. Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his world*. In this work, the first of its kind, he studies the interaction of higher- and lower-class cultural approaches. The (Renaissance) Carnival event where the social order was mixed up and reversed, responded to a bodily management of change, showing the possibility of a game regarding social class behaviours and ideologies[211].

Body and touch are entities that go together, even when they want to control each other.

By analysing the *grotesque realism* of medieval literature, Bakhtin draws attention to how throughout history the conception of the body was not just present in all its glory and in all its mundane being but also through the action of its senses[212]. Classen who works on medieval times, points out that different aspects must be considered to unveil the presence of the senses, particularly the sense of touch in social history.

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[209] Classen, C.: "The inside history", in *op.cit.*, 2012.

[210] Classen, C.: *op.cit.* (p. Xii).

[211] Bakhtin, M.: *Rabelais and his world*, Indiana University Press, 1984, 1965.

[212] Bakhtin, M.: *op.cit.*

She even remarks how the school of the *Annales* in France was a pioneer in highlighting the importance of the study of the senses for this historical period.

"*(…) [The] Annales School (…) aimed to broaden our understanding of the past by investigating collective beliefs and practices within their social, physical, and economic environments. (…) Marc Bloch, explored medieval structures of corporeal behaviour and social organization in works such as The Royal Touch (1973) and Feudal Society (1989). (…) Lucien Febvre, provocatively suggested in 1947 that a 'series of fascinating studies could be done on the sensory underpinnings of thought in different periods'*"[213].

Why Touch matters when studying Racism

Touch can also occur while approaching, or being approached, by the Other. Bodies can mutually feel the presence of each other; a presence that some might reject based on proximity.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Africans were brought to France for colonial exhibitions and other events wherein they were exhibited reproducing scenes of what was considered "their" daily life (or a Western idealization of it), behind a barrier. The spectators could choose the degree of proximity. The Other they were observing was besieged, guarded. They could come closer (up to a point) to see better, with no sense of danger about approaching the unknown. What was at work was an attraction in terms of the ecstasy of voyeuristic exoticism. The Other was an almost naked body. Naked, in different ways, not only were their clothes taken off them when exhibited; but naked also in the sense of their capacity to be, to exist.

The tactile did not come alone, it was accompanied by the other senses, by smell, by sight.

[213] Classen, C.: *Worlds of sense. Exploring the senses on history and across cultures*, Routledge, 1993.

A certain fascination was at play, given the inequality between the white coloniser and the colonised as highlighted in Fanon and Memmi's works[214]. But despite their proximity, distance existed. The white spectators differentiated between what was the space for the Other and for them. There was a separation of spaces (and places).

The Other is always at a distance. Approaching or moving away from the Other always depends on an established power relationship between the dominator and the dominated. A bit like Hegel's master and slave relationship[215]. But in this historical path, the Other was breaking certain imposed rules, and the rules were broken in response to historical processes.

The already mentioned similarities highlighted by Memmi in the relationship between Europeans and Africans, during and after colonialism, are evident. However, while they retain traces of the old structure of domination, they have mutated in some respects. Crucially, the place where these relationships take form has been reversed.

The relationship with the Other is no longer solely based on skin colour, although it persists as a remnant of this relationship's older structure. There are also social and economic inequalities in the mix. The conclusion is that racism, the product of domination studied by Fanon (and Memmi), is nowadays deepened and expanded based on discriminations of class, race, gender, and non-national origins.

Proximity or the distancing from the Other are the basis of the racism that acts through the sense of touch. I will discuss touch and racism, or discrimination, from three angles based on three cases located in the neighbourhood of LGO and its borders. I am interested in the manner how we approach, and how we distance

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[214] Fanon, F.: *op.cit.* Memmi, A.: *op.cit.*

[215] Hegel, G.W.F.: "Independence and dependence of self-consciousness. Lordship and Bondage", in *Phenomenology of spirit*, Motinal Barnasidass, 1998. (111-118).

ourselves from Others, in terms of racism or discrimination. Firstly, how are these changes in the distance from the body of Other (approaching or moving away) related to the acceptance or the rejection of the same Other? For this reason, the sense of touch will be understood as a bodily experience, firstly as all that implies proximity with the Other, the reach or not of touch. Secondly, I have explored the symbolic displacement of the same bodies through the exhibition of their images. Those photographs replace the fear of touch, and of the proximity of the body of Others, transforming them into empty bodies to observe. Thirdly, I will reflect about the ways in which we cover our bodies with particular textiles. In this case, textiles with the symbolic charge of an African identity (wax fabrics), and how these operate as identity claims to solve the conflict of proximity to the body of the Other.

I will use a broader concept of touch that entails the sense of proximity to Others through three different experiences. The rejection of touching the Other, by displacing them to the limits, as we will see in the case of the Mosques. The escape from proximity of the Other (interpreted as the possibility of touching) in the case of the Martin Parr exhibition. Finally, the proximity to the body of the Other through the touching of textiles, as we will see in the case of African Wax garments and fabrics in LGO, which help to build a sense of identity and belonging, while favouring the construction and perpetuation of stereotypes.

The Mosques

Abdoulaye is Muslim and every Friday at lunchtime we would try to stop near a Mosque so he could have time to pray. It was part of our weekly routine as we were travelling together, driven by Senhor Dadá, along the coast of Mozambique in 2004[216]. One time, we stopped in a small village, close to the local Mosque.

[216] Abdoulaye is now a close family friend. At the time we were working as a team of international electoral observers for the 2004 elections in Mozambique, for an international NGO, The Carter Center. That was my first job in Africa, and Abdoulaye was instrumental in training me up in all the skills that I acquired and learnt during that assignment.

Abdoulaye refused to leave the vehicle. He was hesitating. He was concerned that somebody might steal his shoes while praying inside.

I had never thought about this before. At first, I found it amusing, but then I realized that it was a real concern for him, as he was wearing his best pair of shoes that day.

I remembered this scene several times, when doing my fieldwork on Fridays around midday in LGO. Around 12.50 people would start to sit all along the sidewalk at the entrance of the small Mosque of the Rue *Myrha*. The same was happening 200 meters further down at the entrance of the Mosque on *Rue Polonceau*. These streets were never actually closed off to traffic but were often jammed with people moving to one or the other Mosque. People would congregate even if there was snow or when it rained, albeit in smaller numbers; with numbers rising significantly during Ramadan.

All the slippers and shoes were neatly lined-up, while the men were praying. That was what I first saw, the lined-up sandals, slippers, shoes, trainers, etc. behind the praying men. All next to each other, the overall result was a symbolic image of belonging to the same faith.

Taking off your shoes generally creates a sense of relief, beyond any religious connotations. The posture adopted by those praying, shoeless, on the street, was one of submission. The Islamic pose for prayer has similarities with the Catholic one, both are on their knees (in an act of humility before God). In addition, Muslims must direct their prayers and bodies towards Mecca, hence the exact positioning of their prayer rugs. These looked so colourful, against the grey Parisian backdrop. All the rugs were of a similar size, neatly ordered, making the landscape look like a performative artistic installation in the middle of the street.

Illustration by @Sil from Pencilory

My friend Abdoulaye's concern was unthinkable in these improvised places of prayer. Due to the lack of space, there was hardly any separation between the shoes and their owners. Space was the real problem. There was just not enough space inside these Mosques for all the faithful who came to pray on Fridays.

Passers-by on the corner of *Rue Barbès*, looked fairly surprised. Having said this, most wilfully ignored the scene, or even grumbled about how difficult it was to walk or cross the street. Although initially unusual, the situation became increasingly common. Between 2009 and 2011 it became a hotly contested issue, the case of the Mosques.

Why was this an issue?

Between 2009 and 2011, neighbours' complaints grew exponentially. Neighbourhood counsellor meetings (*Conseils de Quartier*), which are open to the public, are the official channel to protest about the problems that arise in the neighbourhood. The counsellors, generally from the neighbourhood, are elected through local elections and usually meet once a month.

Various neighbours started to raise the Mosques issue as a problem in these meetings. At first, they complained about the inconvenience regarding public circulation around these streets during the Friday prayers. However, the bulk of complaints soon focused on the presence of humans on the neighbourhood's sidewalks and streets. While Parisians never really seem to care too much about what is going on in the streets they walk on; somehow, this affair started to draw the attention of many who did not even inhabit the area[217].

Since its early days as a very working-class neighbourhood with high levels of immigration, LGO has been the subject of different schemes aimed at transforming its landscape[218]. Over the last twenty years, LGO has been one of the most resistant neighbourhoods to these processes of gentrification[219]. Having said this, the percentage of non-French residents in LGO, decreased from 20% in 2010 to 17% in 2018[220]. As we have seen there are no statistics on ethnicity (or on religion) in France, so it is difficult to ascertain the prevalence of Islam in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the issue of praying in the streets catalysed various forms of rejection towards LGO from other Parisian residents.

Tensions peaked in 2011. Irate Parisians, the media and now political actors concertedly claimed that the situation was out of control. The far-right flagged the issue, branding it "*an occupation of the [French] territory*". Their soon to be leader continued defining this in the media as "*advances from the Islamic world, first the*

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[217] The issue was extensively covered in the media.

[218] The population in LGO is estimated at around 30,000 inhabitants. INSEE (National Institute of Social and Economic Statistics), 2015.

[219] There are several publications about gentrification in LGO, going as far back as twenty years ago. Bacqué, M.H. and Fijalkow, Y.: "En attendant la gentrification: Discours et politiques à la Goutte d'Or (1982-2000)", *Sociétés Contemporaines*, n°63, 2006. See also: Chabrol, M.; Collet, A.; Giroud, M.; Launay, L.; Rousseau, M.: *Gentrifications,* Paris, Ed. Amsterdam, 2016.

[220] INSEE, 2015.

Islamic veil, secondly the burqa, now this"[221]. In parallel to the growing media coverage, increased involvement from different political groups in the run-up to municipal elections, exacerbated tensions and conflict among residents. This ranked as one of the most public and virulent attacks aimed against LGO at the national level. It was inscribed within a context of increasing levels of Islamophobia in France; at a time when the political narrative of the Sarkozy government was stoking the debate about National Identity[222].

What I will focus on is not the contemporary coating of political conflict but the rejection of the Other, based on the proximity of their bodies. I will try to understand why their collective presence was interpreted as a menace to public order. How a narrative of racism in the 21st century developed, beyond the upheavals of the relationships between the secular modus-vivendi and the representation of Islam, but rather and more interestingly, grounded in a fear of intimacy towards the body of the Others -or the possibility of touching them, thus their proximity.

The *public* space

I walked along the *Rue Myrha*, on numerous occasions -including on Fridays. The first time was in 2009. It was a cold November day and I walked up and down the street looking for shops. I did not know where the Mosques in LGO were at the time, but suddenly I spotted the rolls of colourful rugs on the sidewalk. Twenty minutes later they were open, completely covering the pavement. I felt that I was interrupting something, walking among these already kneeling men. Something akin to when you enter a church as a tourist and realise the priest is in the middle of delivering mass.

[221] Marine Le Pen on France 2, 11 and 14 December 2010.

[222] See the first chapter of this thesis.

Very soon, the volume of men and rugs were impeding passers-by's access to the pavement. Prayer had started, and I could hear the Imam's voice and breathing through a megaphone. A couple of steps more and I was out of the way. Along the other streets the usual hum of LGO continued unperturbed, albeit with fewer street vendors than when I came out from the Metro. Perhaps they were among the group of people praying at that time.

It took some time before I was able to talk with some of the people who attended Friday prayers in LGO. It was not easy at the beginning because not all the faithful wanted to speak to me. Others did not appear confident speaking French; some of them told me later that they came to these Mosques because they also had prayers in Arabic.

I collected these short snippets of dialogue with some of the praying men over several months. Sometimes, the weather made the task more difficult, but there were always people praying outdoors on Fridays.

Do you come here often to pray?
No, I was just visiting some relatives and we decided to come together, I live outside Paris.

Do you come here every Friday?
I do, I live in the area, and I come because it is close to home. I know people who come from the north for example they say that here the Imam is more moderate than in other Mosques outside Paris.

I do, I come from Malakoff, (I also was living in Malakoff, I said) *and we don't have a Mosque there, this is very convenient for me. My wife sometimes comes with me and goes to the women's Mosque across the street. They have more space there than in ours* (smiles).

I live in St. Denis, but I come every Friday and I do my shopping here afterwards. It is a direct line on the RER[223].

Don't you mind being out on the streets instead of inside a bigger Mosque?
We don't have bigger Mosques in Paris. I used to live in Brussels and there you have more Mosques available for Muslim people. I miss that.

Me, I lived in LGO for the last 5 years. I come every Friday, and I don't care to be in the streets. I would love to have a bigger Mosque, but the economic reality is that no one can put money up for that.

Did you know that there is a plan, **a project to build a new Mosque near here?**
No, I didn't. Here? In LGO?
Yes! It is part of the projects of the local council of the 18th arrondissement.
I hope they do it soon, winter will come again![224]

[223] *Réseau Express Régional*, a commuter rail system serving Paris and its suburbs.

[224] I was never able to tap into any dialogue with the complainers or "reclaimers". At the *Conseil de Quartier*, neighbours were reluctant to talk to me. While explaining that I was conducting research (at the time, this part of my fieldwork was conducted for the EHESS which is a well-known institution in Paris), when I mentioned my original subject of multiculturalism it did not seem to interest them.

An image of the street minutes before Friday Prayers. Illustration: ©Sil from Pencilory

Found in my fieldnotes: "*I can see the bodies close to each other, sharing a space and a moment in prayer. Men reclined on their rugs, shoes behind them. While there is a unity among them, there is also a contrast. I can see the proximity to the pedestrians, and the background of the grey chalk buildings. I can hear the not-so-distant sound of the aerial metro rolling by, and I can feel the Parisian humidity telling me that this is happening in Paris*"[225].

In the narrative of the "reclaimers", the bone of contention was around the question of illegitimate occupancy of the public space. For the authorities, it was an offence against the Republic, as expressed by the then Minister of the Interior, Claude Guéant[226]:

[225] Transcription of some of my fieldnotes from March 2010.

[226] Claude Guéant was the right-hand of President Sarkozy during his administration. He was involved in political and official measures against immigrants in France and against Muslim symbols such as the veil. After his years in the cabinet, he was condemned in 2019 to three years in prison, one suspended, for embezzlement of public funds.

"The socialist mayor of the 18th arrondissement of Paris, Daniel Vaillant, said that street prayers did not bother him. I am sure it disturbs many of our compatriots. They have nothing against this or that religion, but appropriating the ***public space*** *in this way is not in accordance with the principle of secularism to which they are very attached*[227]".

A bit later in the same interview he was asked about LGO.

"Q.: The most sensitive issue is that of the Goutte d'Or district in Paris. Have you finally reached an agreement with the cultural associations?
A.: Absolutely, an agreement was signed on Wednesday evening. After several weeks of negotiations, we have found a solution so that the faithful who prayed on Rue Myrha and Rue Polonceau will now be able to worship in available premises located nearby. The leaders of the Muslim faith and those of the two Mosques of La Goutte d'Or, which have formed a religious association, have agreed that they can practice their religion on this site (2,000 m²), which belongs to the state. It will be rented for 30,000 euros per year (…). The faithful will no longer have any need to pray in the street, because there will be more space for worship inside the district's Mosque in the coming weeks"[228].

Economically speaking, high rates had prevented the rental of larger spaces for the Mosques. Initially, the project was to build a new, bigger Mosque with funds from the government of Paris. The governor, Bertrand Delanöe started with the construction of a secular site, the "Institute for Islamic Culture", which initially was meant to host a religious site within and which, would later be relocated to the *Rue Stephenson*. The project never materialised, as French Law prohibits the use of public money to fund places of worship.

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[227] Daniel Vaillant was the socialist mayor of the 18th arrondissement, which includes LGO. Interview with C. Guéant, in Le Figaro, 14 September 2011.

[228] Le Figaro, *ídem*.

Following Guéant's deal, the lack of space in LGO's Mosques was only partially resolved. They were assigned a new location, situated on the boundaries of the neighbourhood and combining both Mosques. It was an old fire services warehouse, with no religious significance and without the necessary conditions to convert it into a Mosque in the short term. The faithful undertook the task of organising the move. While the media stopped reporting on the case, the conflict was ultimately labelled as an illegitimate use of public space by representatives of a religious community. Leaving out of the discussion what was the notion of public space put forward by the media, or by the local neighbours who were claiming it.

The debate was mostly voiced by the local counsellors, without it seems, any representation, initially, from the Mosques or the Muslim community. Thus, there was no real equality in terms of a discussion to solve the conflict between the two parts. What resonated was the condemnation voiced by different sectors, principally the media and far-right political sectors, as well as some on the left[229]. The final decision, moving the Mosques to the assigned peripheral site, was taken by a state minister (Mr. Guéant), reflecting a lack of real engagement from the mayors of Paris and of the arrondissement to resolve the controversy.

The project of the new Mosque was turned down due to a legal impediment (as mentioned, the constitution prohibits the French state from investing in any religious endeavour). The relocation of the Mosques was legally decided by the state. In both cases the decision to displace those bodies from the streets was based on the legal system, which was used to effectively regulate the proximity of Others, as it had done in the colonial era with the *Indigénat* system[230].

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[229] I was present at three *Conseils de Quartier*, in 2009 wherein the issue was discussed. These reflections are drawn from my fieldnotes. Minutes (*compte rendus)* from these meetings are not freely accessible. See: https://www.participezparis18.fr/les-conseils-de-quartier/conseil-de-quartier-goutte-dor-château-rouge/

[230] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Indigénat* as a colonial legal system was initially practised in Algeria before its application in other colonial territories in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Mechanisms of control of local native populations such as forced labour, punishments and forced taxes, among

Furthermore, this identification of the street as a public place, whose occupation infuriated the reclaimers, reflects a sense of separation of the neighbourhood's space. Corporeal presence of some communities seems to be restricted under these claims, as in the drawing of limits between natives and colonisers in the old colonial jurisdictions.

While it is true that public demonstrations of Islamic practices have regularly aroused anger and rejection in French society[231], I want to make another aspect of that discrimination visible. The enflamed reaction was partly unleashed as the presence of those bodies was sensed as being too proximate, within touching distance. These two aspects of the same act of discrimination: Islam and its bodily manifestation in the streets, were interpreted not just as a menace but as an invasion, which recreates in a new way, the spatial division of the cities traced in French colonies in Africa, such as in Algeria, as we mentioned above, separating natives and colonisers. In this sense, racism understood through touch, the fear of the proximity of the Other is reproduced in this example of a local conflict in a Parisian neighbourhood in the 21st century. The geographical space is inversed, as this is France, and the immigrants/Muslims are considered "invaders", which the French actually were in Algeria.

This separation of bodies in the 21st century seems inspired by the regime of segregated spaces in colonial territories, as was, among others, the case in Algeria. It

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others, were applied throughout the French Empire despite their local particularities. In the case of Nouvelle Calédonie, the system (with some reforms) lasted until 1998. For African examples, see Asiwaju, A.I.: "Control through coercion: a study of the *Indigénat* regime in French African administration, 1887-1946", in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol.9, nº1, 1978. For the Pacific example see: Merle, I. and Muckle, A.: *L'Indigénat. Genèses dans l'Empire Français. Pratiques en Nouvelle Calédonie*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2019.

[231] All religious symbols are forbidden in public institutions and the civil service. In 2004, the prohibition was extended to primary schools, although it is allowed at universities.

is interesting to remember how Fanon saw that separation of urban spaces in Algiers as one of the foundations of colonial racism[232].

The case was resolved by excluding those who prayed. The authorities, represented not just by the state but also by the local counsellors, took the decision to extricate the problem. The bodies, and with them the conflict, were displaced to the edge of the neighbourhood's physical borders. The dislocation contributed to maintain the proximity of these Others and the possibility of being touched by them at bay, beyond a space considered by the reclaimers as their own.

This affair exposed a type of racism, which went beyond the Islamophobia that was in vogue at the time. It unmasked a type of racism based on fears of proximity, of the possibility of touching the Others or being touched by Others, in a space that the reclaimers (echoed by the media) considered their own. The claim was firmly based on the need to cut off the proximity of Other's bodies which was represented as a menace. The menace of touch showed how easily those neighbours could resort to old juridical or legal statements to separate and erect a border between different bodies or at least displace them as far as possible.

The sensorial apprehension to the touch or proximity of the bodies of Others has a historical connection with memories of the French colonial system. The bodies of Others were disconnected in colonised sites to subject them to the colonial rule[233].

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[232] Fanon, F.: *op.cit.* 1961.

[233] The French colonial system in Algeria developed the separation between natives and colonisers (*colons*) by dividing spaces, the Casbah and the colonial city. Frantz Fanon brought this into his analysis of the impact of colonialism on native populations. See Fanon, F.: *op.cit.* Another colonial experiment in the dislocation and separation of native populations was conducted in Senegal, in the île de St. Louis, in front of Dakar, where the wealthiest sectors were accommodated separately from the rest of the population, but where mixed race families were living. Manchuelle, F.: "Ile, Métis et colons: la famille Devés et l'émergence politique des Africains au Sénégal, 1881-1897", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 24:96, 1984, (477-504). For more recent work, see Jones, H.: "Rethinking politics in the

As manifested by these social conflicts in LGO; there are still traces in modern French society of this experience of separation, and of this fear of the presence of Others.

The racist system established as part of colonial rule to govern subjected populations has been turned inside out. The site in question is not a conquered territory overseas, but part of the metropolitan national territory. Moreover, some of those Others are from former colonies. They are experiencing from the coloniser, as Memmi says[234], the same conflictual process as regards their bodies (and their colour), as occurred during the colonial period in sub-Saharan Africa or the Maghreb.

The body of the Other is considered at a similar value as it was in colonial times. There are, of course, some new nuances and greater political dissimulation (although not always, as we will see in chapter Smell). Many despise them and have a visceral urge to remove them from national soil[235]. They are also denied as a political force[236], which limits their capacity to engage in dialogue with their detractors -such as for example the reclaimers in the example above.

Other place for those bodies

As noted above, the original project contemplated a new place of worship, to remove the need for prayer on the streets, and simultaneously a new building for the Institute of Islamic Culture (ICI, in French). Only the latter prevailed, with the aim of raising

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colony: the métis of Senegal and urban politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2012. (325-344).

[234] Memmi, A.: *op.cit.*

[235] The political far-right, in-line with its anti-Semitic background, promotes without hesitation in its political agenda the deportation of immigrants, especially those who are Muslim and from France's former colonies.

[236] The protracted process for immigrants to acquire citizenship or residence is a disincentive for immigrants to engage in yet another struggle for their civic rights to participate politically, voting for example, while they wait for their papers.

awareness of Islamic culture, tradition and art among the general public. Its activities range from workshops on culinary experiences, conferences, books presentations, and artistic activities, with a special focus on photography exhibits.

The same year the conflict subsided, the ICI organised a photo-exhibition of works by Martin Parr, a British photographer, who was selected as artist in residence for a week. His work featured portraits of people and scenes from the neighbourhood. Although commissioned by the ICI to present a positive perspective of LGO he was profoundly impacted by the Mosque controversies, Friday street-prayers and all the media buzz.

Martin Parr, Press Conference, ICI, 2011. Illustration: ©Sil from Pencilory

The exhibition included photographs of people, neighbours mostly, as well as references to immigration and to the presence of Islam in the *quartier*, such as in his pictures of the Friday prayers.

"I've never seen anything like it. One of the main differences between Islam here and in the UK, is that it is much easier to build Mosques in the UK. There is therefore no need to pray outdoors in the UK. When I went to the Friday Prayers the organizers insisted that I should come inside and photograph the interior of the Mosque (…) they

even gave me permission to go into the women's Mosque which I thought was extraordinary and you'll see the photo (…) I'd never seen a women's Mosque from the inside. (…) they wanted to explain that the prayers in the street were in no way a provocation, they were purely a necessity"[237].

"Exotic Products", by Martin Parr, Exhibition: "La Goutte d'Or", Institute of Islamic Culture, Paris, 2011.

The authorities at the ICI were delighted and insisted in the media that these photographs challenged some of the prejudices on the neighbourhood.

"*I myself have been living in the Goutte d'Or for five years, I have often seen the collective prayer on Fridays. But I never noticed, that next to the Mosque, there is a store called (as it says above the window) "exotic products", ... it is very interesting to see them in front of this shop. It is at the heart of the debate but in a way that has shifted, with a touch of humour, without falling into provocation or mockery, I think this picture raises the right questions*"[238].

[237] Martin Parr, Press conference, 2011, in Télérama TV magazine, April, 2011: https://www.telerama.fr/scenes/une-oeuvre-a-la-loupe-une-image-de-martin-parr,67606.php

[238] Veronique Reiffel, curator, Press Conference, in Télérama TV magazine, April 2011: https://www.telerama.fr/scenes/une-oeuvre-a-la-loupe-une-image-de-martin-parr,67606.php

The ICI thrives in showing a different representation of the bodies of Islam through photography exhibitions. In these exhibitions, as in Martin Parr's, the vivacity of the Other's body is replaced and mediated by a visual cultural artefact, very different from the real bodies praying in the streets. This representation of the same bodies lacks any sort of conflict. They are approachable through the act of exhibition. There is an emptiness to their corporeal and touchable experience. They are discharged, muted, distanced. They now occupy another kind of public space, a cultural one.

What were once race relations in colonial history are now cleansed, emptied of that biological[239] content to be replaced by cultural difference. Conflicts are now given, not by interracial relationships, but by cultural differences. Racism is reduced and disguised in this game of intercultural relationships or, more precisely, because of its alleged impossibility, given that the origin of the nuisance is more the *culture* of the Other, not their bodies.

The act of racism is hidden but existent in the constant efforts that French postcolonial society makes to effectively "tolerate" Other cultures on its national soil. Thus, while on the one hand the conflict of the Mosques was solved through a complete dislocation of those bodies; on the other hand, the same bodies were still present in evocative images in a closed cultural gallery in the same neighbourhood. The fear of closeness, of the touch of others, is replaced by the enjoyment of distance, afforded by photography.

[239] Foucault, M.: *op.cit.*

Wax Fabrics and the touch of Africanity

One of the many textile shops in La Goutte d'Or. Photo: ©Sil from Pencilory

Walking around LGO, our attention is drawn to clothes of all types, colours and shapes. Several of these garments are made from wax fabrics. Characterised by their striking colour palettes and patterns, these fabrics are works of art in themselves, including icons, drawings, and sometime phrases (often in English or French). Representing a huge industry in Africa (mainly in sub-Saharan countries); they are part of people's everyday attire in many urban and rural settings and are known through different names (*Capulanas* in Mozambique, *Ankaras* in Ghana, etc.) around the continent.

Rolls of wax fabric are on sale by the meter in LGO. They come in different colours and qualities, which determine their price. Those that are made in The Netherlands

at Vlisco[240], are stocked exclusively in some boutiques, which exhibit catalogue pictures in their windows.

A lot has already been said and written about wax fabrics and fashion from different perspectives: a piece of art with "postcolonial" substance[241]; a representation of an African culture of clothing (with the undeniable irony that it was introduced by Europeans into West African markets); and an example of a marketing strategy targeting consumers hungry for a new exoticism[242]. The latter gravitates around the notion of a postcolonial artefact representing a globalised market in which Africa takes part by inversing its subjected economic place[243].

This last point merits further attention, as the questions about authenticity have been present since the very first debates around cultural anthropology[244]. As both Commaroffs[245] pointed out, what was once a question of ethnic authenticity, implying cultural differences and belongings, is now part of a new commodity that some subaltern spaces or countries have created (or recreated) to sell to the West. However, authenticity as a value given to artefacts from non-Western cultures, is fading in the age of global migration.

We can find all kinds of artefacts from other cultures at convenience stores that sell products for nostalgic immigrant communities. We can also find replicated items and

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[240] Vlisco is a Dutch wax textile company founded in 1846. See its website: https://www.vlisco.com/about/about-vlisco/

[241] Yinka Shonibare, a London-based Nigerian artist, has worked extensively with wax fabrics. Most notably his famous artwork "British Library", composed of books covered in them, which was recently acquired by the Tate Modern in London.

[242] Amselle, J.L.: *op.cit.* Thomas, D.: *op.cit.* and Sylvanus, N.: *Patterns in circulation, clothes, gender and materiality in Western Africa,* University of Chicago Press, 2016.

[243] Thomas, D.: *op.cit.*

[244] See Geertz, C.: *The interpretation of cultures*, Fontana Press, 1993. Also, Clifford, J.: *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art,* Harvard University Press, 1988. Also, Geertz, C.:

[245] Commaroff, J. and J.: *op.cit.*

copies of those same artefacts, once revered as unique and authentic. So, in this sense, the praise for authenticity is seemingly being replaced by the act of dismissiveness that follows. The confrontation with the Other and their proximity, provokes disappointment in Western societies due to the lack of exoticism. Authenticity is somehow validated by the distance from that Other, proximity leading to the subsequent dismissal of their culture. The distance from the body ensures praise for the object, its exoticism, while proximity (finding it in several shops in the neighbourhood) seems to curtail that appreciation.

All of this has emerged in LGO over the last decades, through different forms of social turmoil. What we have now is a singular stage of performance of Otherness, with some labelling of authenticity supplemented by the seal of a European appropriation of what was once entirely "African" or simply "Other".

Wax fabric is consumed in Amsterdam, Brussels or London. In Paris, it is sold mainly in LGO, in small shops, boutiques and even bazars. On market days, some retailers sell them directly in their stalls. Indeed, the clothing and fabric trade has thrived in the neighbourhood over the last forty years. Having said this, the presence of fabrics in LGO is shared with its immediate periphery, the Montmartre area. Beyond its touristic appeal, Montmartre, particularly the famous Saint Pierre Market, has historically been the place to search for different types of fabric, including wax[246].

LGO, was once considered the centre of the European wax market, providing retailers from all around the continent[247]. The history of wax and that of LGO have been intertwined ever since this fabric made its entrée in the 1980s. For most Parisians, it was the first time they saw these colourful prints, generally covering the bodies of

[246] Established in 1910, the Saint Pierre Fabric Market is 200 meters from *Boulevard Barbès* (the main avenue of LGO). Its prices and variety make it the best place in Paris to look for fabrics and items of haberdashery.

[247] E. Lallement defines the *centrality* of LGO as a market of African goods sold to other parts of Europe, while N. Sylvanus maintains a similar idea. Lallement, E.: *op.cit. ,* 2010. Also, Sylvanus, N.: *op.cit.*

women that came to re-join their husbands; sometimes attaching their children to their backs; creating a new visual landscape in the streets of Paris[248].

In the 1990s, LGO become the centre of distribution and sales of products made in, or coming from, Africa[249]. Shops selling fabrics started to become more prominent and grew, catering for the consumption of wax fabrics, mainly directed to African women who were at that time already settled in France. The number of these shops has increased significantly, now covering several streets. This has imprinted the image of the neighbourhood with colourful African clothing and fabrics.

In parallel, several tailors and dressmakers, mostly from Côte d'Ivoire, the Congo, Mauritania and Senegal, started to settle down in LGO in the late 1980s and 1990s. Some started to work at the back of fabric-selling outlets, offering the possibility of tailor-made clothes *in situ*. The respect they have gained throughout the district through their ever-increasing clientele has benefitted other fabric shops in the neighbourhood and is a testament to their skill. Gradually, they set up their own independent businesses in LGO, offering fabrics and the services of made-to-measure tailoring[250].

"There is no other place where I can get my clothes made", says Madame Mimi. She comes every two months to order a new garment from Sassu the tailor[251].

LGO has reacted in different ways to the progressive changes in the neighbourhood following urban gentrification projects led by different administrations of the city of Paris in the last few years. It became a place of reference to shop for African fabrics

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[248] Grosfilley, A.: "Récit de vie, tissue d'ailleurs. Des enjeux du wax et des populations noires en France", in *Hommes & Migration*s, 1310:35, 2015.

[249] Lallement, E.: *op.cit.*

[250] Lallement, E.: "Espaces marchands et mode à Barbès, un Fashion mix urbain et cosmopolite", in *Hommes & Migrations* nº 1310, April-June, 2015, (45-53).

[251] From a brief conversation in the neighbourhood. Names have been changed to protect their privacy.

and, also acquire tailor-fitted clothing made by highly skilled designers and tailors. Indeed, the Council of Paris (*Mairie de Paris*) has actively supported these initiatives. In 2011 it backed a project to unite different tailors and designers from the neighbourhood[252]. In 2014 the Territorial Pole for Economic Cooperation was established, grouping tailors and dressmakers to offer their work, notably to larger clients within the field of French designer fashion[253]. In 2019, the possibility was offered to all the small workshops of tailors and dressmakers in the neighbourhood to work through a network, allowing them to build a small union, as a way to fight against the rising levels of informal work.

Fashion has finally established a firm foothold in LGO, and it has started to sell its products and its image to an ever-widening clientele. This fashion phenomenon has re-signified some of the old stereotypes regarding wax fabrics and related to immigration.

Covering bodies

In the 19th century the naked body of the Other was exoticized[254], and admired from a distance. Now, in the 21st century, in an era of immigration and globalisation, how has the approach to the Other's body changed?

[252] Called, "Made in La Goutte d'Or", see https://www.madeingouttedor.paris

[253] Renown *haute couture* houses have commissioned pieces from them and have also promoted the creation of working cooperatives such as the *Fabrique de La Goutte d'Or*, which displays its work at the annual international fashion and design show, Première Vision, among others. See https://fr.fashionnetwork.com/news/Fabrique-de-la-goutte-d-or-une-cooperative-textile-made-in-paris,679973.html and https://www.premierevision.com/en/magazine/la-fabrique-de-la-goutte-dor-fashion-made-paris/.

[254] Let us recall the naked bodies of the Human Zoos of the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* in Paris in the 1930s that we mentioned in chapter Sight.

Today, the representation of the body of the Other is not naked, it is perceived as dressed, but still seems to be exoticized[255]. Following Audre Lorde[256], the normative body is still the whitened body, despite the rise of black and African fashion designers in the economic sector of fashion. Wax fabric has developed significantly, entering our modern fashionista times[257], and that has helped to transform the stereotype of the black African look and body for more economically powerful consumers. Fashion is the territory where the black and exoticised body is now covered with African fabrics -wax fabrics- but these clothes have been given another meaning from their original use as "simple" garments. Their colourful patterns also enhance a touchable desire, the grain of the fabric, its texture and its thickness are often felt to gauge its quality.

There are different ways of seeing these fabrics attached to bodies in LGO. They are found in skirts, dresses, blouses, scarves, and as a way to carry small children on women's backs, a technique still used by descendants from African parents, and also as a platform to carry large and heavy objects on the head. In the last ten years or so, wax prints have become more recognisable in Paris; firstly, as part of the world of African clothing and, more recently, as a component of African identity[258]. What began as a stereotypical image of women carrying their babies on their backs using fabrics made of wax prints, has evolved in the perception of a broader audience into an element of local fashion[259].

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[255] For example, references to African women's bodies (including their hair) and not the clothes appear to be signals of racism and discrimination, disguised as praise of the exotic. See Dabiri, E.: *Don't touch my hair*, 2020.

[256] Lorde, A.: *Sister Outsider*, Berkley, Crossing Press, 2012, (1984). (p. 116).

[257] See different approaches to wax fabrics in fashion: Grosfilley, A.: A*frican wax print textiles*, 2018; Gillow, J.: *African textiles, colour and creativity across a continent,* 2016; and Spring, C.: *African textiles today,* 2012.

[258] Sylvanus, N.: *op.cit.*

[259] Barou, J.: "Variations des comportements vestimentaires chez les immigrés africains, entre pôle occidental et pôle traditionnel", in *Hommes & Migrations*, *ídem*.

What used to be representative of immigrant clothing, now represents the clothes of Africa, as a whole -not just its migrants. Wax fabrics are easily associated with Africa, even if there are enormous variations of fabrics and textiles on the continent. It is now part of the idea of African identity, outside Africa[260].

African references have increased in the shape of other products made with wax fabrics or wax prints that have started to be sold not just in LGO but also in other parts of Paris and in different trendy shops, conquering a new and wealthier clientele. As a homage to African culture, the use of wax fabrics has spread from clothing to interior design[261].

While I edit this chapter, the new reality of the Covid pandemic has brought out a new use. Tailors in LGO created facemasks from wax fabrics and distributed them freely in the first weeks of lockdown in France for neighbours that could not afford or find masks[262].

The wax fabric fashion has established itself further in LGO through the presence of clothing boutiques run by a new generation of designers and young entrepreneurs of African descent. Their designs have been successful among Parisians and have proven relatively popular throughout France and are now extending their reach towards the American market. This exemplifies the increasing appreciation for garments and products made with wax fabrics. But how does this trend work in relation to the concept of African identity?

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[260] This is a global phenomenon that is not exclusive to France.

[261] The trend established itself in France around 2009.

[262] Solidarity in this difficult period also reflects the resilience and maturity of this sector. TV5, May, 2020. See https://information.tv5monde.com/video/coronavirus-en-france-un-tailleur-senegalais-du-18eme-arrondissement-de-paris-distribue-des among other relevant media coverage.

African identity, in question

In her recent documentary "Wax Prints", Aiwan Obynian searched for answers regarding this new phenomenon surrounding wax fabric. After a few tangents, she and her interviewees, mostly young African descendants settled in European capitals, arrive at the conclusion that wax is a way of representing the "African identity" that is theirs and that is within themselves[263].

The history of wax is certainly an example of global history, linking the commercial and economic exchanges of at least three geographical points: Africa, Java and The Netherlands. In Africa, the origin of its consumption has centred around the figure of Ghanaian soldiers who were recruited as part of the colonial military forces who fought in Java under the command of the Dutch Empire. It has been said for generations that these soldiers brought back home some wax textiles as gifts for their families, initiating the taste for and demand for these fabrics. However, this story, although extensively repeated by different fashion historians[264] to this day[265], has not been historically revisited or researched appropriately.

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[263] *Wax Prin*t, directed by Aiwan Obynian, 2018. Mostly shot in Ghana, but also in the USA and The Netherlands, the documentary presents varied opinions, mostly from fashion historians and designers. While interesting, the film does not answer its initial questions.

[264] According to Van Kessel, W.T. Kroese would be the origin of this inaccurate history, through his *Origins of the Wax blocks prints on the Coast of West Africa*, 1976; later repeated by G.H. Rodenburg *Dutch wax-block Garments, Textielhitorische Bijdragen* 8, 1967, (18-51); and reinforced by Ruth Nielsen, "Wax-printed textiles intended for West Africa and Zaïre", in J. Cordwelland and R. Schwartz (eds.): *The fabrics of culture: the anthropology of clothing and Adornment*, The Hague, Mouton, 1979. In Van Kessel, I.: "Wax Prints in West Africa: Unravelling the Myth of Dutch Colonial Soldiers as Cultural Brokers", in Osei-Tutu, J.K. (ed.): *Forts, Castles and Society in West Africa, Gold Coast and Dahomey, 1450-1960,* Netherlands, Brill, 2019.

[265] It has even been included in the catalogue of the latest "Wax and African Textile" exhibition at the British Museum. Spring, C.: *African Textiles Today*, London and Washington DC, The British Museum Press & Smithsonian Museum, 2012.

The Africanist historian Van Kessel[266] has recently confronted that view showing that there are insufficient sources to state that those soldiers played the role of *influence brokers* as has been repeated for years. She demonstrates that their presence in Ghana after their participation in the imperial conflicts in Java was limited, and that many never returned to Ghana. In, Elmina, where most of the soldiers departed from, there are no memories or evidence of their return either. Their own history has largely been forgotten in the local villages from where they might have come from[267].

Van Kessel arrives at the conclusion that the story has been established by fashion and textile historians, creating, maybe involuntarily, a myth about the origins of a major African commodity. According to M. Bloch myths in history have always served to reinforce the particular view of some historians obsessed with origins[268]. This myth regarding the history of wax fabrics in Africa also raises other questions and curiosities. For example, how did a product that was conceived in Java, then manufactured in Europe, and exported for its mass consumption in Africa become so representative, to the point of becoming a symbol of "body-identity" for young Africans?

Can these African references to wax, also be understood as a "cultural appropriation" of a product originally designed in Java, then introduced in West Africa, and later throughout most of the continent? This is a subject that merits more research, and above all, more reflection on how narratives on culture and identity can sometimes be very unstable; not because of the natural character of change, but mostly because there is an underlying myth, as stories recreated with the goal of establishing a history of origins, seek support in other social, political and ideological constructions.

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[266] Van Kessel, I.: *op.cit.*

[267] Her research helped the descendants of those soldiers to open a museum in the Java Hill, site where the soldiers had been settled after their return to Ghana. Van Kessel, I.: *op.cit.*

[268] Bloch, M.: "The Idol of the origins", in *The Historian's craft*, Manchester University Press, 1992. Originally published in France in 1949.

As for what we will discuss here, currently wax fabrics constitute a powerful link with Africa and the representation of its bodies, especially female bodies but lately also male ones.

There are several trendy shops selling African fabrics in the neighbourhood, targeting young and middle-class consumers, both African and non-African. Their customers share two motives: a love for trendy fashion and a love for wax. At this stage it is not important to determine if this consumption of wax fabrics and prints is based on any form of homage to African identity.

The brand Maison Château Rouge[269] (MCR), is one of the most successful in this field and is an interesting case to analyse. They create clothes and shoes mostly out of wax fabric, or with wax details, selling them in LGO, and throughout France and Europe on-line. Their reputation has led them to collaborations with large well-known brands such as Monoprix, Merci, La Redoute, Le Bon Marché, Galleries Lafayette and more recently with Nike[270]. The brand was born as a project of two brothers, one of them the designer, Yousouf Fofana. They started the shop on an *on-line* platform declaring their:

"*(…) desire to share African culture, to open it up and make it accessible through fashion. We design clothing that symbolizes the meeting of African and European cultures. You need to travel to promote and discover a country or continent, but in Paris, Africa is Château-Rouge! We wanted to pay tribute to this famous district in the 18th arrondissement, that best illustrates the meeting point of these two cultures*"[271].

Further on they say:

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[269] A homage to a very recognisable name in LGO, the metro station Château Rouge.

[270] In 2020, they created an Air Jordan model for Nike, with an embossed texture inspired by wax fabric design.

[271] In an interview entitled "The fearless ones" by Amira Rasool in AirJordan.com November 2019.

"*Château-Rouge is the African neighbourhood of Paris. For many years it didn't have a positive image in the media, amongst Parisians and in France, as a whole. Maison Château-Rouge is driven by a desire to display the evolution of our culture, enabled by a new generation of people who, like us, are re-envisioning it. The idea is to help reinvent African culture by sharing it with the rest of the world. We also want to pay tribute to Château-Rouge's historic traders, who sold African fabrics long before they became trendy. That's why we chose them as our direct suppliers. They have been keen to join us in our goal of developing local businesses and enhancing the neighbourhood*."

What is clear from Fofana's message, representing his brand, MCR, is that their main goal is to put an end to the old stereotypes of the neighbourhood at their African level. He and others who have started new businesses in LGO, are trying to define another shape for LGO to show. In the case of MCR it is through wax fabrics and patterns that characterize the "African" spirit of the neighbourhood. As he says in some interviews, he learned this lesson from his parents who always wore wax fabrics. Garments and interior design pieces are sold with clear reminiscences of African daily life. The Wax prints are redesigned by MCR and transformed into new products that show their inherent creativity with a touch of African products and colours.

Interior of the shop Maison Château Rouge-MCR in La Goutte d'Or. Photo from Magazine Courier by © Mailchimp

MCR works with some of the tailor workshops that have emerged in cooperative networks in LGO, as mentioned previously. "The migrant birds" is a charity founded by MCR, which enables its founders to share profits and organise projects in different areas of West Africa, demonstrating an interest beyond the mere selling of clothes. Instead of *Identity*, MCR is sharing a message around the *Culture* of Africa, its "evolution" (which resonates with old evolutionist racism in some ways) and a "reinvention". Are we now replacing Identity with Culture?

Culture and the quest for identities

We started with wax fabrics as a way of understanding the place of the body of the Other at present, considering the experiences and history of LGO and the ever-growing presence of textiles and fashion as a link to the body and its acceptance. We have seen that in the last few years narratives and images of bodies covered in wax

fabrics have been established and related (frequently from outside Africa) to an African identity. There have also been some pattern clashes regarding their use with accusations of "cultural appropriation" [272], which means that the supposed culture of the Other has been taken out of its normal environment and used for economic gain without truly crediting its *origins*. The recent discussions around "cultural appropriation" have not yet awaked sufficiently within academic scholars. As a trending media debate it combines several aspects: a) economic: as the criticisms based on the appropriation are directed to large fashion corporations, alluding to the economic rights of those products or designs taken from different native communities; b) touch related: as the question is about the bodies who wear those garments, they are criticized for attacking an "original" representation linked to a determined community which has created the design in the past and worn it on their own bodies; c) philosophical: who owns a design historically developed within a community?

[272] In 2017, when Stella McCartney showed a collection based on wax fabrics she was criticised by some African designers and firms of "cultural appropriation".

While the struggle against the copying of original designs is a constant battle for all honest artists, the praise of origins and ancestral ownership seems contradictory in the cosmological view of historical communities, as private (and intellectual) property within a capitalist system is something relatively new to them[273].

In our case, another myth has been built related to a history of origins to the African identity conferred to wax fabric.

The spread of the idea of an African identity symbolised in the wearing of wax patterns, as a new trend, defended by younger generations of African descendants, is another case wherein to discuss *origins*. As the levels of racism against immigrants and their descendants have increased in recent years, younger generations look for a genuine external respect for their bodies in a racist social environment, finding comfort in the trend of wax fashion, seen as representative of the roots, or origins of their parents.

However, its mythological history seems to confirm that it is another product resulting from colonial relationships, which is decontextualized, for its use and praise outside Africa, and fully introduced into the system of fashion markets. It is true and undeniable that wax prints continue to be related to Africa. But in some way, others have seen its potential use as a new flag. As the MCR designer says, it is part of their search for a "reinvention" of African culture. This culture that he refers to is more of a construction made in Europe, with references to Africa, but exclusively for the Northern global markets.

[273] Discussions over cultural appropriation are close to the UNESCO declarations, granting (or removing) titles of geographical spaces as being the property of "humanity" within their World heritage programme. Local economic interests are at stake, potentially more than the moral or real political discussions that they merit. See Amselle, J.L.: *op.cit.*, 1999.

In this point, the trend towards African Identity and the idea of a "reinvention" of an African culture, intersects with the idea of recovering some elements of tradition, but with a twist. It is about creating a new "tradition", designed to serve different purposes. Let us come back to some words from Balibar:

"*The new racism is a racism of the era of the 'decolonization', of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolis, and the division of humanity within a single political space. Ideologically, current racism, which in France centres upon the immigration complex, fits into a framework of 'racism without races'. (…) It is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions; in short, it is what P.A. Taguieff has called a differentialist racism*"[274].

We can consider that culture is the new value which is at stake. As the racism of our present has evolved into this differentiation of cultures, racist narratives will often seek to use culture as an excuse. The differences with the cultures that live with us today are highlighted, establishing new boundaries, between an "us" and "Others", as we saw previously in relation to the bodies in the street. One of the reactions to that narrative has been the search for myths as powerful elements to fight against that culturalist narrative. The notion of African identity seems to play this part, as a way to counterbalance the attacks on the level of cultural differences that racism evokes today.

On the other hand, when MCR sought for new narratives to counterbalance the racist narratives that attack LGO (at all levels, unfortunately not just cultural), they found an answer in the "reinvention" of a culture. However, this new myth does not seem strong enough to counteract other, older, myths. Indeed, fighting with the same tools

[274] Balibar, E.: *op.cit.*, (p.21).

can perpetuate the same results. When praising any identity, the danger is to succumb to the same mistakes -in this case reinforcing rather than diminishing cultural differentiation.

Powerful identification with any kind of culture could lead to more racist narratives or, worst, to enhance arguments in favour of differentiation, fostering the idea of separated communities, hence, to discrimination and segregation. As Zadie Smith summarises "*(…) the lesson of that is that identity is a huge pain in the arse. The strange thing to me is the assumption [of white people] that their identity is the right to freedom*"[275]. We could also add that it is not the freedom but the encapsulation of non-white Others which should respond to some sort of external identity to be more socially accepted.

In this respect, the exercise of an identity celebrated in the fact of covering bodies with garments made with wax fabrics encapsulates a contradictory and symbolic racist narrative. This is the cruel twist in the *cultural appropriation* narrative that we briefly referred to above. Wax fabrics and garments taken as a flag of identity have more to do with the need of acceptance of these younger generations, after years of discrimination and rejection in their own spaces.

What is interesting in MCR's case is the search to "reinvent" this "African" culture. This reinvention might be based, according to the designer's own words, in the meeting of two cultures "Paris and Africa", which truly captures the essence of LGO. On this point, we can observe a deviation from the initial narrative of African identity. There is, indeed, a new path to discover, but it is not about Africa exclusively, it is about the Africa in them. As a young generation of French citizens with African parents, they try to reinvent themselves through the fusion of two cultures. If Paris and Africa can be represented in terms of culture, there is much more to say. What is interesting is the idea of a new starting point, of something genuinely new. It is in

[275] *The Guardian*, 2 February 2019.

this sense that reinvention could lead to a counter narrative to the cultural racism experienced by, and in, LGO.

It is not all about submission and resignation to the yoke of contemporary racism in our cities, on the contrary, we should address and talk more about the small acts of resistance against it.

Through the use of these fabrics, MCR, its partners and other young entrepreneurs[276] are trying to give the neighbourhood a new face and, in this process, create a more acceptable image of Africa (for the non-African), related to the body, and its corporeal ability to touch. The body of Africa they want to portray is not what is mostly shown in the media. They want to bring out other facets of the same continent that is recurrently belittled because of its economic and political woes, through its dress practices, or the way Africans cover their bodies in wax fabrics. Within their project to display another body appearance of the Africa they know, there is a desire to make LGO more accepted by Parisians. They address this through fashion -a highly inspired choice given that together with food, fashion is a powerful bastion of French pride and identity[277]. MCR was founded to disseminate a more Africanised Parisian fashion and, has included other neighbourhood tailors and fabric shops in this journey.

The deviation from the African identity movement is also given by the fact that these young entrepreneurs defend themselves through a new positionality as French nationals, with African parents. This is an interesting démarche in a place like LGO,

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[276] Currently, there are several young entrepreneurs in LGO working on this same path: The Little Africa project (local guides and books); Little Africa Paris Village (a concept store and a cultural centre in LGO); Black Paris (local guides that shows the importance of different African or black personalities that made history in Paris), and some restaurants as we will see in chapter Taste.

[277] Perhaps not coincidentally, the charity founded by the creators of MCR, "The migrant birds" (*Les oiseaux migrateurs*) is committed to training young chefs in Africa and has recently developed collaborations with renown young French chefs. See their website: https://www.lesoiseauxmigrateurs.com

within a historical context of discrimination against immigrants from former French colonies, because the acceptance that is sought is focused on a trend made in France, and not actually in Africa. It is worth highlighting that they have chosen the body as the channel to express this battle. The same bodies that are attacked or criticised by racism, are now reaffirming their presence through the garments. The bodies are covered in those garments, and in this way, it seems a singular form to confront the place assigned to the bodies of Africans by racist representations of the population of LGO.

Summing up

This chapter has tried to show how racism can operate in different ways through the sense of touch. As I explained at the beginning, the idea of touch is represented in the corporeal existence and appreciation or rejection of the bodies of the Others. In the three parts that I have worked on I have found how racism manifests itself in the desire and rejection of the proximity of the Other.

In the case of the Mosques, rejection represents racism, subtly disguised in narratives and arguments about, paradoxically, old colonial rules and ideology. The separation, the boundary established towards the Other, and the consequential rejection, so close to colonial relationships of the past, is recreated in a different time and space, in a small neighbourhood in Paris. Employing different tools, but ultimately reproducing the effect of racism through the idea, (and fear) of the touch or proximity of the Other.

This situation was reinforced by the artistic endeavour commissioned to an external photographer. It is true, as M. Parr said, that his own exteriority to LGO's Mosques conflict allowed him to move easily without any constraints in the community, and therefore take pictures of the intimacy of those places that *in situ* several neighbours

did not want to see. Interestingly, these images, framed in a cultural place, are accepted, while the protagonists of those images are expelled or legally displaced.

What is accepted is the reproduction of the same bodies in a photography, thus, without their corporeal reality, empty of any trace of existence. Judging by the positive comments of the organisers of the exhibition, there is even a small sense of desire represented in the contemplation of those fixed bodies in pictures, which reaffirms old relationships towards the bodies of the exotic, of the Other, in a form of voyeurism. Proximity mediated by art seems to be the ideal distance from those bodies.

The rejection of proximity of foreign bodies continues to revolve around questions about the act of covering bodies in the case of wax fabrics. But this time there is a twist in the response to racist actions through touch or (the possibility of it).

The representation of bodies of Others covered in determined garments has changed and acquired new forms to reflect urban attributes, which are more rooted in the neighbourhood's space. Sticking to fashion, the covering of bodies with wax textiles can be complex as we saw in the current praise for origins and identity belongings in some narratives about the history of the origins of wax consumption in Africa.

However, the appreciation of the garment by the youth in LGO has introduced a twist to the narrative. Showing how it is possible to respond to racist attitudes against the neighbourhood and, by extension, to African communities, with new perspectives on the act of wearing, of touching not only the materials but also playing with the proximity, another proximity with those bodies that are the focus of racism.

In this last case, it is important to highlight the place for resistance and response. It shows resilience in the community of LGO against a long history of prejudice and racism, in this case, channelled through the sense of touch in the presence of the bodies of Others.

CHAPTER IV: Taste

"*The question in reality hearkens back to two distinct meanings of the term taste. One of these is taste understood as flavour (…) an experience that is by definition subjective, fleeting, and ineffable. But taste can also mean knowledge (sapere vs. sapore): it is the sensorial assessment of what is good or bad, pleasing or displeasing. And this evaluation, as we have said, begins in the brain before it reaches the palate*".

M. Montanari[278]

"*Argument won't persuade the taste buds to enjoy or dislike unfamiliar foods: taste or distaste is not simply a matter of cultural capital, but of the body's orientation and disposition towards specific sensorial orchestrations*".

B. Highmore[279]

[278] Montanari, M.: *Food is Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006.

[279] Highmore, B.: *Ordinary lives. Studies in the Everyday life*, Routledge, 2010.

About Taste

I entered the bakery in front of *Parc Brassens*, a small corner-front with a sign painted on the window indicating that one of the best baguettes in Paris was baked there (and in its original site, in the city of Lyon). I made the effort to drag in my pushchair, with my baby son, and we were in.

Next to me, there was a basket with small baguettes. There were other baskets with other types of bread, but I had never seen those little baguettes before, half the size of a regular one. I decided to go for one instead of my first option -a "*tradi*"[280] . The attendant asked me, what I wanted. I said "*Demi-baguettes*". Suddenly her facial expression changed from resignation to indignation, she barked at me: "*We cannot sell 'Demi-baguettes', how on earth can you assume that I can CUT a baguette in half?!*". She raised her voice, upset. She continued to contest this outrageous idea of "cutting a baguette in two", that according to her was my idea. I tried to point my finger towards a small sign on the basket that said "Demi-Baguette". I felt unfairly blamed for suggesting a sacrilege that I had not even considered, so I left.

Many years later, I can see that what did not seem to have crossed her mind is that I may have misinterpreted the sign on the basket… She was adamant that I was neither aware of the impracticality of cutting a baguette in two (which never went through my mind!) nor of the offensive act that the idea suggested[281].

French cuisine is a point of national pride. Its history can be tracked to Medieval times, its preparations growing in complexity and being codified through the reign of

[280] A "Traditional Baguette" is a bread made with a longer proving period than the pre-frozen bread called "classique". "Traditional" ones are entirely made in the bakery.

[281] I admit I also thought that the lady might have assumed that I was illiterate, as sometimes happened to me in Paris when approaching people I did not know. Maybe my accent (my French is not that bad) or the traces of my face, the colour of my hair or how I was dressed, I cannot tell…

Louis XIV and spreading after the Revolution into the creation of restaurants[282]. It is a trademark that French chefs have managed to market all around the world. What they export and share as a culinarian culture, is a vast tradition based on a progressive series of codes, techniques and proceedings about cooking, ingredients and taste. It carries an extensive glossary of terms and names not just of dishes but also of specific methods of cooking and displaying. As a national symbol, if any foreigner tries to challenge those codes, they will be condemned, as I was.

I do not want to refer to this incident as being racist, but, in a way, some strange forces of misconception and prejudice were at play in that situation, and these are sometimes difficult to explain. Sometimes, the senses take the form of a nuanced area as we are dealing with the most primitive human reactions of our body. Strange reactions, which can sometimes give us the impression of being discriminated against or simply being hit by racism. I was a foreigner, trying to sever a national symbol - although it was never my intention.

I try to depict these experiences, while forcing myself to understand how these, sometimes unconscious but not irresponsible, actions, respond to preconceptions about the difference posed by the presence of Others. How these judgements, made by the brain, act subsequently as manifestations of the senses. While in Montanari's quote, there is an intellectual preconception to the act of taste, in Highmore's the body, where taste operates, is not as rigidly connected to the mind.

Body and mind are inextricably linked when we talk about senses. As C. Korsmeyer noted, taste can be of interest to philosophy to the extent that "*tastes convey meaning and hence have a cognitive dimension that is often overlooked*"[283]. More

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[282] Neirinck E.; Poulain J.P.: *Histoire de la cuisine et des cuisiniers: techniques culinaires et pratiques de table, en France, du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Paris, Éditions LT Jacques Lanore, 2004 (1994). Also: Flandrin, J.L. and Montanari, M. (eds.): *Histoire de l'alimentation,* Paris, Fayard, 1996.

[283] Korsmeyer, C.: *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy,* Cornell University Press, 2014*, (*1999). Introduction*,* (p.5).

recently, taste has acquired a more open perspective in the field of senses. Taste is also what we put in our mouth, and then in our body. As Korsmeyer also adds, "*Perhaps most obviously, eating is an activity with intense social meaning for communities large and small. A study of taste and its proper activities thus takes us into territory involving perception and cognition, symbolic function and social values. I believe that the values and meanings of tastes, foods and eating are all-around us and are readily revealed by reflection upon life, practices, and habits*"[284].

From this perspective, and to talk about taste and racism I will work on food, not so much on drink, and on the area of social and cultural judgements regarding differences in taste.

Otherness regarding the sense of taste can lead to aversion and rejection. I will try to show how racism, discrimination and exclusion are interrelated in the manner in which taste plays a strong role in the case of the very *gourmet* French society. The case that interested me is the neglected story of African cuisine in France, as a vehicle to understand how racism, in its more postcolonial perspective, could still be operating and being challenged in the same society. As Highmore summarises, "*Where there is difference, there is unevenness: seemingly inevitably there is inequality, and that acute mixture of fear and fascination that marks so many encounters with the new and the 'foreign'. Taste and smell play an inexorable role in everyday forms of racism*"[285].

Based on the case of African cuisine, its presence in LGO as a trademark in restaurants and markets, and its place in the global history of French cuisine (and colonialism), I will try to work on two key questions: a) What is the relationship between French cuisine and African cuisine? and b) What is the place of African cuisine in Paris (and in France)? These will help to understand how through the sense of taste we can be in front of different racist and discrimination attitudes in the way that choices of

[284] Korsmeyer, C.: *op.cit*.

[285] Highmore, B.: "Senses of the ordinary", in: *op.cit.* 2010. Chapter 6, (p. 142).

inclusion or exclusion of foreign dishes or culinary practices have been incorporated or not into the vast corpus of what it is defined as French cuisine. It is a battle between the palate and the mind, and about how chefs have reacted to foreign taste stimuli, throughout this same history that has consolidated French cuisine as a national symbol.

These questions will allow me to analyse the case of racism at the level of taste within the institution of French national gastronomy, and its levels of permeability in relationship with other non-European cuisine experiences. More specifically, with the cuisine from former colonies such as those from North and West Africa. Trying to understand how the colonial past influenced several of these African cuisines (with their different regions and countries) and what has been the position of French cuisine when confronted to the ingredients, flavours and dishes of these territories[286]. Some of the questions that I raise gravitate around the case of African cuisine and French cuisine, and their relationship -if any. I would like to know if there are reciprocal influences from the colonial period, and if the way they interact is affected by that relationship.

Given the importance and lineage of French cuisine[287], is there, or have there been, opportunities for African flavours to interact with contemporary French cuisine? The trigger for this question about the permeability of different cuisines was sparked by my own taste experience with some African flavours. Were there cases of

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[286] There are different approaches in the field of food and taste according to different sociological and anthropological perspectives, see Lupton, D.: *Food, the Body and the Self*, London, Sage, 1998; and Le Breton, D.: "The cuisine of disgust", in *Sensing the world, an anthropology of the Senses*, London, Bloomsbury, 2020.

[287] The study of French cuisine is a field in itself. The work of Amy Trubek covers the history of the professionalisation of gastronomy and of culinary practice in France until 1915; some of her questions will help us later when discussing the rapprochement of French and African cuisines. See Trubek, A.B.: *High Cuisine, How the French invented the culinary profession*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000; and Fergusson, P.: *Accounting for taste, The triumph of French Cuisine*, University of Chicago Press, 2004.

permeability in post-war French cuisine and the Nouvelle Cuisine period that we can consider as influences from abroad?

Permeability, incorporation, and adoption are some of the concepts that I will use to work on these questions. I understand permeability as the capacity to include, adopt or incorporate foreign ingredients, dishes, or practices into a local and stronger cuisine[288]. This is a way to break the idea of an undisturbed tradition which French cuisine seems to represent throughout its history. This is also a manner to reveal what is hidden in the concept of identity, or national identity -which it represents-, and see how this label is nurtured by other national representations that once incorporated became part of that national identity.

Arjun Appadurai has displayed how the national identity on culinary practices (and dishes) can change over time and according to political requirements[289]. This is a path that I would like to explore in the case of French cuisine, in its own relationship with foreign elements or culinary practices.

In contrast to what is normally envisioned of the French case, examples of exchanges or permeability can be found in the culinary experiences of Italy, Portugal or the United Kingdom. Portugal, for example, has delineated some of the processes and uses behind the preparation of curries in India, since its informal occupation back in the 18th century and before[290].

As for the United Kingdom and following the curry trail, L. Collingham[291] and B. Highmore[292] considered an exchange or permeability of the culinary practice, and an appropriation by the British of curry as a national dish. Balti curry is one of these

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[288] See Trubek, A.B.: *op.cit.* and Fergusson, P.: *op.cit.*

[289] Appadurai, A.: "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30:1, 1988, (3-24).

[290] Collingham, L.: *Curry: A Tale of cooks and conquerors*, London, Vintage, 2005.

[291] Collingham, L.: *op.cit.*

[292] Highmore, B.: *op.cit.*

cases, and I would put it as a prime example of cultural permeability and social transformation. Back in 1977 in Birmingham, a Pakistani chef came back from his holidays in Pakistan with a new idea to present his curry dishes. Mixing vegetables and meat and serving them all together. Balti was created to expand the customer base from its origins -immigrants in search of a taste of home; to seduce new customers, by giving the British public a taste for a new flavour.

Balti has affirmed its presence in everyday cuisine culture, in most Indian restaurants (often run by part of the Bangladeshi community settled in UK) and in the many supermarkets that offer different preparations of this dish. In 2012, the British government asked the European Commission to certify the Balti Curry as an English protected recipe. After four years of campaigning, the request failed to be approved in 2016. Despite this incorporation of a foreign taste to a national culinary identity, as Collingham says: "*The consumption of large quantities of curry has not necessarily made the British any less racist*"[293].

The anecdote of requesting the registration of Balti Curry as a national British dish made me wonder: Would the French do the same with anything African? With *Couscous Royal*, for example?

The case of permeability of influences in culinary experiences is a broad subject in the field of Food Studies. Can we consider the treatment from one dominant culinary experience as is French cuisine, towards other flavours and dishes from former colonies, as racist?

In this regard we are working with different, but not irreconcilable, variables: taste, food, socio-political contexts, and history. The latter is linked to the French colonial experience as is the confirmation of *Haute Cuisine* (High Cuisine) in France[294]. What I

[293] Collingham, L.: *op.cit.* (p.236).

[294] Trubek has suggested that French chefs had a strong relationship with colonial settlements in Africa, travelling and working for the colonial elite. The author also suggests that this situation confronted

want to know is if that enormous national institution that is French Cuisine has ever taken notice of those African flavours coming from its former colonies, and if this is something that we can taste in LGO.

Southern Africa

My first contact with African cuisine was in South Africa, on my first trip to the continent, when I visited the Western and Eastern Cape and then travelled to Mozambique for the first time.

I was with my friend Cecilia in Knysna, a small coastal town on the Western Cape. As we were on a very tight budget, we looked for food in a small local market. There, we saw some locals enter a very small shop in a corner of the market and leave with cardboard bowls and plastic forks eating something that looked very tasty judging by their faces. We went in, and I can still remember the smell of a South African curry, my first curry. We ate that meal with tremendous pleasure and took a picture of the market to remember where we savoured that delicious meal.

As we were travelling through different places, we continued tasting local food; both, due to our limited funds but also from some heightened anthropological curiosity. As it was my first trip to Africa, I really wanted to enjoy every aspect of it. When we arrived in Durban, we went with other travellers from our hostel to visit the Victoria and Albert Market. Once there I was overwhelmed by the number of spices I had never seen or tried. I bought so many that my backpack smelled for the rest of the trip and back to Buenos Aires.

One night we were invited along with two other travellers that we befriended, to the home of the driver who brought us to Durban. He was mixed-race -South African and

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them sometimes to social contradictions, being part of the colonial administration but also part of the group of workers left behind by the colonial administration. Trubek, A.B.: *op.cit.*

Indian. At his home, we met his family and neighbours. Although we did not eat a curry, a young lady was kind enough to give me a recipe that I still keep in one of my many notebooks back in Buenos Aires. The recipe contained ingredients that I would later see in other curries I have tasted, in Bangladesh for example. It contains potatoes (that can replace the basmati rice) and a special seasoning mix very popular in South Africa, which makes it less hot. The combination of two different culinary traditions makes the South African curry quite special.

I can still tell the difference between a South African curry, a curry from Dhaka, or a curry eaten in Brighton or London. This multicultural combination responds, in my opinion, to the fact that Durban is the epicentre of Indian immigration within Africa. Its cuisine has been wholly influenced by this interaction of communities.

Something similar occurs with samosas in Mozambique. Also considered a "local" dish in South Africa, I found the best samosas in Maputo. Once again, local cuisine or local products have been incorporated into recipes of a foreign cuisine, in this case, Indian cuisine. For samosas, the connexion is not direct, but through the Portuguese influence. Portuguese and Indian cuisines have had a long-drawn love story[295] .

A year after that first trip, I returned to work for several months in Mozambique. This allowed me to taste its cuisine in other regions. In the northern province of Zambezia I discovered the Mozambican version of a Portuguese dish called *caril*. *Caril* is another Indian dish (caril-curry), incorporated by the Portuguese and subsequently exported throughout its overseas territories and colonies, such as Mozambique. In the province of Zambezia, in the coastal area where I was working, in the city of Quelimane, coconuts are the basis of the economy. Its crops are exported, in the form of coconut milk, or other formats; but have also shaped local cuisine. The *caril de camarão* (shrimp curry) in Quelimane has a powerful and distinct coconut flavour, which is quite different from the one typically made by the Portuguese. It has the characteristic taste of Quelimane's coconuts. Portuguese cuisine has adopted

[295] Collingham, L.: *op.cit*.

numerous flavours from its travels around the world, particularly from its settlements in Goa. Many of these are now fully incorporated into the national or so-called typical, Portuguese cookbooks[296].

There is certainly a history behind some of the recipes that the Portuguese adopted and incorporated. Interestingly, this influence spread more rapidly and took a firmer foothold throughout its different overseas territories, than in mainland Portugal.

I want to explore if similar connections or incorporations of foreign flavours from colonial experiences, also affected French cuisine as they did in Portugal. Similarly, how this impacted the daily life of LGO.

Northern Africa

You cannot walk around LGO without being assailed by the smell of food, coming from brasseries, café bars, street vendors and market stalls.
The smell of couscous (the dish not the grain) is special for me and was something that I was not so used to. The first time that I ate a couscous dish was during a break of a workshop that I attended in Montmartre, just a few streets away from LGO. Our tutor, a female artist from Nice, took us, me and two other students, to have lunch in a small café-restaurant close to a square. It was surrounded by the trees of the Montmartre hill, which towers above LGO. She explained to me, only recently settled in Paris, that I would find no finer couscous than this one, because, according to her, the cooks and owners were from the Maghreb and had been serving couscous here for many, many years.

The place was sort of seedy. With some benches outside and stools close to the entrance where we ate. The walls were (unintentionally) distressed, and the counter

[296] Collingham, L.: *op.cit*. and Appadurai, A.: *ídem*

was tiny. Behind it, a strong woman in a tank-top was taking orders and calling them out to the cook, who was visible through another countertop with a hole, a window to the kitchen. We waited for a while for our orders to arrive, savouring the scent that was coming from that mini kitchen. Our tutor ordered a couscous royal, my colleagues went for other specialities, while I chose a basic couscous, called "*Maison*" (home couscous).

After that day, I dug deeper into the different varieties of couscous, remembering that lunch, when I was first introduced to this popular controversy. Couscous Royal is often called Moroccan, or from Morocco, although it is not really from there. It is more of a French reinvention of the couscous, since the *Pieds Noirs*[297] brought it with them to France after fleeing Algeria in the 1960s. Couscous Royal normally comes with different types of meat: chicken, lamb, beef meatballs and a Maghrebi sausage called *merguez*.

Merguez sausages and couscous are the most visible African incorporations to French popular cuisine. Merguez sausages are traditionally made with lamb meat (occasionally with pork for non-Muslim consumers), spiced with a variety of elements such as cumin, chilli, aniseed and even mint. The sausages are usually left to dry for a day or so before they are ready to be cooked, generally on a barbecue or grill.

Little is known as to how the *merguez* arrived and established itself in France. It is generally linked to two possibilities: a) its introduction through Algerian and Moroccan immigration from the beginning of the 20th century or, b) its introduction following the relocation of *Pieds Noirs* coming from Algeria at the end of the war, as noted above. In any case, *merguez* are now a staple of French barbecues. Not only in areas where Moroccan or Algerian descendants live or pass through, like LGO, but throughout France and regardless of origins.

[297] *Pieds Noirs* is the name given to the populations of European origins born in Algeria during French colonial rule.

Even if couscous and *merguez* are two of the most common dishes in France today, they are not highly thought of, or considered, within the world of high cuisine or among the most recognisable French cuisine that is usually exported as a trademark.

The case of Couscous Royal

Couscous is not just popular in LGO, it is one of the three most popular dishes in France[298]. The historical claims, linking its origins to the *Pieds Noirs*, have strongly marked some of the versions of its past, but have also introduced varieties regarding the same dish.

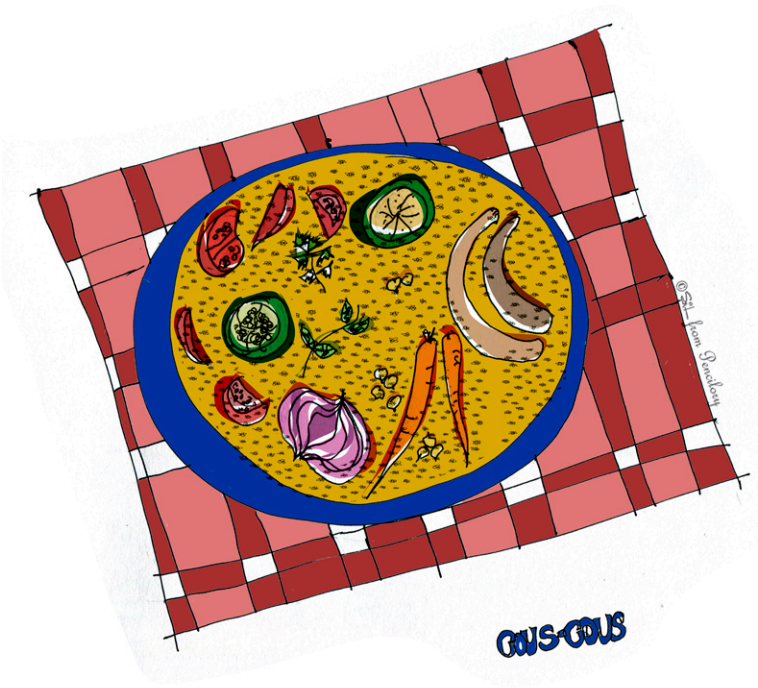

Illustration by ©Sil from Pencilory

A.L. Hubell[299] notes that families and descendants from *Pieds Noirs* communities, currently living in France, embraced this dish of couscous and *merguez* as part of their

[298] Gogois, L.: *Les 100 plats préférés des Français*, Paris, Hachette, 2015.

[299] Hubell, A.L.: "(In)Edible Algeria: Transmitting nostalgia through Food", *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 10:2, July 2013.

traditional, or more practised, cuisine. These are celebratory dishes, rooted in their experience of life as colonisers (*colons*) on Algerian soil. In her work, A.L. Hubell brings us to think about the uses and practices of this culinary taste from the *Pieds Noirs*. She tells us how these communities feel about these dishes, concluding in many cases that these families find comfort and nostalgia in cooking and eating them now in France. The complex relationships between *Pieds Noirs* and colonialism are transferred to the field of food and taste.

Couscous Royal incorporates many ingredients, very often including *merguez* sausages as noted above. Although often claimed as Moroccan, that community does not recognise this form of the dish as theirs. Different cookbooks present the dish in a variety of ways (some even employ bulghur grain instead of wheat grain). Ultimately, couscous royal appears to be more of an invention -made in France. However, there does not seem to be any recollection about when this dish came to occupy such a prominent place in the menus of so many brasseries in France.

Voices of Taste

I encountered Samir that afternoon in a café bar on the *Rue La Goutte d'Or* (which bears the same name as the neighbourhood). He told me about his father, about how he was one of the first entrepreneurs of the *quartier*. Since he first arrived in Marseille, he had moved from job to job, finally making his way up to Paris.

"*My father was one of the first Algerians to come to France, at that time (back in the 1950s) they were not treated like immigrants, he was part of the Statute 47*[300] *(…) He first worked as a peddler, and then he earned enough money to start with a small*

[300] The statute of 1947 allowed *indigènes* to come to France in colonial times. It was the half-way house France devised to accept Algerians as half-citizens of France. See more on *Indigénat* in chapters Sight and Touch.

vendor stand here at LGO. He bought this venue years later and my mom and I joined him, and we all came to live and work with him"[301].

In his voice, there was not just nostalgia, but also pride. The memories continued to flow.

"*Couscous is a dish that belongs to everybody, it is a dish to share, you can eat a dish of couscous alone, of course, and we serve several in a day. Sometimes it is the only meal for some people for days, but the good thing of couscous is that it is very nutritious and can keep you working longer hours*"[302].

About the taste, and the "royal" version he told me "*yes, there are many ways of preparing couscous here and in Algeria. I think the best known is the couscous royal because its ingredients are diverse, and people like to taste several things in just one dish*. *But it is a local version, I think it was the French that came from Algeria who invented it, or at least that is what they say. I also heard it was the Moroccan way of making couscous; but my wife denies this, she is Moroccan*".

The couscous trail

The first written mention of a dish of couscous in France appeared in Jean-Baptiste Reboul's *La Cuisinière Provençale* sometime between its first edition in 1897, and 1922[303]; as a response, it claims, to public interest in exotic dishes[304]. The recipe had been taken from another book written by L. Isnard, *L'Algérie gourmande*, published

[301] Interviews that I conducted in LGO between 2009-2011. The names are changed to protect the interviewees.

[302] *Ídem.*

[303] Samrakandi, M.H.; Oubahli, M.; Carantino, G.; and Ghourgate, M.: "Manger au Maghreb", in *Horizons Maghrébins*, N° 59/2009. Part 2.

[304] Mentioned by J.B. Reboul in *La Cuisinière Provençale*, Marseille, Tacussel Éditeur, 2001. (1922). See: Samrakandi, M.H.; Oubahli, M.; Carantino, G.; and Ghourgate, M.: *op.cit.*, p.28.

in Oran probably at the beginning of 20th century[305]. As agreed by the authors of *Manger au Maghreb*[306], couscous has been known by the French since the first years of the colonisation of Algeria back in 1830. However, it did not enjoy a prominent place in French cuisine until its popularisation, through "*Un Français de l'Algérie*"[307], which could mean a *Pied Noir*, in reference to L. Isnard. Some authors[308] claim that at the end of the 19th century it was possible to find couscous in several restaurant menus of the Côte d'Azur and in Provence. It is generally agreed that the popularisation of couscous in France occurred between the 1960s and the 1970s; largely linked to a peak of Moroccan and Algerian immigration in France.

"*It will in fact be necessary to wait for the 60s of the last century, with Maghrebi immigration, the return of conscripts and the French from Algeria, before this dish definitively enters the daily life of the French*"[309].

So, Couscous Royal as a French invention could be linked to its colonial past. The role of the *Pieds Noirs* as influencers of French cuisine is generally recognised, notably as those who led to a greater consumption of Mediterranean vegetables and ingredients in France in the last fifty years. Moreover, the references by Jean-Baptiste Reboul, a chef from Provence, lead us to consider couscous as an already established

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[305] There are no known copies of the book. See: Samrakandi, M.H.; Oubahli, M.; Carantino, G.; and Ghourgate, M.: *op.cit*.

[306] *Ibidem*.

[307] Mentioned by Samrakandi, M.H.; Oubahli, M.; Carantino, G.; and Ghourgate, M.: *op.cit*.

[308] Dubois, U.: *Cuisine de tous les pays. Études cosmopolites*, Paris, Dentu, 1901. BNF-Bibliothèque Nationale de France https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k65442310.texteImage. This author mentions couscous as "*couscous des Arabes*" (couscous of Arabs). There is even a mention of couscous in the Renaissance in the work of F. Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, London, Penguin, 2006. According to the literary critique, L. Sainéan when Gargantua attended a food feast there is a mention to a "force cosscossons" being served. Sainéan, L.: *La langue de Rabelais* (1922), Paris, Hachette-BNF, 2018.

[309] Samrakandi, M.H.; Oubahli, M.; Carantino, G.; and Ghourgate, M.: *op.cit*. (p.28.) My translation.

dish in France, much before this commonly quoted timeframe. Reboul states in the Preface of his book:

"*Foreigners who have visited the South have always been amazed at the particular value that cuisine has in this region. Despite a certain prejudice against garlic, oil and some ingredients, this cuisine does not fail to create new followers, in general travellers come to us from all over the continent*"[310].

This pre-existence of couscous in menus of French regional cuisine demonstrates at least two points: a) couscous, one of the most influential North African dishes in France, was well-known in continental France prior to the settlement of the *Pieds Noirs*; b) the concoction, known as "Couscous Royal", is the result of a French interpretation of a foreign dish, created and popularised in France, but rooted on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean Sea. This would make us believe that some degree of permeability exists in French cuisine, at least in relation to culinary experiences from its former colonies.

If we agree with Samrakandi[311] and his colleagues, the introduction and popularisation of couscous as far north as Paris might have been through the first Algerians and Moroccan immigrants to settle in LGO in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Barbès Market

Markets in Paris are plentiful. Even within a single district there may be up to five per neighbourhood. However, they are not noted for the presence of non-French

[310] Reboul, J.B.: *op.cit.* Preface. My translation.

[311] Samrakandi, M.H.; Oubahli, M.; Carantino, G.; and Ghourgate, M.: *op.cit*.

products or dishes. They are mostly focused on local produce and regional products from other parts of France.

Entering the Barbès market, you are hit by a chaotic wave of noises. The market is placed under the viaduct of the overground metro railway and the noise of the carriages overhead, the creaking bends, inundate the market's soundscape. The stalls are lined up. There is an aisle where people come and go in either direction, carrying bags and caddies where they safely store their purchases.

Most of the stalls sell a wide variety of vegetables; many of which are recognisable to the Western eye today: tomatoes, salads, courgettes, berries, oranges, and others. However, most of the market is centred on vegetables that are neither French nor European. Some of them are exotic, others are simply the less expensive versions of now staple Mediterranean vegetables. It is true that, in contrast with some other markets in Paris, you can find less expensive fruit and vegetables coming from Spain or Morocco in Barbès. Low prices are one of Barbès' main claims to fame, but so is its more extensive offer of "tropical" and Middle Eastern specialities. There are also ready-made dishes to take away: *pastillas*, couscous in plastic plates, samosas, etc. Sometimes, closer to the edge of the viaduct-market and close to the La Chapelle Metro station, curries can be found, testament to the various Indian restaurants that are established in this area.

"*My mother used to come with me every Saturday*", *s*ays Aïssatou, who runs a small stall of ready-made dishes that includes specialities from Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire.

"*We came to shop, but also to see people from my parents' town. Men used to meet in a bar, in the next street, while my brothers, my mom and myself did the shopping*".

"*I remember the aubergines…* says Madame Loló, *they were part of our cuisine over there* (Côte d'Ivoire), *but they were difficult to find here in the Leader Price, for*

example. So, we came here to search for those vegetables and also for plantain. Today, I can easily buy that in my neighbourhood corner shop"[312].

The Barbès market operates also as a meeting point for several long-term settled immigrants in Paris who come to shop and talk with friends. Most of the people who turn up on market days, come from beyond Paris' city limits. It is normal to find several groups of people chatting in different corners of the market behind the stalls or in the surrounding streets. If in the past, Barbès market was the epicentre to buy African food and goods[313]; today, it is a jumbled experience of exotic foodstuffs ("exotic" for the non-connoisseur), local meeting place, and cosmopolitan vibe[314].

In the last few years, public authorities have led initiatives to move the Barbès market to the northern borders of Paris. As we saw with the case of the Mosques, this is another form of rejection promoted by state agents and largely backed by political and public authorities. The project was called "The Market of Five Continents". It has so far not been carried out, as the municipality that would be invited to host this market, Aubervilliers, has so far not responded enthusiastically to the project[315].

African Restaurants in LGO I: markets and small bistros

In 2009, when I began my research, there were many bars and bistros in LGO. Most bars had small kitchens that offered at least two meals a day, including couscous among other dishes. Some of them -particularly the bistros- were run by second generation Moroccan or Algerian immigrants. The bars were more frequently run by

[312] Interviews conducted in 2011. The names have been changed to protect the interviewees.

[313] See, Lallement, E.: "Château Rouge, Une centralité Africaine à Paris", *Ethnologie Française*, Vol. 29, January, 1999.

[314] Palumbo, M.A.: *op.cit.*

[315] There is also the *Rue Dejean* daily market in LGO. Starting at the exit of the Château Rouge metro station, which also gives its name to the western part of the LGO neighbourhood; this market is a compact space where you can find a variety of fresh fish, vegetables and fruits.

West Africans. Many of these bars also offered musical shows and dishes from Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal. Several of these businesses often encountered problems at night, including police raids chasing drug dealers or searching for illegal prostitution. These conditions made it difficult for them to open late.

The bars of LGO that I visited seemed less focused on serving food than on organising shows, theatre, and music (as we will see in chapter Hearing). However, they did start to serve food to attract more people to their venues. African dishes like *yassa chicken*[316], *thiéboudienne*[317], desserts like tapioca or *sumbi*[318], were regularly on offer. However, you could find couscous next to a *bœuf bourguignon* and a tapioca next to a *crème caramel*. They also offered some African non-alcoholic beverages such as bissap[319], or ginger lemonade. All produce was locally provided by the LGO market stalls. The success of these dishes and drinks was replicated in other bars in the neighbourhood.

Since then, African restaurants have proliferated. There are now over 15 such establishments in LGO. According to Travel Advisor there are between 170 and 190 African restaurants, or at least classified as such, in Paris and its closest outskirts. The majority are Ethiopian restaurants, which have a series of particularities that I will not develop herein[320]. Interestingly, there are no Ethiopian restaurants in LGO.

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[316] *Yassa chicken* is based around a sauce prepared with tomatoes and onions.

[317] *Thiéboudienne* is a Senegalese dish also served in Mauritania. Its oral history says that its creator was a cook from the colonial authority that forced to renounce barley to make a stew, opted for rice and fish. There are different versions which include beef and chicken as well as barley. Some consider it the Senegalese version of couscous.

[318] The *sumbi* is a dessert served in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal; it is based on a rice pudding aromatised with different floral infusions.

[319] Infusion made with hibiscus flowers, cinnamon, and sugar that is served cold.

[320] Ethiopian cuisine is an extraordinarily rich and ancient construct that merits more dedication and time to discuss. As it does not have a direct link with the neighbourhood or France's colonial past, I will not dwell on the subject.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, as the greatest proportion of African immigrants in the neighbourhood originate from Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Ghana, Senegal, and other countries that had (or have) a special or particular colonial relationship with France (such as Cameroon, Rwanda or Togo).

"*I come to eat here because Mamma Gigi has an enormous taste for our food, I am from Côte d'Ivoire, and she totally understands our palate (…) This is a special place where you can eat tremendous food and also share a glass of wine with your pals, the place is very small but equally cosy*"[321].

The presence of African food in the neighbourhood has experienced visible changes over the last ten years. The most served and consumed food has always been from Northern Africa, (couscous, tagine, falafel, mezzes and different stews) -in accordance with the proportionately larger number of immigrants. Today, African restaurants that serve food from West Africa are developing new business strategies, such as *take away* modalities and new approaches on more classic dishes, to increase their viability.

Some clients are still mainly attracted by the food of their home countries'. Nostalgia plays a strong role in their palate determination, and it remains an important resource used by businesses in LGO. In these restaurants you will find customers who are looking for a dish to connect with their past, their family, their region or their country. Another reason could be the price which is normally quite accessible. These restaurants are frequented mostly by people in their 40's or more, that are now settled and working in or around Paris.

Price and curious palates also attract non-African descendants to these eating places, but in limited numbers. Workers from the surrounding areas approach these restaurants occasionally. In my interviews with neighbours and people who came to work in LGO, I asked about the transit of persons around the market. I was interested

[321] Interview conducted in 2010. The names have been changed to protect the interviewees.

in people's curiosity, especially of those who were not linked to Africa in any way, who may never have even visited the continent. Most of the interviewees said that they were keen to taste African food, but that the restaurants were "*too small*" or "*not appealing*". Some considered that the restaurants were uninviting, were "*just for Africans*"[322]. Others were more interested in trying new flavours, looking for new (to them) spices to try at home.

New venues have emerged in the district and the areas closest to the neighbouring 10th arrondissement, run by young second generation entrepreneurs, whose parents emigrated to France from West Africa. They make great efforts to enhance visibility in the way the food and the dishes are presented as well as the decor. Interior design is taken to another level, as compared to the older restaurants in the district -their competitors- for which it was not as important a consideration. The goal is clearly to appeal to new consumers. Presumably, those with greater spending power. Moreover, the menus are very similar to those of the less well presented and decorated restaurants but with new twists on old recipes.

It is interesting to note how these new restaurants are going beyond the targeting of their forebearers' "nostalgia". Appealing to memories of dishes once tried at home by younger second or third generation customers of African origins; but also keeping the link to Africa through their dishes. In this sense, they combine African dishes with the approach of more modern French cuisine. This combination of flavours executed in LGO is starting to challenge the perspective of the immaculate French cuisine cookbook. But to understand this we first need to look briefly into some of the history of French cuisine.

Permeability and Colonial interventions on cuisine

French cookery and cuisine culture have successfully exported their image and *savoir-faire* outside France thanks to the innumerable French chefs that have worked

[322] Short interviews conducted 2009-2011.

abroad from the very early stages of its history[323]. Has French cuisine adopted flavours from other countries in the same way as it has influenced world cuisine?

We have seen how couscous is now one of the three most consumed dishes in France, and we have understood that claiming a national label for Couscous Royal, was not in any way part of a national agenda[324]. This shows, to some extent, that we need talk about two different levels of French cuisine. *Haute cuisine* (High cuisine) and household, local or regional cuisine have historically been rigidly separated in France.

We will briefly address the growth of *Haute cuisine*, while acknowledging that, over time, some of its precepts have been incorporated into the national popular cookbook, making social access to those recipes more blurred in terms of social sector belonging.

Little has been said about foreign influences in the history of French cuisine. According to Le Breton, there is little doubt that the history of French cuisine started after the French Revolution[325]. Following Le Breton, most of the chefs that were employed in the newly opened restaurants ran by the new bourgeoisie, had previously worked in the palaces of the nobility[326]. The new bourgeoisie was the new consumer (and also the producer, as investors and entrepreneurs) of these culinary treats, making accessible (to them) what was once reserved for the higher classes. This opening to new social strata made Paris, particularly, the centre of this revolution. Others, like Del Moral, locate the beginning of the French cuisine between 1800 and 1825 with the "*concurrence (…) of the great journalists Grimod de*

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[323] Trubek situates the rising migration of French chefs in the last decades of the 19th century. Trubek, A.B.: *op.cit.*

[324] There is a common intention of countries like Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia to obtain from the UNESCO a "world heritage" label for couscous. France Bleu, 2 December 2019.

[325] Le Breton, D.: *op.cit.* Other authors considered it began during Medieval times. See Trubek, A.: *op.cit.* Neirinck, E.; Poulain, J.P.: *op.cit*; and Flandrin, J.L.; Montanari, M. (eds.): *op.cit.*

[326] Le Breton, D.: "Savouring the world", *op.cit.*

la Reynière, Brillat-Savarin (first gourmet in history), and Antoine Carême, the most influential and contradictory chef of the time, represented the birth of contemporary gastronomy[327]*"*.

Figures like Grimod[328], Carême and Brillat-Savarin took the first huge steps in the history of taste in France, which were soon exported to the neighbouring nations. Antoine Carême was the chef who made the difference in this formal history. He was the first major chef to share with the public all the recipes that were previously zealously secured in the noble abodes of pre-revolutionary France.

French Cuisine in the 19th century was based on a contradictory movement; the conviction that the game was being opened to the general public (from Carême's gesture) while the recurrent consumers came only from wealthy sectors. Throughout this period chefs gained in authority and were occasionally able to climb up the social ladder[329].

Towards the end of the 19th century the chef Georges Auguste Escoffier made few but transcendental changes to the way in which kitchens were organised to prepare

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[327] Del Moral, R.G.: "Gastronomic Paradigms in Contemporary Western Cuisine: From French Haute Cuisine to Mass Media Gastronomy", *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 6, 2020.

[328] Grimod as a journalist became the first gastronomic critic to publish reviews of his culinary experiences in these new restaurants. He had the writing expertise and the life of a gourmet (also an entrepreneur in the food business), combining these two into a new type of occupation. Carême inaugurated stardom in the chef world, he mixed creativity, economic resources and extended tasting experiences. He was famous for his *"pièces montées"*, inspired by architectural figures and towering structures. With its ancient history and its often-critiqued past (complexity was at the core of his cuisine, and this was his inheritance to future French chefs), the pièce montée remains, with its grandiose nature, a centrepiece in French cuisine. Brillat-Savarin developed a compendium of taste that was published in 1826: *The physiology of Taste or Meditations of Transcendental Gastronomy*, also analysed by Le Breton, D.: *op.cit*.

[329] According to Trubek, the period between 1860 and 1915 was the beginning of a longer process that she calls the professionalisation of French high cuisine. Trubek, A.B.: *op.cit.*

high cuisine meals[330]. This period started in parallel to Escoffier's international career developed in London, at the Savoy hotel. Through Escoffier's memoirs[331] we can have a peek at what he was cooking up in London. Some of the menus and recipes include several ingredients or components regarded at the time as *exotic*. It is easy to find a time for a "*caffé oriental*", or "*café turc*" or "*café oriental á la mode*" in his menus[332].

We also find desserts, such as "*Ananas glacé à l'Orientale*" (chilled pineapple in an oriental style) and "*Ananas Roti*" (roasted pineapple) -another tropical fruit coming from the empire. "*Riz Pilaw*" (Pilaf Rice) also stands out in his menus; not just during his period at the Savoy or the Carlton in London but also in his previous years in Monaco[333]. Approximations to other cuisines, such as Indian and Moroccan, are evident in his London years: "*Cailles aux raisins*" (quails with raisins), a take on the Moroccan Tagine (that sometimes features quails or pigeons, and raisins); "*Crème de champignons au curry*" (curried mushroom cream), "*Laitues farcies á l'Orientale*" (oriental stuffed lettuce), another take on Moroccan or Maghrebi cuisine. On 24 June 1902[334], Escoffier served a Royal Meal for Edward VII; among the list of dishes was a "*Concombre au curry*", his version of "Cucumber curry" a typical dish from the Kerala

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[330] He established the internal division into groups of chefs dedicated to different dishes (called *brigades*) and the assignment of a specialist chef for every speciality (called *chef de partie*). Moral, R.G.: *ídem*.

[331] Escoffier, A.: *Souvenirs culinaires*, Paris, Mercure de France, 2011. First published after his death in 1931.

[332] Coffee was popular in France since the times of Louis XV and was also part of the plans for further colonial administration. Several coffee shops had opened in Paris since the 18th century, and in the 19th century with progressive settlement in the Caribbean Islands, coffee became one of the most exported products. The adventurous story of how the first coffee tree was planted in Martinique in 1723 focuses on naval officer Gabriel de Clieu, who (with the help of a girlfriend) stole some clippings from the only coffee tree in France (a gift from the Dutch to Louis XIV) which grew in the *Jardin de Plantes* in Paris. See Pendergrast, M.: *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World*, Basic Books, 2010.

[333] Escoffier, A.: *op.cit.*

[334] Escoffier, A.: *op.cit.*

region in India. Therefore, between 1890 and 1912, settled in London, Escoffier prepared and served dishes that were not exclusively French. This is something important to highlight given Escoffier's totemic role in the shaping of the strict, stilted and closed image of French cuisine.

When Escoffier died in 1931, the French Empire was a consolidated reality. The social status of chefs remained intact in French society during the colonial period while their international recognition grew. Food and cuisine were also present in the colonial exhibitions through different banquets and dinners.

While we already discussed the importance of those exhibits in the development of stereotypes about peoples from Africa, the rise of exoticism and the seeds of racism in France, and especially in Paris, they also introduced different colonial products to French palates. Most often the chefs in charge of these culinary events would be the same high cuisine professionals referenced above, or chefs who had been trained in those concepts[335].

The same society that ran the *Jardin d'Acclimatation*[336] for the Colonial Exhibition of 1931 that we mentioned in chapter Sight, used to offer an annual banquet to taste different products and dishes from the Colonies[337]. These dishes and products were received mostly with some apprehension or understood as exotic. As L. Janes points out:

"*Many colonial foods were met with trepidation or disinterest by French consumers and with downright hostility by competing French producers. While French consumers embraced a few new colonial foods, many were never accepted. In recipes and restaurants, the inclusion of those colonial foods that were embraced -such as tropical fruits and curry- was enough to set apart a dish or a meal as exotic. The*

[335] Trubek, A.B.: *op.cit.*, Chapter 6: "Schools, standards and status".

[336] Blanchard, P., Bancel, N. (et.al.): *op.cit.*, 2002.

[337] Janes, L.: *Colonial food in interwar Paris, the Taste of Empire*, Bloomsbury, 2016. (Introduction).

cultural limitations on the use of colonial foods demonstrate resistance in France to the notion that the development of the colonies was essential to improving life in the metropolis. Whether French cuisine and the French body could incorporate these new foods, and the anxiety over these questions, reflected a broader national discomfort with the incorporation of the French colonies into the Greater France"[338].

The same year, 1931, the botanist R. de Noter published *La Bonne Cuisine aux colonies*[339]. Subtitled, "400 exquisite or picturesque recipes", it was extensively promoted at the International Colonial Exhibition that same year. Prefaced by a famed gastronomic journalist of the time, Paul Reboux; an advertising banner announced that the book was "*refundable in colonial products*"[340]. We have no way of telling how many of the eight million visitors to the exhibition asked for this refund[341], but we can see among the list of recipes and illustrations some of the (now) best known fruits and vegetables of different overseas territories.

The book presents more than just a picture of colonial and tropical goods from three different continents, it also portrays 400 "different" approaches to taste. The author enthusiastically describes the characteristics, uses and practices of these different cuisines and dishes. There are alluring references to textures, flavours, sensorial experiences, and colours enhanced by accurate illustrations. There are many references to fruits and vegetables from Latin America and North America, while Asia is dominated by Chinese and Japanese products. African products are the least cited and those that do appear are mainly from North Africa.

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[338] Janes, L.: *op.cit.*

[339] De Noter, R.: *La bonne cuisine aux colonies. Asie, Afrique, Amérique. 400 recettes exquises ou pittoresques*, Paris, L'Art Culinaire, 1931.

[340] L'Archive de la Quinzaine, no. 375, Nov., 2018, Council of Fontenay-aux-Roses, île de France, France.

[341] L'Archive de la Quinzaine : *ídem.*

Illustration from the book "La bonne cuisine aux colonies", by R. de Noter,1931. This "gombo" is very similar to the ones that are sold today in LGO markets.

This promotional drive seems to have been orchestrated by the Ministry of Colonies[342] and the pressure of colonial companies (or *lobbies*) seeking to make profits from certain tropical products. The intention was clear, there was a need to convince the French public to consume colonial foodstuffs. Coinciding with this promotional narrative, the *Cordon Bleu* published a cookbook the same year, to encourage consumers to eat rice. But some authors, like E. Peters sustain that despite the efforts from these colonial lobbies, the acceptance of Other's cuisine was almost non-existent, for example in the case of rice from Indochina:

"*French nationalism had reached a different stage by this point. French cuisine was now so important to the French sense of national identity that the foods included could only be conventional French foods*[343]".

[342] The Ministry of Colonies was a very influential institution, sharing programmes and long-term economic goals to best take advantage of the new political order of the French colonial empire.

[343] Peters, E.: "Indigestible Indo-China. Attempts to introduce Vietnamese Food into France in the Interwar period" in Evans, M. (ed.): *Empire and culture The French experience 1830-1940*, Palgrave,

Korsmeyer refers to the sense of "danger" in the act of tasting the flavours of the Other, arriving to a perception of disgust, and the dangerous extrapolation of this sensation, provoking reject of Others as an entity[344]. In chapter Sight, we referred to the images of the colonial exhibitions in Paris. Those images were charged with stereotypes of the figures of other human beings treated as uncivilised and inferior. In the same context, books like *La Bonne cuisine aux colonies* were published to promote the use and consumption of goods that came from the same places that those human beings that were exhibited as colonial species.

Food becomes part of the undertaking of eating which is a sensitive act as we are putting it into our mouths[345], and then into our bodies, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Rejecting the consumption of exotic or unknown edible products is unsurprising, as both E. Peters[346] and L. Janes[347] sustain, if we reflect on the context and the period. This was the heyday of colonial France when the government's main discourse aimed to reinforce the political (and of course economic) authority needed in the colonies to survive as an empire during the post-war recession. If the first narrative that we saw about the state sponsored[348] bodies in the exhibition at the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* was about demeaning the Others from the colonies, establishing the differences and barriers between "they" (native populations brought from the colonies) and "us" (the French public at the Colonial Exhibition). This narrative was reinforced in the practice of the system of *Indigénat* in the colonies.

2004.

[344] Korsmeyer, C.: *Savoring Disgust the Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

[345] Korsmeyer, C.: *op.cit.*, 1999.

[346] Peters, E.: *ídem*.

[347] Janes, L.: *ídem*.

[348] Let us remember that those events were entrusted by the French state to third party companies. See chapter Sight.

In the second narrative on colonial products the goal of this lobby, also indirectly commanded by the state, was to promote their consumption, eat them, and enjoy them. This takes the idea worked by bell hooks'[349] of "eating the Other", that we can reinterpret in this case as "taste the Other, to control *it*, to own *it*". This sudden pressure to consume, to taste Other's flavours through colonial products, could be read as a contradiction, promoting a rapprochement instead of the distancing established by the fences in the cages of the *Jardin d'Acclimatation*.

We should also pay attention to the legal system of the *Indigénat* and the colonial policy of *Assimilation*[350] (with its "civilising mission") as a cultural system, both at the core of the functioning of the administration of the French empire, to understand how both overlap. While the legal system imposed the segregation of natives and French *colons* in the colonial territories, *Assimilation* worked in a similar way but under the guise of education and evangelisation. When colonialism was considered as a positive action in our more contemporary society[351], it was because *Assimilation* proved to be a highly effective way to control the native populations assimilating them to the French culture and language, but also to the French taste[352], thereby diminishing their local values.

Both regimes contributed to a racist narrative towards the Other, but *Assimilation* was used to disguise racism, dissimulating it with paternalism and with the imposition of French values considered as superior to the ones of the local native populations. A more structural type of soft racism.

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[349] hooks, b.: "Eating the Other. Desire and resistance", in *Black Looks, race and representation*, Routledge, 2015.

[350] See Betts, R.J.: Assimilation and Association in French colonial theory, (1890-1914), Columbia University Press, 1960, and a recent edition from 2011. Also, Conklin, A.: A Mission to Civilize. The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, (1895-1930), Stanford University Press, 2010.

[351] A law approved in the National Assembly in 2005, stating that French schools should teach the "positive side of colonialism", was immediately revoked by President J. Chirac. More on this in chapter Smell.

[352] French dishes are still strongly present in the daily life of former African French colonies.

Going back to the colonial lobbies pushing for the consumption of Other's flavours in metropolitan France, it is interesting to note that at the time of the release of *La bonne cuisine aux colonies*, the Minister of Colonies was Albert Serrault who was sympathetic to the British notion of *indirect* colonial rule. In this sense, the incorporation and adoption of foreign flavours promoted by colonial businessmen and importers, ignored the main assimilationist narrative towards the natives and their foodways[353], not for being less racist but for strictly economic interests. Their pressure payed off at some point, and we cannot completely agree with Peters or Janes in the total rejection of those flavours as we found many dishes with an exotic allure at least as far back as in Escoffier's menus.

It is fair to add in this analysis the factor of social class, considering the difference between the public that consumed French high cuisine and the public who assisted to the Colonial Exhibition[354]. Social classes could also determine, following Bourdieu[355], different tastes and approaches to different cuisines. Some groups could share a taste for good meals, and for more elevated and expensive menus. This is more in accordance with their social and cultural practices, to an education of the palate, which conditioned their *habitus*, which made of them *gourmets* or simply rejectors of the different.

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[353] Van Troi Tran has worked on the process through which French nationals tried to educate natives in the colonial exhibitions providing different types of French dishes to them. See Van Troi Tran: "How 'natives' ate at Colonial Exhibitions, 1889, 1900, 1931", in *French Cultural Studies*, 2:2, 2015.

[354] Between 1835 and 1939 Paris hosted eight different exhibitions (Universal, Colonial and Industrial) that shared an interest (some more than others) in the exoticism and the voyeurism of the Other that colonialism had to offer. The public that assisted was varied, but it certainly targeted middle and lower economic and social sectors of the Parisian population. See Blanchard, P. and Lemaire, S.: "Exhibitions, Expositions, Media Coverage, and the Colonies (1870–1914)", in Bancel, N.; Blanchard, P.; Lemaire, S. and Thomas, D. (eds.): *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution*, Indiana University Press, 2014.

[355] Bourdieu, P.: *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Tast*e, Routledge, 2010. (1981).

We now have some additional elements to answer the questions raised at the beginning of this section regarding the permeability of French cuisine and the possible incorporation of foreign flavours. In conclusion, there have been some incorporations of new non-French flavours since the times of Escoffier and especially in the 1930s, despite a poor initial reception from the general public regarding exotic products and dishes. The bourgeoisie and elites had a relative advantage in the consumption of more global products -different from those from France, considering that they could eat at restaurants run by renown chefs. We should also consider our previous section about the incorporation of couscous to the French palate thirty years later. It is true that high cuisine did take advantage of the geopolitics of France during its imperial years, expanding the possibility of taste with ingredients from North Africa, the Caribbean and from other places, but immigration has also contributed to the incorporation of new flavours from old colonial territories as we saw in the case of couscous.

As Collingham[356] would say, the amount of food from its colonies would not make the French any less racist. What is interesting is to see how the myth of French high cuisine as an element of national identity shares a closed, purist narrative, excluding crossroads and incorporations, that clearly echoes racist narratives from the past. This however does not hold up under scrutiny, which reveals the gaps through which Other's tastes were adopted.

African restaurants in the neighbourhood II: African cuisine combating racism

Coming back to the new experiences in taste provided by new restaurants offering African cuisine in La Goutte d'Or, we will try to understand the impact of flavours from former colonies on French cuisine. The case study is about a restoration entrepreneurship called Bamako-Paris restaurants (BMK), who own two restaurants on the border of LGO with the adjacent 10th arrondissement.

[356] Collingham, L.: *op.cit*.

In their website they state:

"*Stereotypes about Africa are tough. They are of course part of reality. But this reality is nevertheless different from the one we see every day in traditional media. BMK's ambition is to discover and promote authentic Africa. The Africa of our parents, but also the Africa of today: at the same time traditional, dynamic and full of potential*".

"*BMK is not an encyclopaedia, but rather a window that is open on the Africa of yesterday, today and tomorrow*".

"*We present concepts, products, recipes, stories of Africans*".

"*Africa is a magnificent continent still little known in France. Africa is a magnificent continent still little valued by many Africans. BMK will allow us to highlight the riches of this wonderful continent*"[357].

Their business model is very different to that of the older African restaurants in LGO that we referred to earlier on. This is an example of younger entrepreneurs as we already advanced. Their vision is to seek another kind of client and generate interest in their cuisine. A cuisine that has been ignored within the corpus of French cuisine. Their goals are both culinary and political[358]. To show the public another face of Africa than that which they normally see, and to offer the best of its taste, through African recipes. These values reveal a very direct way to fight against racism towards African communities and their cultural capital, especially those communities so often related to the neighbourhood. But it also represents a challenge against the strict gustative order of French cuisine.

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[357] BMK website: https://www.bmkparis.com/en-savoir-plus-ambitions-philosophie. My translation.

[358] The team also lead a charity to support children in Africa. This is yet another way to attract a new clientele. Exhibiting good political intentions is always a good way to ingratiate oneself to one's customers. It is certain that the overall model can appeal to the younger middle classes, but there seems to be a genuine desire to present African culinary traditions at their best and thus fight against existing prejudices.

The dishes on offer are exposed as if they were dispatches from Africa. There are different meals from different African countries, fostering a more cosmopolitan feel and showcasing the breadth of diversity of African cooking. There is a tab on their website to present and discuss local and traditionally used ingredients, varying from fonio, to gombo passing by vanilla from Madagascar and jujube. They enhance the customer's understanding of these products, their characteristics and nutritional values[359].

Ultimately, they are following the same model used to promote the colonial cookbook *La bonne cuisine aux colonies,* but from the opposite angle. If the colonial lobbyists insisted on the consumption of these exotic products out of pure economic ambition, the benefits and enjoyment that these ingredients can offer were still there. In the case of the BMK proposal, they put that model upside down, using the same ingredients, but promoting other African cuisines (with their past and present) as a subtle way to fight against the discrimination and racism that they receive on a daily basis. They are adopting African taste elements and incorporating them into French dishes, and vice-versa.

This is a smart (and tasteful), way to inverse the predominant racism against African cuisine, and against the neighbourhood. It is a truly fascinating adventure to follow, and we have yet to see if it will succeed and to what extent. It is important to highlight that the position that this younger generation takes to talk about Africa in Paris is with a shared sense of pride. They do not exclude that they are also French, but they have something to offer and something to be tasted, that, in this case, is different and worth a visit. I believe that this is a very hopeful position against the neglected position of African flavours in Paris.

Furthermore, young African chefs are starting to appear in different European cities. Recently, in the TV show Top Chef France, one of the candidates, Mori Sacko, a young

[359] See their website: https://www.bmkparis.com/produitsdafrique.

but experienced chef of Malian origins, cooked a yassa chicken for one of the challenges. Combining ingredients from French, African and Asian cuisine, he succeeded in reaching the quarter finals of the competition. He received his first Michelin star this year (2021).

The recently awarded first Michelin star for an African chef in London is another chink at the very confined world of High cuisine or contemporary gastronomy[360]. Fighting racism through the sense of taste can be effective within the neighbourhood but also in general terms for African cuisine which has largely been dismissed or ignored in Western countries. African cuisine may well be facing one of its greatest opportunities to assert itself globally.

Taste and soft racism

We started this chapter talking about racism through the palate, using the sense of taste, and relating this to food and flavour. Across the experiences of food in the neighbourhood, from the market stalls to its restaurants, we have seen how the perceptions of taste have been slowly changing over time.

If racism can manifest itself in the way people react against certain flavours and ingredients, usually with preconceptions towards the taste of the Other, as Korsmeyer has pointed out, we have seen that at a larger scale, and specifically in the relationships between African food and French cuisine, there have been resistances, and prejudices, inspired by the colonial ideology of racist superiority, as we saw in previous chapters; but there is also a small space where this relationship has been different.

[360] The African restaurant Ikoyi in St. James's Market received a Michelin star in 2018. Its menu is based on the cuisine of Western Africa with a gastronomical twist.

To understand a bit more how soft racism manifests itself through taste, I also tried to retrace the historical path of the relationship between the taste of foreign flavours and the permeability of the national institution of French cuisine. We initially wondered about the place of African cuisine in LGO and in Paris, but we also travelled along different moments of the French culinary experience to consider the obstacles to the inclusion of more diverse ingredients, more specifically African products in French dishes.

In the past, the place of African cuisine was discrete, but non-inexistent as the contents of Escoffier's elaborate menus indicates, or in the arcane references to couscous in Provence, or in the compilation of *La bonne cuisine aux colonies*. At present, we are starting to see, both in the examples from Top Chef and in cases such as the BMK Parisian restaurants, attempts from younger chefs to show how compatible and complementary these two culinary worlds could be. African cuisine has made a place for itself, albeit on the margins. It is ready to take the opportunity to timidly raise its profile in the world of high cuisine through the work of a few gastronomically adventurous chefs.

We have seen that there are different strategies and contradictions at play that have opened small interstices of action to penetrate that resistance. In some ways, it could be a counter hegemonic reaction[361] against French High Cuisine.

The discovery of these interstices: the increasing popularity of couscous as a result of a mix of culinary approaches from northern Africa but also from the south of France; the adoption of colonial ingredients (the incorporation of Other's flavours) in the 1920s by a respected chef such as Escoffier; the unexpected economic interest from colonial lobbyists promoting the consumption of tropical ingredients, that will slowly incorporate the Other's taste. These small gaps expose the permeability of French cuisine towards the Other's flavours, despite its strict, rigid (and racist) institutional corpus.

[361] Gramsci, A.: *Prison notebooks*, Vol.1., Columbia University Press, 2011. (1910-1920).

Considering the two parts on African restaurants in LGO and following the last case study, it seems that racism is not only towards the neighbourhood itself, as the managers of the restaurants try to battle, it is also a more general racism against the taste of the Other, based on old institutional narrative of what French cuisine is. Similar to the doctrine of Assimilation, French cuisine seems to move in a territory of dissimulation of its own discrimination, continuing to ignore the important contribution that African products and flavours, have had, notably in the case of couscous. Moreover, politicised flavours can also reverse their initial goals, as in the example of colonial lobby pressure.

It is important to highlight those historical experiences as small challenges against soft racism through taste, as the institutional annals of French cuisine remain silent regarding the process of adoption of the Other's flavours.

CHAPTER V: Hearing

Postcolonial sounds of La Goutte d'Or

Like in a Jacques Tati movie, I listen in my way, to how all the sounds of the place make their appearance. The noises in the street, sometimes at lower or higher decibels, like the pitched voices from the market stalls (voices and their owners, laughing, talking). Sometimes there are kids; the sound of a ball against a wall, rhythmically going back and forth. The boulevard, the metro station, with their constant brouhaha, which prevent me from listening to what people are saying. There are some distinct noises and sounds, but there is always confusion. Steps echoing on the more deserted streets, music coming from some guys' speakers, they are knitting their words (faster, faster! shouts one of them) on the stairs of a building entrance. All the sounds (and the voices, and the music, and the noises) are what make La Goutte d'Or so liveable, including some silences as well.

About Hearing

In this chapter, hearing as a sense will be used in different ways to dismantle several experiences relative to racism and discrimination, present or historical.

Beginning with music, in the first part, I will use my own hearing, to pay attention to sounds that tell a story. How the different versions of a same song could have been listened and interpreted over time by different artists. This is the history and the connotations of the sound of music in a song that is, by its rhythm and its lyrics very close to the history of the people who inhabit the neighbourhood. I will work on the

way those distinctive harmonies correspond to different messages on the same story, which is about the difficulties of obtaining a residence permit.

In the second part, I will use my own hearing, relistening to an interview taken a few years ago and I will pay attention to the noises and sounds that accompany the voice of the interviewee and my own voice. As Le Breton pointed out: "*Sound possesses the virtue of being able to interrupt the existing temporality and instantly create a new ambiance…*"[362]. This will also apply to the analysis of the voices in Part II of this chapter.

I am particularly interested in the tones of what has been said in that interview, what have been the words, and I will reflect also on the relationships of what I hear, with what is heard (or not) within the neighbourhood. It is a discursive analysis of the sound of an interview, but it is also a way to use the sense of hearing as socially and politically performed in the words of a social agent of the neighbourhood. This allowed me to recognise different obstacles in the purpose of a mutual listening of the people of the neighbourhood, and the political agenda applied by different social and cultural workers in LGO.

In the last two cases of voices, covered in the third part of this chapter, I will share the use of hearing on two instances. First tuning my ear in order to hear the voices that flow in those radio-stream programmes and recognising feelings and impressions about stories of racism and discrimination, but also paying attention to how the act of listening works among the voices, in both cases. How their own thoughts and words are listened by each other and how they respond to that interaction; and how soft racism is present in many of the stories told in those programmes.

[362] Le Breton, D.: "Listening to the world", *op.cit*. (p.83).

Part I: the political sound of music

"(…) when I have music, I want to feel its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body…"

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

The interest of the French public for non-Western or less well-known music from other countries is almost a trademark of France's cultural interests. This phenomenon grew exponentially in the 1980s and 1990s during the administration of President François Mitterrand (1981-1995), when his Minister of Culture -Jacques Lang-, created, among other cultural milestones, la *Journée de la Musique* (National Music Day), held on 21 June -the first day of Summer. The idea of a Music Day has now been exported to several countries, and has evolved into an International Music Day, whose actual dates differ among countries.

During the *Journée de la Musique*, organised concerts are performed freely for the general public. Anyone who is interested in performing in their neighbourhood, in the streets, or even on their doorstep is entitled to do so. Music completely takes over the streets and all public spaces, turning the city into a single sonic space to enjoy at ease. Still today, the *Journée de la Musique* is one of the most festive days in France at a national level, and perhaps more so in Paris, given its size and its diversity. Many performances, big and small, are from African musicians be they internationally renowned or not.

This relationship of the Parisian public with musical concerts and performances as an enjoyable and accessible activity has marked the history of LGO. It is a district where smaller and larger concert venues have grown, such as its musical bars, forming an

important part of its musical history and of its history in general[363]. But there is also another event that has marked how the neighbourhood sounds, and that is its annual *Fête*. *La Fête de La Goutte d'Or*[364] has played a historical role in the *quartier*'s musical and sonic identity, which together with its small bars and concert halls, have become one of LGO's most recognisable trademarks.

Between 1984 and 1986 the first musical events called "festivals of LGO" were organised by local associations who would later become involved in the future *Fête*. The musical programmes had a large component of music from the Maghreb and Africa, including some big acts such as Salif Keïta and Cheb Mami. The diversity of the sounds represented by the different musicians were a characteristic of the event.

The festival grew in the 1980s, while the town hall pushed for renovation in LGO with a series of transformations. An increasing number of estate agents started to appear, and buildings were demolished. The valuation of properties started to increase amidst the neighbourhood's metamorphosis. Several associations started to voice the plight of immigrant populations following expulsions and evictions from their dwellings (and often from the country itself for not having the required residency documents). The festival thus, also served as a political and ideological tool helping LGO to shape an appearance of conviviality, highlighting its diversity, or interculturality.

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[363] Some of the better-known musical bars in the district are: Saarabá, Olympic, and Léon.

[364] When I started this research project, I was very involved in the evolution and history of the *Fête* in LGO. I was compelled by its dimension, its representation of community and how the debates about multiculturalism challenged the evolution of the *Fête* itself. See the synthesis of that work in Silva Aras, S.: "La différence fait la fête. Les fêtes et les festivals dans le quartier Parisien de La Goutte d'Or", in Bénard, N.: *Festivals, Raves parties, Free parties. Histoire des rencontres musicales actuelles, en France et à l'étranger*, Paris, Ed. du Camion, 2012. (253-279).

In 1988 it was given its current name, *La Goutte d'Or en Fête*, extending its programme beyond musical activities[365]. In the 1990s the *Fête* consolidates its legitimacy within the neighbourhood and starts to grow a musical identity that would attract inhabitants from other parts of Paris in search of new musical experiences. Ultimately, it achieves its desire to establish itself as *the* "world music" festival in Paris (and France). Many African, Caribbean and North African musicians find their niche in the event and become quasi-regular features over the years.

In 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic the *Fête* was initially postponed from its original dates in July to the end of September (like the Tour de France). It was finally suspended, for the first time in its history. While it might seem exaggerated to compare this festival with a national emblem such as the Tour de France (only ever previously suspended during the two World Wars), the importance of the *Fête* for its neighbours is of a comparable magnitude.

The *Fête of La Goutte d'Or* is not only a huge component of the neighbourhood's identity; it is also one of its musical experiences, part of its soundscape. It promotes international performers, and what we might call "Other music", almost as a mirror of how the narrative of inclusion tries to grow from the political actions of local organisations or official channels. Music as a sound of the neighbourhood also embodies the different struggles to be accepted as part of the larger sound of Paris. We will try to see in which direction its waves move.

In 2010, the *Fête of La Goutte d'Or* marked its 25 years of almost uninterrupted celebration of music in the district. That year, I attended the closing concert in July. One of the most expected bands: the *Orchestre Nationale de Barbès* (ONB), was headlining. ONB was already a well-established musical group composed of eleven

[365] The festival also started to incorporate exchanges, conferences, exhibitions, debates on drug-abuse and civic debates on topics such as immigrants' rights. The presence of the *Sans Papier* movement is a significant component of the event during the 1990s and it is regularly mentioned in concerts and other events of the period, something which has remained in the memory of many inhabitants.

musicians playing different instruments. Not all of them, but the majority, were or still are neighbours of Barbès or LGO. Musically speaking, ONB play traditional instruments from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa as well as incorporating harmonic influences from there.

Their sounds cover a broad spectrum, the Algerian sounds of *Raï* [366] mixed with some notes of African and French Funk[367]. Two of its founding members are originally from Algeria and Morocco and have lived through the successive waves of immigration in LGO since their arrival in Paris in the 1990s. This experience forms a powerful backdrop to their music. During that concert, on a stage set up in the street, as a finale to the musical component of the *Fête's* 25th anniversary, ONB performed a song from their previous album (Alik, 2007) called *Résidence* which includes the following lyrics[368]:

[366] Raï is the most popular of Algerian musical genres, famous also outside Algeria and among the diaspora. Although it has now been mixed and updated with new sounds, its origins can be traced to the 1920s as a rhythm first established in the port of Oran.

[367] There are some reminiscences in their music to groups such as *Mano Negra*, *Les Négresses Vertes*, and *FFF-Fédération Française de Funk*; highly successful French bands from the early 1990s with a strong French Funk sound supported by North African and southern Spanish resonances.

[368] "Résidence", Orchestre National de Barbès-ONB can be listened here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq52dzE0B4A

(Original version in French)	*(English version)*
D'après ce qu'on nous annonce ça va dans un bon sens *Il faut pas prévoir à l'avance avant d'avoir la réponse* *Avant d'avoir la réponse au sujet d'la résidence* *Avant d'avoir la réponse au sujet d'la résidence*	*From what we are told it is going in a good direction* *You don't have to plan ahead before you have the answer* *Before having the answer about residency*
C'est vraiment bien dommage le racisme et le chômage *Heureusement qu'il y a des sages, c'est le prestige de la France* *C'est le prestige de la France, c'est la raison d'espérance*	*It's really a shame racism and unemployment* *Fortunately, there are wise men, that is the prestige of France* *This is the prestige of France; this is the reason for hope*

And it continues:

Mesdames, mesdemoiselles, messieurs, si j'dois vous dire adieu *Sachez bien que nos aïeux ont combattu pour la France, ont combattu pour la France,* *Bien avant la résidence*	*Ladies and, gentlemen, if I have to say goodbye to you* *Please know that my ancestors fought for France, fought for France,* *Long before residency*
Toujours des Conversations, le chômage, l'immigration… *Après les négociations on attend qu'on nous annonce* *on attend qu'on nous annonce* *on attend qu'on nous annonce*	*Always conversations, unemployment, immigration…* *After the negotiations we are waiting for an announcement* *we are waiting for them to announce*
Et chaque fois ça recommence	*And every time it starts again*
Le travail quand il est dur, c'est pour l'immigré bien-sûr *Avec la conscience pure, l'dévouement et les souffrances* *L'dévouement et les souffrances, ça mérite la récompense*	*Work, when it is hard, it is for the immigrant of course* *With pure conscience, dedication and suffering* *Dedication and suffering, deserves a reward*
Mesdames, mesdemoiselles, messieurs, si j'dois vous dire adieu *Sachez bien que mes aïeux ont combattu pour la France* *Ont combattu pour la France, bien avant la résidence*	*Ladies and gentlemen, if I have to say goodbye to you* *Know that my ancestors fought for France* *Fought for France, long before residency*
Ça va, Ça va, Ça va pas du tout! *L'immédiation (ça va),* *Négociations (ça va!),* *L'immigration (ça va!),* *L'intégration (ça va)* *La reconnaissance (ça va)* *devoir de la France (ça va)* *Trop de souffrance (ça va) la résidence (ça va)* *dès la guerre mondiale (ça va)* *on a un trajet (ça va)* *on a un délai (ça va)* *(...)* *et on est d'ailleurs Français! (ça va pas du tout!)*	*It's okay, it's okay, it's not okay at all!* *Immediate (It's okay),* *negotiations (fine!),* *immigration (it's okay!),* *integration (fine!)* *recognition (it's okay)* *the duty of France (it's okay)* *Too much suffering (it's okay) residency (it's okay)* *since the world wars (it's okay)* *we made a path (it's okay)* *There is a time limit (it's okay)* *(…)* *and we are French! (it's not OK at all!)*
D'après ce qu'on nous annonce ça va dans un bon sens *Faut pas prévoir à l'avance avant d'avoir la réponse*	*From what we are told it is going in a good direction* *Do not plan ahead before you have the answer*
Au sujet de la résidence	*About your residency*

This song is actually a cover from a 1970s track by the Algerian singer Slimane Azzem. During an interview published in the musical magazine Inrocks in 2008, about the release of their album Alik, one of the members of the ONB said: "*Résidence dates back to 1979, when Giscard's government set up the "return assistance" programme. Immigrants were given 10,000 francs to return home. Today, we help them with some kicks up the backside*"[369].

Interestingly, there are some differences between the original song and the ONB version. If we go to Azzem and Cheikh Noureddine's public rendition of the song on France TV3 back in 1980[370] we can hear some lines in Kabyle language, directed to the immigrant community from Kabyle (Algeria) who were present at that recording. While both artists showcase the comedic undertones of the lyrics, their interpretation seems tainted by a veil of nostalgia. The song is performed by only three musicians: one guitarist, one percussionist and a singer who adds acoustic notes with a traditional Algerian instrument similar to a laud (*quwaytara*) while the percussionist marks the rhythm with a drum (*darbouka*). The camera shots of the few people present depict a certain sadness while they sway to the rhythm. The recording seems to have been made in the *Place de Pérou*, in the French city of Montpellier, with sunlight drenching the screen. In effect, they are making fun of the bureaucracy that immigrants from Algeria (and other parts of North Africa) suffered in those years -but the image does not seem comical.

Certainly 2007 and 2008 were conflictive years for immigration affairs in France. The general debate propagated by the media, and originated by the newly elected president Nicolas Sarkozy, was focused on the idea of a "national identity", referring indirectly to the type of approach that his party would have once elected.

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[369] Interview led by F. Dodor with ONB about their Album "Alik", in Magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, 26 February, 2008. https://www.lesinrocks.com/musique/alik-95970-26-02-2008/

[370] See the video of the INA (*Institut National de l'Audiovisuel*) posted on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXiyllaUGKA .

The same year that the ONB released its version in their album Alik, another French group led by the musician brothers *Mouse and Hakim* released an activist musical project called *"Origines contrôlées"-OC-* (controlled origins) where the same song was performed. The track was included within a collection of old tunes related to Algerian immigration in France from the 1950s to 1970s. According to the musicians it was a homage to their immigrant parents.

Armelle Gaulier[371] has analysed the album *Origines Contrôlées* (OC). Their revival of the song coincided with that of ONB that I am focusing on here. Both groups of artists revisited the same song inspired by the political situation spanning from Sarkozy's electoral campaign to the first moments of his presidency. Gaulier's article highlights the level of engagement of these new generations with old traditions of immigrants in France, especially those from the North of Africa. She remarks that the songs (re)covered by *Mouse and Hakim* were part of a search for a "*public utility tool for citizens*"[372]; meaning that, immigration as a whole was remembered as some form of legacy for the new generations of French citizens with immigrant parents.

On a melodic level, the original version is closer to folk music parameters, while the version from OC sounds more punk-ish. On a semantic level, both retrace the path of immigration in France, highlighting its hardships. This reflects a shared approach and vision, despite the time elapsed between them. Both versions are songs of immigration or as Gaulier explains "*Maghrebin Songs of Exile*"[373]. The original version recounts the mishaps and absurdities with a mischievous sense of humour, while the OC version directs our attention to the notion of "homage", as a form of recognition for those immigrants as being part of France. Despite the punk-rock melodical use, the OC version, still contains notes of sadness and nostalgia.

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[371] Gaulier, A.: "Chansons de France, Chansons de l'immigration maghrébine. Étude de l'album Origines Contrôlées", *Afrique Contemporaine*, 2015/2, nº 254, (73-87).

[372] Gaulier, A.: *ídem*

[373] Gaulier, A.: *ídem*

The ONB version taps into other resources. Firstly, and as deduced from their interviews, they chose the song to draw attention on the similarities between the past and the present as regards the complexity of immigration. Musically, they grounded the song on other harmonies providing a different sonic experience. Their version has rhythms of a Congolese Zouk, famous for its Rumba accentuations and the playing of African guitars. The percussion is strong, with more traditional Algerian and rock & roll drums in addition to the bass, marking the basis of the rhythm that together with restless guitar chords, gives a continuous and enveloping sound, making it more powerful and memorable.

Back in July 2010, the crowd took no time to start dancing to the song. The tone of the lyrics was satirical and ensured that there was no place left for nostalgia[374]. The same words, sung in the form of a responsorial chorus, made the lyrics sound like the retelling of a story. This festive sound took on a scathing tone in the way they performed the lyrics and the high-pitched intonation given to the song's chorus. These variations make the song funnily poignant, contrary to the previous versions, inviting us not just to dance but also to feel and listen to the unfolding story of long-lasting frustration towards immigration policies. Done differently, it could bring on tears. Despite the presence of Congolese dancers on stage, the attention was largely focused on the singer and on listening to the lyrics.

ONB's cover was clearly geared at awakening an audience -even here in the middle of the *Fête*. The lyrics, echoed ghosts from the past (the *résidence*) that in different forms (the modern-day *Carte de Séjour*) are still just as real and relevant for most immigrants that come to France. A reminder of an unresolved cause, and its upsurge. There is an illegal status attributed to many of the more recent immigrant arrivals. The sound of hectic Zouk-rhythms helped to denounce the structural problems of

[374] This is also because the bureaucracy to obtain a residency permit continues to haunt immigrants in France.

racism and discrimination; like "a call for action" in R. Elisson's words[375], wherein ONB show their engagement with the harsh reality of immigration in Paris.

Part II: To listen or not

I was on time for my scheduled interview with one of the representatives of the musical Centre Barbara Fleury. I shall call her Margo. I had communicated before with her by e-mail concerning an activity that I offered to volunteer in at the Centre in the following days [376]. Once we met, we sat and talked about that first.

Suddenly, we heard music at the back of the room, where the bar was located. Caribbean-style music, *salsa*; the volume kept creeping up making conversation increasingly difficult until it was just too loud. We continued talking about the activity for a bit longer, before we began the actual interview, while the music continued playing in the background.

A brief note regarding the presentation of the hearing sources.

The following dialogues are presented in the form of stylised graphic novel balloons. I have found that this form of presentation allows for the following:

A) It makes the reading of the sources an optional choice for the reader. Given the wordcount restrictions, I either had to cut my sources or reduce them. Ultimately, I thought that the reader should have at least the option to see the participants' full conversations in the podcasts.

B) Every voice is colour-coded, to facilitate identifying them without having to repeat the names of the participants every time they interact.

C) The flow of the voices, identified through their colours, tries to emulate the act of hearing the podcast.

[375] Ellison, R.: "This music calls for action", in *Invisible Man,* Penguin, 2001, (1952).

[376] This activity is recounted in chapter Sight.

Voices colour code

Me:

Margo:

These bars are associated for events that we have and call "Thema"; for example, Barbès l'Africaine is a "Thema" we associate with these places. There is a connection with the Olympic, the Lavoir Moderne Parisien, the Echomuseum, the Chango bar and the space Saraabá too. It's always… it has to interest them too. In any case we will see the people of the Social Cafe, we will see the people of the neighbourhood. Ah, afterwards we also have links with the artists in the neighbourhood; so many will expose here, and after there are associations that do their shows here. We also have artists, who are local artists, who are here as residents, in residence, a bit. It's not because they are from the neighbourhood (she almost blinked as she said this), because we are not obliged just because they live here. It has to be something where we can work with them together.

The public from the neighbourhood participates in these events? I mean, people from the neighbourhood come to concerts and other activities to see, to listen? Or it's more about people from outside the neighbourhood?

Yes, mainly the public is people from outside the neighbourhood I think most of the time ... for the activities they are people from here. But the people of the district do not necessarily frequent the concert hall. Besides that… for specific events maybe, if they like it or not ... I do not know.

Maybe it is the ticket price?

No, it's cheap here, the concert is at 5 and 8 euros. It's cheap. And then we have a lot of free concerts. No ... it's just that ... I do not know why? It should be analysed, the public… it is interesting…

(She laughs nervously and looks at me)

Is there a community image of the African neighbourhood, the "exotic" neighbourhood Do you agree with this image of the neighbourhood...?

Exotic?!

Well, it is ONE multicultural quartier of Paris, it's not the only one, there are a lot of multicultural neighbourhoods in Paris Not because we are in Paris that we say that it is the only ONE...

Well, not exotic but multicultural neighbourhood of Paris...

(She laughs, as if I had said something absurd...)

(She kept the high-pitched tone in her voice, and she no longer looked at me when talking, and I noticed that her eyes were on the edge of rolling …)

(...) I would say that La Goutte d'Or, it's true that it's a neighbourhood that stays a bit apart because it's a neighbourhood that's still very popular (meant in terms of social sectors) ; in fact, whereas neighbourhoods that had very popular origins, today are a little less popular for having a mixed side. (...)the district of La Goutte d'Or it's an ultra-mixed neighbourhood... I do not have the image of a district of immigrants or just immigrants....what I see in the area is that it is a neighbourhood where there are many immigrants in any case, people of African origins .

Because there is an important African community and there are also many Africans who do not live in the neighbourhood, but who are here because they frequent the African market, the shops. ... there are much less than what we actually see, and the neighbourhood (...) figures show that it is mostly inhabited by French people (big laugh), here and there is a mix of people who are of foreign origins that we can see, but that's all.

The volume peaked again to the sounds of the Beastie Boys' "You have to fight/ for your right/ to Paaaarty ..."

Margo continued, raising her voice so I could hear her. Somebody in the background realised that we were talking, the volume plummeted to zero…

Would you say that the neighbourhood has an identity?

There is an identity of La Goutte d'Or, yes, it's true. ...there is a particular spirit, there is ... I think the African market does a lot, because it's a market that is hyper well-known (...) it creates a kind of life in the neighbourhood. The sensations...

I am interested in the centre and the projects you have here, I saw the website, your activities... Is there a connection between the activities from the centre and the neighbourhood?

Is there…anything?

(gesture of intrigue)

I didn't know if it was the noise that was bothering her or my low tone, or my accent.

A link...?

Ah! A li-ai-son!, yes of course, a lot of links ... Hum. NOT in all our activities; but in any case...

The music was now at its loudest, making it impossible to hear each other.

Sorry ... We can go there if you want... Let's move…!

We moved to a small corner, within part of the exhibition Barbès l'Africaine . In the back, were hanging some images of old vinyl records with pictures of musicians donning thick Afro hairstyles. Our corner was decorated in a strong colour palette, very '70s-ish (beiges, maroon, dark yellow, orange and red).
We sat on a massive, round-edged and red velvet sofa. It was a bit strange to sit there with her and resume the conversation. It was like being in a Blaxploitation movie…

Yes, in fact there are two mediators working (…) one on the neighbourhood and the other pushes more globally, and associations working at the centre. So, this mediator is a concrete point of contact on mediation, so it is at the same time going back to the projects of the young people from the neighbourhood to integrate them into the life of the centre. There are young people from the neighbourhood who participate when we design events here. (…) I will say to do things that will "speak" to young people in the neighbourhood, or to listen to the needs of young people in the neighbourhood. There are associations working with us too because there are a lot of young people from the neighbourhood who frequent the centre, its spaces, because they do an artistic activity in fact, such as dance, music, singing, and there are neighbourhood associations that use the space.

Is this a partnership with the centre?

Do you have a report of the young people who attend the events and who are from the neighbourhood?

No, the rooms are rented at really cheap rates. This is a way to support the activities of the neighbourhood's associations. To access the rental rooms, you must be an association from the quarter.

Here, this is a project of the Council of Paris (Mairie de Paris), but it is a private administration, it is a school of music, which manages this entire establishment, we have Four main missions I would say. But the real big main mission is supporting "musicians on the way to develop", after that, there is also the socio-cultural mission with other associations; but the big mission is the support, the accompaniment. For this, there are not many young people in the neighbourhood who are in musical accompaniment because the young people of the neighbourhood are not necessarily young people who practice music, and accompaniment is not music lessons. You have to have a repertoire; you have to play ... It's not a district where you find a strong practice of music. So we have a balance sheet. We have a basic project that is on our site, and then after that the figures, statistics that allow us to show accountability to the Mayor of Paris

(She laughs, ironically and nervously).

Are there other types of partnerships, for example, there are several music bars in the neighbourhood and theatres.

Yes, we have a partnership with the Olympic café, once a month there is "La Goutte d'Or au Lab" which is the name given to the scene discovered here by our accompaniment. Once a month there is a programming of the accompanied musicians. We choose and decide whom we will send to perform. We have also been in partnership several times with a bar called Le Chango Bar …

Performative experiences, such as music and dance, contribute to a sense of shared community, at least for the lapse of time of a song or a dance. But how can these experiences of sharing sounds and music be transferred into a semi-official institution within a neighbourhood, and in how much time? Some instances of celebration play an active role in a sense of togetherness, shared until they come to an end, as with the *Fête*. In the pursuit of integration, the official narrative seeks to extend that togetherness in the district through other similar experiences based on music and sounds.

Activities in the Centre, like the support for young people who undertake a career in music or providing access to recording studio rental at affordable prices, aim for that togetherness, making it a tool for the political agenda of "integration". In that quest, the official narrative, through the channels of local institutions, aims to establish a dialogue with the local community, based on support to local interests -not needs- replacing the fight against inequalities with the idea of "accompaniment". According to Margo, the purported goal, being to listen to the youth, to their needs in order to organise and reorganise their own activities.

However, as she admits, the shows that the Centre schedules lack uptake from the local neighbours or youth. They are mostly attended by an audience from outside LGO. She also refers to LGO as a neighbourhood without a musically educated young population. While these are the primary beneficiaries of their projects, they are required to demonstrate a prior level of skill, a musical background or a *repertoire* to aspire to the Centre's support. Margo also underlines that the projects are not to train in music, but just to accompany young musicians in their path to professionalisation. Hence the difficulty, which lies in the fact that not everyone in the district necessarily possesses a musical knowledge or an underdeveloped, self-taught, musical talent as she also recognised. Some youngsters could have enjoyed some musical support but there is still work to do on that front[377].

[377] There is a local association that runs a music workshop for younger children. It is always full, and places are scarce. Its children's chorus, which performs in some public events is its most successful

Throughout the interview, the conversation was difficulted by numerous sounds. Listening was a challenge. The environment, the space where we were seated, was also part of a décor, part of the *Barbès l'Africaine* exhibition. The projected images were of black musicians, a few from France, but the aesthetics were accentuated with a US black retro-vibe.

In a way, the sonic and sensorial experience that accompanied the interview, reflected the tone of the interview itself. There was a deft tone in her answers. I could not avoid sensing that what she was telling me regarding their projects, their priorities, and how they implemented those projects in the neighbourhood, was all very distant from the sound of the neighbourhood itself or at least from the audience of young neighbours: their interests in sound and music. How were those projects meant to fulfil the needs or the realities of the neighbourhood? If what is missing is accessible musical training for youngsters, why focus on "accompanying", rather than training? Similarly, if there were links with the people of the neighbourhood, these seemed to be largely mediated by local associations, rather than with the people themselves. In this sense, it did not surprise me that their concerts' audiences were mainly from outside LGO, as opposed to from within.

The sounds of LGO were curated by a political agenda, the actual sounds of the neighbourhood remained unheard. This gap could be explained by the contradictions within the political assessments of the *quartier*, and consequently the multitude of projects aimed at "integration". In this sense, it is not clear whether the Council of Paris (*Mairie de Paris)*, as an official political representative, is actually paying attention to the voices and needs of the neighbours, in this case the youth. It sounds very professional to provide recording studios at lower prices, but due to a lack of training in music, few youths of LGO will ever be able to use them. Furthermore, this is always done with the intermediation of a local association, which makes the

showcase; but limitations persist in terms of including more children from the neighbourhood. See *l'Atelier Musical des 3 tambours*: https://www.3tambours.com

communication mediated, increasing the distance between the Council and the actual youth.

Integration is a goal in the narrative of some political voices of LGO; mostly from left-centrist sectors linked to the French Socialist Party, but also from other sectors close to the centre-right. In these multiple political uses of music and sounds (of the neighbourhood), integration becomes empty of any real sense. It seems that in some of the projects implemented by the Council the soundscape of the neighbourhood is heard as white noise.

If the youth are required to have a certain, prior, level of skill before being eligible to receive support from these projects, there is sense of discrimination therein. In terms of support, musical training for youngsters would be more effective, helping them to channel their inner sounds and music or the creative use of their sounds.

The sound of the Other

The presence of music in the district through the celebratory events mentioned by Margo, also seems to showcase some exoticism, as a cultural approach to diversity - despite the rejection of this term (as in Margo's case); as a way to portray music from outside and make a parallel with the district. The public who attends these shows have not necessarily embarked or engaged in the narrative of integration. They have come to observe and listen to the Other's music on a stage[378]. Listening in this way, becomes selective and puts aside the original soundtrack of the neighbourhood, focusing on the exotic sounds, or the different sounds of diversity.

There are two different sound boxes about the sounds of the neighbourhood: the first one is in the events, organised with the goal to further the integration agenda. These events, that Margo presented, and which we could experiment are clearly

[378] Several renowned musicians from Africa and elsewhere have performed in the Centre.

separated from the neighbourhood's sounds, which were taking place mostly outside, in the streets or elsewhere within the neighbourhood's space. The soundtrack of LGO is not actually part of the sonic experience of the people who attend those events. LGO only serves as a stage, legitimised by its label as a diverse district, to use the terms of the political agenda, giving to that outsider audience the assurance that they are collaborating in some way with the progressive political narrative of diversity.

The second sound box is the chronic deafness regarding the sounds and the voices of the neighbourhood's youth in the development of activities. Institutions and musical centres like the one where Margo worked, and new ones such as the 360º Paris Music Factory[379], respond with events that are more directed to an outsider public.

A district like LGO with such a huge history of musical performances of the underground scene of what was called "world music"[380] in the 1990s deserves effective musical training for younger generations. This is a complex task and even if education on this path in France could be supported by the state, the basic elements of learning how to play an instrument or learning some basic music theory requires specialised training that is not always at hand for working-class families, such as those that inhabited LGO. Support could also be provided to young musicians or self-taught musical practitioners.

In this way, it would seem that all the efforts sincerely put in place by neighbourhood agents to facilitate local youth access to explore different musical opportunities, is truncated by the inability to connect the sounds to the needs. The neighbourhood becomes just a stage where diversity is on display.

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[379] A recent centre offering similar events. I will not focus more on it as it has only been inaugurated recently. However, the precepts it presents on its website seem very close to the idea of using LGO simply as a stage. www.360paris.com/a-propos.

[380] Silva Aras, S.: *op.cit.* 2012.

Part III: Intimate soundscapes of LGO

There is a TV show called "The Voice" which is broadcast in France and the UK, among other countries[381]. I had watched some episodes of this show in France and in other countries where the setup is replicated. There is something intriguing in its format - the judges, later coaches of selected participants, choose their *mentees* through a blind audition. What attracted me the most has always been the juries' sonic experience, listening to voices whose owners, we suppose, they cannot see and do not know. Beyond any suspicions regarding the honesty of these blind auditions; there is something interesting around the idea of giving contestants' voices the centre stage.

The human voice has countless practices (you can sing, talk, shout, etc.) and it also presents different characteristics. Something anodyne like a TV show can transport us to a different form of expression and auditory recognition[382]. In a world governed by the empire of sight[383] where visuality is constantly evolving and present in our daily lives, sound and its adjacent elements of listening are sometimes neglected or ignored. The recognition of a singer, of a pristine talent, through the emanations of their voice alone, could be a sign of trust in someone who in other visual circumstances in our complex and *discriminating* world, could easily be dismissed or discriminated against because of their appearance.

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[381] The concept of the programme comes from the same producers of *Big Brother*, John de Mol and *Endemol* productions.

[382] The field of sound studies is trying and proving different methods to analyse sounds, voices or any other auditory recognition in order to find or delineate an "auditory epistemology", see Bull, M.: "Sounding Out the city: An auditory epistemology of urban experience", in Bull, M. and Back, L.: *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Taylor & Francis, 2020. Also, Bull, M.: *Sounding out the city: Personal Stereos and Management of the Everyday Life*, Berg, 2000.

[383] As Howes mentions: "*(Michel) Serres derides the urban-dwelling scholars who sit huddled over their desks, basing their notions of perception on the bit of the world they glimpse through the window -and no doubt thereby overemphasizing the role of vision in their intercourse with the world*". Howes, D.: *op.cit*, 2005, Introduction.

If The Voice France enjoyed relative success (as in other countries) it is because it works on a principle, a social principle, (which could, of course, be misguided or purely performative, for the purpose of the show) which is the equality of opportunities. The notion that you can excel in something regardless of your appearance, your social background or nationality is a powerful one. Participants demonstrate to the watchers (and listeners) of the show, the possibility of being themselves "in voice", through the exercise of their talent. While some will not achieve their dream of success, the real hook of the show is to display possibility within a social or colour-blind society (the show) which gives that opportunity to everyone. The show manifests other disruptions regarding its own process of selection, and preferences, which of course, confirm at the same time, that those opportunities are not, finally for everyone, but that it was worth competing.

The voice is a channel of information (even when silenced[384]) that helps us to understand several capacities of its powerful force. From Freudian psychoanalytical theory to Lacan's essays on the same field, the voices of the patients implied a way to know their own language system, and the relation with their feelings, impressions, fears and their subconscious[385]. S. Freud worked on the power of the voice, where the purpose of listening to it is not only about what is being said but mostly on how it has been said, with its intricacies, signs and discharged information that comes from the voice of a patient[386]. Later, J. Lacan analysed the Freudian concept of "floating or suspended attention", in his first analysis of the voice. He concluded the opposite, the voice not as a source of information, but of *hidden* information, putting

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[384] Following a similar idea to Derrida's on absence. Derrida, J.: *Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, 1976.

[385] "*The figure of the voice that emerges from this situation is thus not only <u>positive</u> in the sense that it is a real, perceivable (acoustic) phenomenon, it is also <u>positivistic</u> in that it is thought to reveal the hidden substance of subjectivity, (…) like the <u>truth</u> of the person to whom it belongs*", Lagaay, A.: "Between Sound and Silence: Voice in the History of Psychoanalysis", in *Episteme*, Vol.1, 1, 2008.

[386] Freud, S.: "Free or Floating Attention", in *The interpretation of dreams*, VII, p.377. Wordsworth Editions, 2000, (1899).

his focus on what was not said; in the patient's silence, Lacan finds a language system[387].

Close to the voice, we find language, as a capacity to express verbally. In Saussure's theory, "speech and language" work in different ways. He separates speech (*parole*), and language, the latter governing the act of Speech[388]. While language refers to the order of the collective, the order of "social" life; speech or *parole* refers to the order of the individual, which I would prefer to call, the intimate space, the self-place of the voice. For Lacan, language is the system by which the subconscious is organised to manifest itself, through the channel of the voice[389].

We can say that in these two theories the voice is controlled by language, (following Saussure's idea in which language controls speech to some extent) both in social instances as well as in intimated spaces. The addition from Lacan's perspective, is the importance given to the changes of the voice, such as silences or interruptions, or other sounds related to the act of Speech. These give us a possible theoretical framework on the hearing of voices, in a social environment but with intimate interferences (or at least with the manifestation of intimate feelings) that can tell us stories or experiences of racism. We can say that the voices of the neighbourhood are multiple, imbued with different tonalities, colourations and vibrations, responding to the musical particularities of sound. They are all part of the district's soundscape and also work as part of its own identity.

While the French language is the most commonly heard in LGO, it is accompanied by others, mostly African (in their sonic variety and complex sounds) and Arabic in different dialects and with particular accents[390]. Bearing this in mind, people use the

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[387] Lagaay, A.: *ídem*. See also Dolar, M.: *A voice and nothing m*ore, MIT Press, 2006.

[388] Saussure, F.: *Course in General Linguistics*, Columbia University Press, 2011, (1916).

[389] Miller, J. A.: *Jacques Lacan and the voice*, London, Circle 6, 2001.

[390] There are several different languages spoken in LGO that come from West Africa, from the Sahel and from the North of Africa. Berbere, Kabyle and Arabic are the most heard non-territorial languages, but also Wolof, Serere, Malinke, Senoufo, Lingala, and also Ashanti due to the small Ghanaian

sound of language to identify when a speaker is not originally from France. As a result, they might sometimes ask "where are you from?". This is a regularly repeated question in Paris, and it reveals the importance of pronunciation and sound, which can sometimes lead to discriminatory situations[391].

There are unaccountable stories about discrimination over the phone in France, notably related to the process of renting a flat in Paris and the administrative procedures which can suddenly go from being very difficult to near impossible[392]. Sometimes it is a combination of the sound of the voice that is "revealing", and the surname mentioned over the phone; especially if the surname is recognisable as being from a Muslim tradition.

As long as you speak a language close to its national intonation, the level of discrimination should decrease[393]. This is particularly complex in France, given the fact many of the immigrant communities that came to settle from former French colonies speak French perfectly, as do their children born and educated in France, thus also French. It is also frequent to hear comments like "you speak perfect French", where the discrimination is paired to racism because the owner of the voice that is speaking might be being judged according to their skin colour.

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community in the district. There are also multiple languages corresponding to smaller territories in the hinterland of the principal African countries where the different populations come from.

[391] As in the Bakery incident mentioned in the chapter Taste.

[392] In 2019, the non-profit organisation *SOS Racisme* conducted research around a subject that had been long dismissed by the authorities: racism surrounding the process of accessing the residential rental market. Working with different statistics, the research showed that people of African origins had 35% less chances of accessing rental properties. The process normally starts by the hearing of the voice of the person who calls for information on the rental advertisement. See, Boutry, T.: "Logement et racisme: un an d'enquête sur les discriminations", *Le Parisien*, 6 May 2019. https://www.leparisien.fr/societe/logement-et-racisme-un-an-d-enquete-sur-les-discriminations-06-05-2019-8066877.php

[393] Although currently not in France, it is not surprising that in countries such as the US coaching services are offered to correct the intonations and accents of non-native English speakers.

The heritage of the French colonial doctrine of *assimilation* is strongly present in the field of language. French-speaking African countries still battle to be recognised as having a place as French-speaking populations. Since the original project of a *Francophonie* led by L.S. Senghor until today, turmoil on the possession and relevance of the French spoken abroad has marked and still operates in different kinds of discriminations -but that it is not the subject of this thesis. Nevertheless, this adds elements to our analyses that contemplate racism and discrimination according to the voice of who speaks, how they speak and what is their relationship with the French language; as sometimes, an owned language is also put into question. As the Algerian writer Kateb Yacine says: "*I write in French, to tell the French that I am not French (…) the French language is still our trophy of war*". The French language plays a role in a battle against discrimination among young French from African parents in Paris, as it is their language too.

The voice as a source of discrimination can be interpreted in different aspects. It can also be analysed to understand how those mechanisms of soft racism are at play in different situations of our daily lives and that is what we will try to do in the following section.

Voices on the radio

One of the ways in which radio has been understood as a social instrument, is through the conquest of a sonic social space throughout history, based on its ability to share daily experiences, in different orders (news, fiction, musical, etc) and levels (with more or less participation from the audience); in other words, creating a communal feeling of belonging to a same space, place or identity[394].

In Franz Fanon's work *The Voice of Algeria*, the role of voices on the radio was pivotal to gain support for the cause of Algerian independence, from popular classes of

[394] James, M.: "Jungle Pirate Radio and Hype", in James, M.: *Sonic intimacy: Reggae Sound Systems, Grime and YouTube Music Videos*, Bloomsbury, 2020.

listeners. It was a way to build a sonic community, in the middle of a war; a collective and at the same time discrete way to fight together[395].

That *sonic intimacy*[396] between the listener and the speaker on the radio demonstrates the possibility of establishing a bond through the airwaves. There is also another type of connection that occurs in the same radiophonic space, among the people who participate in a radio transmission.

I will use the sense of hearing to also pay attention to different ambient sounds, tone levels, and pitches of people's voices, as these other sounds escort the voices and can change the sense of their meaning[397].

I have chosen two pieces of radio-stream to work on intimate soundscapes of LGO. They belong to a series of radio programmes recorded in the neighbourhood, hosted by different organisations who work there, primarily the Association Salle St. Bruno. The streaming format obscures something about its real time nature, (even if we can see the dates when they were posted online on the site) given the fact that they have been recorded in different circumstances and in different moments. Both radio programmes are part of a larger archive of radio recordings with interviews, and participation of people from the neighbourhood organised in a website as a streaming system under different subjects. These are compelling topics for the neighbourhood's population: activities and projects within the neighbourhood, housing, youth and education, as well as racism and discrimination.

Originally, they might have been recorded in a spontaneous way, judging for what I have gathered from listening to them, which gives more character to these

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[395] Fanon, F.: "This is the voice of Algeria", in Sterne, J. (ed.): *The Sound Studies Reader*, Routledge, 2012.

[396] A concept worked by James, M.: *op.cit.*

[397] Again, Le Breton, D.: *op.cit.* (p.83).

recordings. They were probably later edited under different thematic labels: racism, being one of the most important.

Today, we can listen to all the pre-recorded programmes by just clicking on the site or choosing by subjects. This does not let us consider the participation or engagement that these recordings could have built if they were broadcast live with open participation from listeners, messaging or sending comments in real-time through social media.

This immediacy is not present here, nevertheless, I will focus on the recordings' intimacy and all the sounds and tones present on them at the time of their respective recording[398]. I found my two selections under the topic of "racism and discrimination". The lack of deep editing is what allows me to dig deeper into them, to listen to them as unstructured pieces, full of live moments and unexpected answers, facilitated by the moderators who ask questions or establish the prompts to start the conversations.

Both selections correspond to different age groups. The first one is with elder ladies of the neighbourhood, and the second one is with youngsters also from or who work in LGO.

Initially, I opted to focus on the voices. I analysed the stories, the tones, the sounds and the energy that every word transmitted, recounting sad examples of racism and diverse reflections on different manifestations of discrimination in the daily life of

[398] They are hosted by the site "*A vous La Goutte d'Or*" and are organised under the name of Web Radio. Recordings cover more than ten years from 2010 to 2021. Originally the Radio "Café Social" was a project designed by the Association Salle St. Bruno, a very well-known non-profit organization of LGO, supporting the community's needs with several social projects in the neighbourhood since the 1980s. The streams (in French) are available here https://gouttedor-et-vous.org/Radio-Cafe-Social-discriminations (5 December 2016) and https://gouttedor-et-vous.org/Webradio-de-La-Salle-racisme-et-discriminations (4 July 2018). Both last accessed in September 2021.

those voices. I also focused on the interaction of the voices and their unique perspectives, their different roles in the transmission, how they influenced the words of other participants in the same radio-moment. I also observed the occasional glimpses of soft racism or discrimination in the conversations that were happening in those radio-moments. My place as a listener of their stories is to string the voices together as well as their own understanding and listening.

Streaming 1, the Ladies in the Café

The participants of the first stream are elder women, judging by their voices and the experiences they share.

Two members of the association launch the dialogue and begin with some questions. I have identified the participants below, by the grain of their voices[399] and I have assigned a colour to each of them to recognise the flow of the conversation.

Recording made on 5 December 2016 (five parts)

There are two Radio Presenters (RP), a man and a woman. We will distinguish them as Male RP voice and Female RP voice.

[399] "*I shall straightaway give a name to this signifier at the level of which, I believe, the temptation of ethos can be liquidated (and thus the adjective banished): the grain, the grain of the voice when the latter is in a dual posture, a dual production – of language and of music*". Barthes, R.: "The grain of the voice", in Sterne, J. (ed.): *op.cit.*

Voices colour code

Female Radio Presenter :

Male Radio Presenter

Different Ladies:

1

"Definition of Discrimination". This is the week of the battle against discrimination in the whole territory of France."

It is simply to see if you know what "discrimination" means.

That's it.

Simply, it is a question of knowing if you understand, what does discrimination mean? What does it represent for you?

That is correct. What does this word mean to you?

2

IT IS THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS ACCORDING TO SKIN COLOUR, THEIR RELIGION...

She reads:

The definition of discrimination is "it is unequal treatment based on a criterion prohibited by law. There are 22 discrimination criteria prohibited by law". Do you know these criteria...?

They talk over each other

RELIGION, THE COLOUR OF SKIN, AND THE COUNTRIES FROM WHERE WE COME

...AND ANOTHER CRITERION IS THE SURNAME...

3

AND WE HAVE A LOT OF THAT, FOR EXAMPLE, MAMADOU, FATAH, MOHAMED, ETC.

IF YOUR NAME IS MRS. COHEN, FOR EXAMPLE. IT IS LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO ME IN THE SOCIÉTÉ GÉNÉRALE (BANK). I WAS QUEUING FOR THE COUNTER AND SHE PUSHED PAST ME WITH HER ENVELOPE, AND SHE COMES UP AND SAYS 'IT'S MRS. COHEN,' SHE PASSED RIGHT OVER ME, WHAT WAS HER PROBLEM? AM I NOT LIKE MRS. COHEN?

What else can be discriminating? For example, when we are applying for a job, and we are women?

umping into the conversation:

Women that already have children...

4

BUT, THEN, WHAT IS RACISM?"

That's why it's interesting to discuss this today because discrimination is not just racism. Racism is a FORM of discrimination, but it is not ONLY THAT.

He plays with the tone of his voice, with a very good spoken French with a bit of an accent.

What else could there be? Disability?

THAT YES, WHEN ONE IS SICK, OR DISABLED. WHEN YOU CAN'T LISTEN TOO WELL, OR WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE PROPERLY.

THE HEALTH PROBLEM, WHEN I WAS WORKING (INAUDIBLE VOICE, MOSTLY MUTTERING), I WAS SICK AND THE EMPLOYER SAID GO BACK HOME AND DON'T COME BACK, IT IS NOT WORTH IT...

5

Why?

WE WERE THREE, I GUESS IT WAS FOR THAT, WE WERE THREE DOMESTIC WORKERS. THEY DID NOT NEED ME.

Did you feel discriminated at that moment?

YES, BUT I DIDN'T FEEL NOTHING.

Lower voice.

Wasn't that a sense of injustice?

The voice of the presenter is louder, perhaps she is closer to the microphone.

YES OF COURSE...

She continues reading

"Physical appearance, the surname, belonging to a nation, or a race or an ethnic origin, or to a religion, health status, sexual identity, sexual orientation". Pregnancy?

SURE THERE IS.

DISCRIMINATION? I WOULD SAY RACISM.

They mentions a list of different concepts: wealth and poverty, manners, prejudices, the place of residence. 6

Do you have any idea of the area where discrimination occurs?

IN WORKPLACES, IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, IN THE RATEPé (RATP), EVERYWHERE. ARAB CHILDREN (SHE MEANS YOUTH), FOR EXAMPLE, ARE EXCLUDED FROM SOCIETY. ARABS FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN YOU ARE APPLYING TO RENT A FLAT YOUR FILE IS PUT ALL THE WAY AT THE BOTTOM. THEY ARE EXCLUDED FROM SOCIETY.

7

A LADY, SHE TOLD ME ON A BUS (WE WERE ALL SQUEEZED IN VERY TIGHTLY AND I WAS CLOSE TO HER), "GO HOME!"

THAT IS STILL HAPPENING ON BUSES.

"GO HOME, WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN FRANCE?" SHE TOLD ME

YES, THAT HAPPENS, "GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY" THEY SAY THAT OFTEN.

One of the ladies talks about her experience in a cleaning job. 8

ALSO, IN THE CLEANING JOBS. I DON'T KNOW IF THERE IS AN OFFICIAL OBLIGATION FROM THE STATE TO CHECK FOR THE HEALTH OF THE EMPLOYEES, BUT ACTUALLY IT IS NOT THE EMPLOYER BUT THE STATE ITSELF WHO OBLIGES THE EMPLOYERS TO ENSURE THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF THEIR EMPLOYEES. SO I WENT.
I WAS WORKING CLEANING TOILETS AND I DID NOT HAVE GLOVES. I WORKED WITH MY HANDS. AND THE DOCTOR TOLD ME, "WHAT IS THIS?", SHE (THE DOCTOR) UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WAS THE USE OF THE CHEMICAL PRODUCTS THAT DAMAGED MY SKIN. SO, SHE SAID, "GIVE ME THE ADDRESS OF YOUR BOSS". AND I SAID "NO, DOCTOR, HE WILL SEND ME AWAY AND TELL ME THAT IT IS ME... THAT I AM CAUSING PROBLEMS... IN THE END, I DID NOT GIVE HER HIS NAME.

She makes a noise, tapping a palm with the back of her other hand. It is a gesture that signifies something, like: *there you have it, (nobody cares).*

SO, I DID NOT GIVE HIS NAME, BUT THE DOCTOR HERSELF LOOKED IT UP AND FOUND IT IN THE LIST, THE COMPANY THAT I WORKED FOR, AND THEY SUMMONED HIM, AND THEY ASKED FOR HIM. AND THEN HE CAME TO ME AND MADE A BIG SCENE, MY BOSS, AND HE SAID, "ONE LIKE YOU...!" AND THE NEXT DAY HE SENT ME TO BOULOGNE-BILLANCOURT, (...) BUT I WAS STILL LIVING HERE AND HE SENT ME TO BOULOGNE-BILLANCOURT TO DO MY JOB AT 6 IN THE MORNING, SO I WAS LATE... SO I UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WAS A WAY OF DISCRIMINATION TO PUSH ME TO LEAVE THE JOB ... A THREAT.

AND YOU RISK PROBLEMS... HE SHOULD HAVE GIVEN YOU GLOVES...

9

The first voice responds emphatically to this last lady.

"BUT YES, I COULD ASK BUT I DIDN'T, TO AVOID PROBLEMS"

HE SHOULD HAVE GIVEN YOU GLOVES...

"BUT IT WAS HIM, THAT WAS ACTING ILLEGALLY, NOT ME!

YOU COULD HAVE CONFRONTED HIM..."

COULD YOU HAVE CONFRONTED HIM?!, COULD YOU HAVE CONFRONTED HIM?!

THE GLOVES COULD DIMINISH THE DAMAGE

it is not simple... it is not simple

I NEEDED TO PROTECT MY HANDS -NOT DIMINISH THE DAMAGE...!!

10

11

If you are discriminated against, do you know what can happen?

What is the reflex? Make a complaint! Where do we have to go to complain?

TO THE POLICE STATION?

IT IS NOT WORTH GOING TO THE POLICE... IF I GO, A POLICEMAN OR WOMAN WILL TELL ME: OH, COME ON, THAT WILL PASS. WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO ABOUT IT?

There is now the possibility to contact the rights defender/ombudsman.

12

That is how it's called, The De-fen-der of Rights!

These rights you can learn about them by going to the Office of Victims of Discrimination there are some almost everywhere in the French territory. Or the Justice office. And then there is the Victim Assistance Association, that is present almost everywhere, or the House of Justice and Rights.

13 "and then there are different organisations, 135 organisations to support victims of discrimination that are also a bit everywhere in specialized places (...) that can inform you about what are the steps to follow. There is a website called "Stop discrimination", and there is an interactive map where you can see all the associations, etc. There is a phone number 0884...37 and there is a professional who will listen to you and who can give you advice.

WHEN YOU GO TO THESE... WE ARE FRAGILE... WHEN YOU TELL THEM ABOUT YOUR CASE OF DISCRIMINATION; BEFORE THAT IF YOU ARE SICK OR YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, THEY DON'T HAVE MANY TOOLS TO HELP YOU AND THAT IS BECAUSE PEOPLE RENOUNCE TO DENOUNCE.

14

That is true that when one is object of discrimination there is a fragilization, we are fragilized by the fact of discrimination, and therefore we don't have the psychological condition to go and ask for our rights.

that is because when we are isolated and discriminated, we have to act as a group. This is a collective appeal that helps the victims of discrimination to act against it, and this is so since July 2015, it is very recent. People can take the option of being represented by a trade union or by an organisation that has the experience of dealing with cases of discrimination, so, this is a way to simplify the reparation of prejudice and it is less expensive than an isolated legal action (...)

15

ME, I DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THAT. I THOUGHT THAT THE POLICE WERE THE ONLY PLACE THAT I WAS ABLE TO COMPLAIN."

"NOT ONLY WE DON'T KNOW THE LAW, AND THEN THE STATE IN WHICH YOU ARE THE DAY THAT YOU ARE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST (SHE SPEAKS SLOWLY, AS IF SHE WERE MAKING A STATEMENT...), FIRSTLY YOU DON'T HAVE THE STRENGTH, YOU ARE IN NEED, FIRSTLY YOU ARE IN A STATE OF IGNORANCE, AND THEN...AND THEN...AND THEN... LOTS OF THINGS..."

16

ME, I WILL NOT GO TO THE POLICE TO MAKE A COMPLAINT, THEY INSULT YOU FOR "BEING ARAB".

At this point several voices talk at the same time, the presenters try to speak over them, saying:

THERE ARE SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES, THAT IS A GOOD THING

The presenters try to channel the ladies' conversation back towards the topic of what is discrimination. But in so doing, they act in different ways. They both repeat this intention reorienting the narrative often with didactic explanations: a) Specifying what is considered discriminatory, b) What are the tools offered by the state/government to battle it. The tone of voice used by the presenters reflects a technical, almost instructive (in its use of descriptions and the options offered to solve the problem by accessing to a website) approach to racism, reducing the fact of it (racism) to just a form of discrimination. The women react to this and the conversation meanders along, while the women's voices change.

The male presenter says, "*the thing is to know what you know about discrimination*", which seemed a bit odd considering that neighbours from LGO are confronted to that kind of experience daily. It is a raw voice, now softened and readjusted by the female presenter who literally reads out different instances of discrimination from a document which seems to be an official account of acts of discrimination, which in part confirms the first statement of the male presenter, defining racism just as one of the multiple acts of discrimination. I can hear the voice of the female presenter as representing the official narrative, (a bit as we saw in Margo's speech), listing the cases which the law considers as discriminatory actions, which have been compiled, thus, officially registered.

The official narratives about discrimination, categorise racism in a different way to the ladies. At least that is what we can imply from the dismissive place where racism is located in that stream. In this context we can see how playing with words and definitions do not do any favours if the objective is to tackle the problem imposed by racism. Racism actually seems denied, seems silenced as a possibility in this operation to replace its denomination by the word "discrimination".

On other hand, in the listing that the presenters read, daily acts are reduced to simple points to remember, perhaps with the positive aim of generating a reaction against them.

The women take their time to answer, slowly counter balancing that speech they start to mention more situations which they found to be discriminatory or racist.

It is in this evolving interaction of definitions (of the presenter) vs. real situations of "discrimination" (or at least lived) of these women, that they finally disrupt that official narrative, bringing racism back to the centre of the discussion. They refer to what they have lived as racism, not "discrimination".

In the story of the *health issues* ("*I was sick, and the employer said, go back home and don't come back*") the dialogue between the female presenter and the lady is more profound each time I listen to it ("*did you feel discriminated at that moment? Yes, but I didn't feel nothing. Wasn't that a sense of injustice?!"),* changing the hearing experience. The lady's voice is quieter and lower[400], denouncing a discriminatory act without calling it by its name. However, as the violence of the act is replaced by the silence of its designation, this inhibits its condemnation. It is the first listener here, the female presenter, who intervenes to correct that omission, pushing her to reference the act as "racism". In this operation, her pedagogical role becomes more certain enunciating "racism" as a fact[401]. It is actually the voice of the older lady that succeeds in calling things by their name and putting racism back at the forefront of the conversation.

The voices of the ladies sound as if they were taking a position over the formalities and superficial tone of the presenters' official narrative.

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[400] Defining the voices without the use of adjectives is a difficult task. But translating the hearing is an essential part for an understanding of the communication between the voices to which I am listening.

[401] As Foucault says: "*Speaking or writing is not saying things or expressing oneself, it is not playing with language, it is moving towards the sovereign act of denomination, going, through language, right to the place where things and words are tied together in their common essence and that allows to give them a name*". Foucault, M.: *The order of things, An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 1966. (p.136 in the Spanish edition). My translation.

If the goal of the talk was to teach, or share advice about discrimination, this was diverted into the sharing of different daily stories of racism. The story about the *gloves* and the damaging way in which the ladies had to work in the cleaning sector is a very telling example of racism in the workplace and in daily life. The woman asserted that she did not want to denounce her employer fearing actions against her. The apprehension in her voice is patent. This fear is also apparent in her reluctance to *mention* the name of her boss. Another omission that reveals the powerful force that racism exerts, even without being named, or maybe because it is not called by its name. This subtlety is part of how soft racism also acts, disguising the act of racism, and unfortunately using another word such as discrimination, in a more gentle or vaguer sense. This operation has become recurrent throughout the years as D. Fassin (and P. Simon) denounced[402] and it deserves more attention as to how the word discrimination has recently been used to replace racism, to dissipate its real sense. Talking about soft racism, is also a way of denying the existence of racism in small and dissimulated acts[403].

I can hear an emerging empathy among all the women, altering the flow of the pedagogical goals of the conversation. The voice of the female presenter oscillates between two poles, the official narrative of law and justice, of the institutional methods prescribed to battle racism, and on the other hand her empathy and understanding of the rawness of the recounted stories -making all the listening more intense. She moves from being a transmitter to a listener and then to more participative role, asking for details, adding some personal impressions. ("*wasn't that a sense of injustice?*"). This seems possible in a shared space of gender, reflecting the intersectionality of the conversation. Her voice breaks in parts, becomes almost inaudible, maybe in an emotional state.

[402] Fassin, D. and Simon, P.: *op.cit.* See the first chapter of this thesis.

[403] Certainly, a more detailed discussion is needed about how language has been used to cover racism in the media and political discussions about the subject not only in France but globally.

Despite her efforts, there is no clear exposition of a legal framework -which should be the cornerstone of state measures against racist abuse. Indeed, there are not clearly stipulated legal or civil codes that provide victims with a simple legal action. In other words, there is no denomination or reference to criminality if the racist abuse is soft, diffuse or subtle. Having said this, the toolkit that is presented fails to provide solutions to the problem of racism[404]. Nonetheless, this is consequent with the way in which the conversation was conducted. Because *racism* as a word was barely mentioned by the presenters, the ladies were pushing back with their own definitions. Focusing on "discriminations" the narrative translates the efforts of a state that tries to disregard any soft act of racism, because to be denounced it has to be brutal. The battle against racism is lost by omitting the word. Language and the sound of words can also be a powerful trick that racism and racist acts use to disguise themselves.

As for the male presenter, his voice scatters interventions in a confident tone and with some degree of *mansplaining*. The first record of his voice "*you know what discrimination is?*" appears empowered in front of this group of women, and he shows some reluctance in his way of speaking. He is the one who asserts that racism is just a form of discrimination, dismissing it.

He does not seem to be listening too much to the other voices. At this stage and judging by his intonations, I hear him as a nexus between the ladies and the female presenter, as if he were also an official voice, but one that portrays itself as local and close to the experience of the ladies. His performance lacks generosity in his

[404] Notwithstanding several official statements about the "battle against racism and xenophobia", as well as a plethora of European Council agreements, and several policies in different stages of completion, there is still no legal definition of racist abuse as a crime. This absence undermines the entire process and contributes to the inability of complaints and charges to be resolved, adding to the lack of awareness among the population. See, "*Plan national de lutte contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme: 21 mesures pour continuer le combat",* 2018-2020. https://www.gouvernement.fr/plan-national-de-lutte-contre-le-racisme-et-l-antisemitisme-21-mesures-pour-continuer-le-combat

understanding and interaction with the stories -his silences are palpable. Ultimately, he merely reinforces the predicament that emanates from the readings of the institutional information.

I hear a process at play wherein the ladies gradually gain control of the radio show. Their demonstration of fully and deeply knowing what racism means, through their life experiences, validates and legitimises their overthrow of the narrative and challenges the lack of concrete definitions by institutional channels.

It is perhaps a problem of theory vs. practice. A problem that is played out in the more muted ways in which racism acts in the daily lives of people and the ignorance or denial of the institutions and/or other members of society. Unfortunately, it is also a demonstration of how discrimination as a word and perhaps as an empty definition, is progressively replacing racism. In this operation, discrimination plays the same game as racism, except that it seems less violent to enunciate, as I would say, it is falsely gentler. We must not confuse this with soft racism, because, as explained earlier on, soft racism is simply disguised and dissimulated racism. In this case, the replacement of one word by another, has to do with the act of soft racism, which is actually racism disguised. Verbally speaking, saying "discrimination", *sounds* less brutal than "racism", in this perverse narrative that officially has been taking place not only in France but also in other countries[405].

If *La Goutte d'Or* has been one of the most punished districts of Paris *intramuros* in terms of cases of open racism and/or discrimination[406] there is also a strong corpus of NGOs and associations battling daily against its effects and underlying conflicts,

[405] This brings to mind the recent media interest in the concept of "unconscious bias" in the UK. By saying that an act of racism is "unconscious" we are emptying the sense of the act of racism itself. We are excusing the offender, who has done something allegedly involuntarily, not on purpose. This approach is very dangerous on the road to tackle racism.

[406] Local media has evolved over the last few years to avoid the positions that international media has taken on the neighbourhood. Internationally, Fox News famously declared LGO a "no-go zone" in a report in 2015, an opinion shared in the past by various French and Parisian media.

helping the less fortunate neighbours, but also, and unfortunately, spreading the official narrative as the principal solution to those problems. Hearing these voices reflects the authorities' neglect towards these conflicts. The tools that local and state administrations provide are largely bureaucratic in nature, without a proper legal framework, without the possibility of confronting the forms that daily discrimination takes, and which endanger the access of those who suffer them, to the possibility of a normal life[407].

The omission of the word "racism" in some way certifies the tendency from the political sphere to tackle the symptom of a social problem, rather than addressing or resolving its root causes. Denomination is an important factor, and despite the titles of the stream, "racism" is a word with several different connotations in the voices of the official narrative defended by social (and political) agents[408].

Deploying symptomatic administrative resources to address racism and discrimination is the modern state's current response to racism; an approach that successfully manages to avoid tackling its causes. The resources and tools provided by the official narrative are concentrated on the aftermath or after-effects of the problem, hence my reference to it being symptomatic[409]. Its inefficacy is based on its

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[407] The consequences of racism and discrimination on individuals can be catastrophic in several ways, not just widening the gap of social exclusion as a workforce, but also in the access to opportunities for education. Mental health is proven to be another concern among victims of racism in daily life. The web-radio listing of its programmes' themes shows a genuine interest in starting that kind of conversation. Creating a shared and safe space wherein to talk about experiences and stories of racism.

[408] I am thinking of two of Foucault's texts here. Firstly, the process of symptomatizing made in "The Birth of the Clinic and the construction of medical knowledge"; and secondly, "The Order of Things", or as in its original title "the words and the things", which brings forth in a stronger way the historically acquired importance of naming things, such as racism in this case. Foucault, M.: *The Birth of the Clinic, an Archaeology of Medical Perception*, Vintage Books, 1994; and *The Order of Things, an Archaeology of Human Sciences*, Taylor & Francis, 2004, (1966).

[409] This attitude is not exclusive to the French state, it appears to be widely shared by others.

own apparent mandate of curing wounds, instead of preventing harm, as vividly portrayed in the "gloves" story.

The ladies' voices also demonstrate the complexity of "soft", daily racism. There is no register that legally defines, condemns, compiles or logs these attitudes and silent acts of violence, which we can categorise as "soft racism".

Theory and practice can be translated in the two different narratives in place in this conversation; acting both in superposition and in constant battle against each other. On the one hand, the official or "normative" narrative about racism and on the other, the narrative of experienced racism. The norm cannot get along with the other because there is a huge gap between them, caused by the post-decided measures, socio-political actions and decisions to tackle the issue that are not enough to solve the conflict, based just on symptoms. This is unsurprising, as there are no correlative actions or understandings between the real-life realities of soft racism, the deep understanding and acknowledgement of its acts, and the consequent measures or actions that could solve those problems [410].

Narratives of Race and Racism

The second programme chosen from the same web-radio is called "Anti-white racism"[411]. There is a lapse of two years between the first recording we analysed above and this one, which appears to be conducted and recorded in a studio.

[410] In the National Plan to Fight Racism (*Plan National de Lutte contre le Racisme* -2018) there is a phase called Education. While we coincide in the critical role that Education can play in this battle, there would appear to be no consideration regarding other more solid bases from which to start.

[411] It is part of a series made by young people of the district with the support of the same association, la Salle St. Bruno https://gouttedor-et-vous.org/Webradio-de-La-Salle-racisme-et-discriminations.

There is a group of different voices (youngsters between 15 and 22 years of age, 5 male and 2 female) dialoguing, as well as the voice of the radio presenter, also a youth. Some of them work in the organisation, others in the *Mairie de Paris*, while others are part of a group that participate in the activities organised by the association.

As with the first programme, I transcribed and translated it. A few specifications are included to highlight Parisian slang, the vocabulary of youth and some African modalities in the accent tonalities and the voices. All the names have been changed.

They all introduce themselves with their first names and their age (15, 20, 22, 18…). They all live in the neighbourhood; some were even born in LGO. One of the older youths says he is an entrepreneur. The radio presenter also introduces himself. He is 21 and he is studying. His voice is confident. He explains that he will manage the broadcast. He has been broadcasting this show every two weeks for some time and has been living in the neighbourhood for twenty years.

A young woman that we will name Claire, says she works in LGO, but is from outside Paris (from the east of France); she works as a coordinator for the host association of the web radio.

The radio presenter introduces the show and reveals the week's topic.

Voices colour code

Radio Presenter

Claire:

Monique:

Boy A:

Boy B:

Boy C:

Boy D:

Today one of the topics that we wanted to address is Racism. But more precisely anti-white Racism. What do you think when we talk about racism, simply?

For me, anti-white racism has never existed. That is a media thing and it will always be provoked by the media. Because when we say "racism" it is for people of colour. I have never seen anti-white racism. But we are next to a person who is white colour, aren't you?

In my case I don't know if the media talks about anti-white racism or not, I haven't seen that.

A boy says to her in a very low voice: now, you that are white…you've felt that?

I am… I don't know if that exists… we should first define what is racism.(…) racism is the idea of discrimination, so that means that anti-white racism would be that a white person, or better said a person "conceptualised" as white, feels that she or he is discriminated by others. I have never experienced that, and I've work in an NGO here in LGO for three and half years now. It should be said that normally the people who work in the association are not considered as white themselves and that I don't have the impression of having been discriminated by anti-white racism in this district. Nevertheless, I think I am a minority in terms of colour in this quartier, but this is not an issue. Beside the odd little jokes about that, but I didn't feel this as racism against me. For me there is no colour for racism (…)

No, I don't think so, but since I work here what I see is that people tell me "and you, and you?" "You, the white", as if we were not the same. I'm in the minority (she is referring to the group of people who work as volunteers in the association). They don't say, "the Blacks, the Arabs". Because it is like we were not similar to you. We are all similar, and it is not racism, but a distinction is made. Maybe it is because there are lots that explain themselves badly. And it is as if we, the whites, we don't go to eat to the same places as you (laughs). When I was selected to work here it is true that my director said that he wanted social diversity in his team. I know that I was not taken because of that.

To support what Monique is saying, it is true that here we can hear "the Babtou* this, the Babtou* that" and what is funny is that those are preconceived ideas. For example, when I arrived to work here as a volunteer there was a young girl who asked me "but why are you not a doctor? Why are you working here, and you are not a doctor?" And in fact, that touched me so deeply that I thought, "how could she think that?". And I answered her, "why do you ask me that that?" And she said, "you are white, (in other words you are a Babtou) and you could succeed in your studies". As if my brain were more developed than that of others in the neighbourhood! (…) I think that at the beginning it was not a provocation, it was more to see my reaction. … there are differences, but I don't think that they are caused by colour. (but) cultural…

When she told you "why are you not a doctor" it is because in general, we've heard that they are not used to seeing other people, white people, working in LGO. It is the image they have of whites. It is because of that. In my opinion the young girl was not malicious, it was just a question, maybe it has been misunderstood, but it was not intentionally unkind.

No, I didn't take it like anything cruel or badly intentioned, it was just surprising.

We've heard a lot of talk about anti-white racism, anti-black racism, but there are also other groups. There are the Pakistanis, the Chinese, Indians, there are lots of other groups, why is that we don't hear too much about them? You see? It is always Black, White, Arab, but in fact there are no differences. For example, at the place where I work (the Municipality of Paris, as he mentioned before) we could have other volunteers Pakistanis, Latinos, Chinese, but in a district "called" like LGO … (with his finger in the inside-face of his cheek he made the sound of uncorking a bottle -pop!) . For the moment that is a utopia, we can say.

In fact we say the Black, the White, whatever, but it is because of what, what sociologists call perception of colour they don't use the term Black or White anymore but "perceived as white",(…) Because a White… what is a White? Today, for example, she is very tanned, but I know that she is White (referring to her female colleague, Monique). So, what does it mean "anti-White racism"?

When they say White, I have the impression that they actually want to say French, not the colour White. It is more about their social or ethnic origins, what brings the word "White", it is not the colour of the skin, it's a synonym.

You are not perceived as White then…

No, I don't feel perceived like White because a person is named Marie, Claire or Jean-Pierre.

That means that people can make jokes about that?

Babtou is "Toubab" spelt back-to-front, it is an example of the Parisian slang or argot created by putting words backwards, which is called "verlan" ("á l'envers" , i.e., backwards). Toubab, is the historical name given to white people in French West Africa, notably in Senegal. This is an interesting transference of a word employed in a

Once, I was having dinner with a group of people, all together, and they were all Black except for me. And one persondid not finish his meal. The other told him, "(...) stop doing your White thing and finish your meal" and that upset me very much indeed. When I hear comments like those, I know that it is not always badly intentioned, it is not to say that it upsets me constantly but ...

What we think is that the word is strong (talking again about anti-white racism) because it is not violent, it is not ... it is just the distinction between "them and us"; but I don't think that that is racism as in the origin of the term as you just said it. Yes, we are not discriminated against in our life in society, it is just that every White, Babtou, French or whatever origins (...) for me what you said is violent.

But you know the people who come here, (she refers to youngsters that participate in the activities that the association organizes) they are very nice. I doubt that they are malicious in that respect. What makes me laugh is that every time that we organize something, they say, "you, the Babtou, or the catholic" and for me that doesn't make any sense.

Because, not all my origins are French, and I am not pure French like those who are. And there are the amalgams that are not good, because the deduction "you are white, then, you are catholic, then your dad's name is Jean-Pierre, Jean-Charles or whatever". I can't say that that is violent, it is just redundant. It is just clumsiness...

And what you said is the opposite but the same, "you are white, so your father is named Jean-Pierre, so you are catholic", while your own history is more complex than that, you see. And me, it is the same, because I am Black so, "Hey Black, stop talking so loudly " or,

So, I think that racism against white people and the minority here is in relation to the Blacks and Arabs here (in the neighbourhood and in the association). It is true that we live in a French country and, logically the majority of its population is of white skin and they are in a position of superiority in front of the people who arrive, those who emigrate to France; it should be more about them, to help them. When we say something to a White person, it is not a mean thing, I don't know if you see what I want to say...

In my opinion, I differentiate racism from the racial issue because for me racism is a history. It is of course the colour, but it is also linked to a question of domination. So we suffer racism when we cannot be equal to other parts of the population, by rights or to a certain... , and for me, the issue of the colour white, what I have to say, it is more like the racial issue than to racism. Because as a white person, well, there are other discriminations that exist like social discrimination and other, but being white, we are not discriminated in the search for a flat or to access education because we are white in colour, while when you are of colour, Black or Arab, or Pakistani or young then, it is racism that exists.

No...

It is true that it is just a joke, etc. but then if I was in a professional environment, I would take it badly.

But the idea behind it, is violent...

Well, if you tell me that I am a catholic, which I'm not, that does

But the problem is not that, the problem is to say, for example "you are black, so you dance well."

Big Laughs

Collective laughs

So, what does that mean? That, I am white and there are certain stigmatisations? It is true. But I can't say that it is violent and mean. It is just not logical I think that according to what I heard here and outside (in the district) about the Blacks and the Arabs and other stigmatised populations, that is more violent.

It is not racist in both senses; the way the French people are towards Black and Arab people is far more racist than these are towards French people. Because originally, racism is from the French against Black and Arab, because they have it in their heads that we are not the same than them, and it is because of that we can perceive them in a different way, saying that "what are you doing here, you should be in another place..." Nevertheless, it is precisely them (the French people) who have given us the image that we are all lower in everything in terms of studies. There are not so many Black people... (he stops)...I don't know, it is because of that, that they say, "what are you doing here... you should be in another place", because we are used to hearing that, and when it is in the other direction it is "Hey Black, don't stay with us", then it depends on the results. So, what I see is that Black people don't intend to be mean by that, but in the other direction it is like "what are you doing here? you are Black...!" you see?

I have just one question. What can people do, here and outside, what can be done to fight against racism?

Stop discriminating at school promote diversity in all places, and stop making stereotypes, amalgams, blaming Black and Arabs, telling us that we don't have the right to do this or that. Once we have spread this new mentality, I think Racism will decrease

In fact I don't know what to say about racism, because I haven't experienced racism, I could not find a solution because I have not experienced it Because we are mostly between us; together with Blacks, Arabs. But then well I have friends that are White (he laughs) yes, but they are Portuguese, they are not (he does not finish the phrase) (they talk between themselves about someone called Bastien), but it is true that when I talk with them or if we meet all together, we don't have the same lifestyle, I mean, we don't see the same things, that is true! But that is not racism

I think that that happens because you are not from the same nationality, you don't have the same origins.

Yes, we don't have the same culture… I live in a district (probably outside Paris) where there are not so many Whites, you see? And when I was at school, there were not that many Whites, you see? I would say that we grew up among Blacks and Arabs, maybe some Asians too, so if we, after school should mingle, for example, as neighbours, even in my building there are no Whites. Oh no, there is a Serb, but you, see? (Laughs). He is my mate, Pierre.

That means that for you, White means French; because the Serb, he is white! The Portuguese is also white!

Yes, but they don't have the same culture as the French

Again, what can we do to fight against racism, a very good question…

First, mentalities have to change, and that won't happen in one day, there is work to do for several generations. For me, the only solution is that we open the borders of the districts, so that everybody can travel left and right. Blacks and Arabs in the 6th , the pure French can go to the 18th, especially to LGO. It is necessary to open mentalities and see what their neighbours do. It is not like shutting the door and everyone to their own life, it is necessary to go and have dinner with the neighbours. We should do that. I think that we really need to open those actual borders! Not saying "no, I cannot go there because it is a dangerous neighbourhood", we need to open the borders and let the generations go on with that.

Thank you to everybody for participating, I really appreciated your ideas and I hope that more people could hear this.

The racism question: or what does it mean to be white or black?

The subject of the stream reflects a well-established topic in the public sphere, mostly put forth by nationalistic far-and centre-right groups, about the supposed existence of an anti-white racism.

The topic served as an interesting starting point to talk about racism. The show's format, at the same time, allows us to follow developed interaction among the youngsters and the uncountable ways in which racist narratives can operate through viciously spiralling contradictions.

All the responses seem to gravitate around another question: what is racism? The respondents express how racism is perceived and understood in their experience. Two young white women are presented with a reference to their skin colour. Their interventions are critical to lead the discussion beyond "*white racism*", to address racism as a whole concept.

The different anecdotes, such as the "*what are you doing here?*" question raised by a small girl of the neighbourhood to one of these young white volunteers; and the reference to a white custom related to eating, demonstrate how complicated it seems to be for the white "side" to understand the Other "side's" (black and Arab in this case) experiences of racism. In other words, the young women, white and French, stumble into the trap of an open narrative of integration and equality that diffuses itself at the end of the programme.

Claire explains that she has not experienced this notion of "anti-white racism", but she admits to feeling part of a "minority of white people" in the neighbourhood[412]. While she refers to some academic work on "*perception of colour*" to define a colour identity; her colleague, also white and French, refers to a universal resemblance ("*we are all similar*"), while at the same time she states that *there is a distinction*.

[412] In some ways this contradicts some of the interviews conducted with LGO neighbours, who stressed that the neighbourhood is mostly white "French".

There is an interesting point in the main contradiction of the narrative of universal equality or access to the resources of a society. The cited question of a black girl saying "*why is she in LGO and not studying medicine*" is crucial because Claire is confronted with the realities of racism: through the anecdote she is experiencing the consequences of old racist narratives and practices. The young girl's assumption comes from the representation she had received about white people, generated by naturalised racism. The distress that Claire seems to experience, is nothing more than a consequence, as Boy C mentions later, of how white French people have contributed to the representation of themselves -as a category of power, who have more chances to succeed than a black youngster from LGO. As Boy C brings up, colonial relationships have contributed to this representation.

Monique and Claire and their universal approach to "colour", represent the inner contradictions of a multicultural narrative that sometimes circulates around LGO[413]. The colour-blind discourse shows its inconsistencies through the establishment of other differences: cultural habits, and different (national or ethnic) origins. The *difference* is the new racism, and this is in line with Balibar's concept of *cultural racism*, as we mentioned before [414]. Their reference to "*perception or perceived as coloured*" comes from a recent narrative created and stated by a varied range of researchers, mostly from the field of American statistical sociology, close to the project of Ethnic Statistics that we discussed in the first chapter[415].

While Claire and Monique seem to gradually dismiss their self-experience of discrimination, Boy C highlights the homogeneity of LGO by pointing out that most social workers are black or Arab youngsters. This shows that the tendency towards

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[413] Mostly called "diversity" as multiculturalism is a taboo word in France as we discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

[414] Balibar, E. and Wallerstein, I.: *op.cit.*

[415] Inspired by the American tradition of the sociology of racial conceptualisation which mingles with the genetic sciences approaches. See Morning, A.: "Pour une sociologie de la conceptualisation raciale au 21ème siècle", in *Terrain/Théories*, 3, 2015.

ghettoization also occurs in LGO. At the same time, he is turning the mirror towards Claire and Monique, to make them aware of how racism can operate.

This line of discussion in the second half of the general discussion is based on "differences": cultural ones but also ethnic and national, all of them jumbled.

The speech that I hear from the voices of Claire and Monique is part of the Manichean narrative that on the one hand celebrates cultural differences, while on the other, it bases its prejudices on those same cultural differences. Applied to the representation of the neighbourhood, this explains some of the contradictions in the two young women's speech, first stating a colour-blind view on the district, and later, expressing an uncomfortable feeling about the fact of being singled out as white, as different.

Dialogically, Monique and Claire seem confident affirming a colour-blind policy to work in the neighbourhood. But in the last discussion, the pedagogical explanation to another youth, who talks about his friends and acquittances (Serbian and Portuguese), is based on "cultural differences" between those two nationalities, bringing back once again the prejudice put in question from the beginning, by Boy C: "*we are more complex than that*".

The way in which all these youngsters are talking is a flow of voices where the discussion about racism is at the core, and showing how, in these small conversations prejudices and categorisations are still at stake in the neighbourhood. Origins and cultural differences are new ways to disguise the prejudices towards Others who now live closer in the same society.

The narrative of "origins", often heard in French-speaking contexts, is foundational regarding those conceptualisations of cultural differences to which Claire refers to. It is common to be asked in France "*de quelle origine êtes-vous?*" (Where are you from originally?) when your tone of voice has accents or tonalities from elsewhere. It is not necessarily linked to negative enquiries, but it is in some way part of the French process of understanding differences or of listening out for them when talking to

others. The cultural differences mentioned by Claire are an indication of how cultural racism has evolved in the last years towards concepts such as "tolerance". Tolerance reflects the conditional acceptance of something that is making noises in a place. This contradictory mode of anti-racism actually exposed its ugly face, again, separating, distancing the "they" from the "us". "They" live there, while "us" live here, "let's not mix that up". This seems to be the message regarding these discussions around differences, fake equalities and approaches to racism.

This is part of a contradiction that lies at the core of the historical republican narrative, where everybody is equal in front of the law, whereas, in reality, long-standing statistics and cases of abuse from the police against black and Arab communities, clearly contradict this universal idea of equality[416].

Stereotyping

Stereotype it is the name chosen by the official and normative narrative in France, that usually takes the place of racism, as we saw in chapter Sight. It sounds less aggressive -at least to some ears. Once again, the sound of a word is chosen to avoid causing problems.

[416] "*It was quite clear to me that the Frenchmen in whose hands I found myself were not better or worse than their American counterparts. Certainly, their uniforms frightened me quite as much, and their impersonality, and the threat, always very keenly felt by the poor, of violence, was present in that commissariat as it had ever been for me in any police station. And I had seen, for example, what Paris policemen could do to Arab peanut vendors".* Baldwin, J.: "Equal in Paris", in *Notes of a Native Son*, *Collected Essays*, Penguin Books, 2017. (p.106). This short text by James Baldwin, originally written in 1955, provides further grounds, on his experience of being imprisoned for a theft that he did not commit. Forty years later, a French movie, "La Haine" (Hate) directed by M. Kassovitz, made a huge buzz reflecting the daily life of police violence inside the *cités* around Paris. Twenty years after this we saw the success of "Les Misérables" directed by Ladj Ly in which, once more, police violence against Black (and immigrant) communities from the *banlieue* of Paris are portrayed.

The power of the sound of a word finds its versatilities in the official narrative that opted not to talk about racism directly. As race is disguised by culture, stereotype is a low-key reference to racism. Once more, we are faced by yet another speech omission of the term “racism”.

While they are discussing about racism, there is an intention, similar to the radio presenters from the other stream, to cover the word and its enunciation with the highlight of cultural differences manifested by Claire and Monique. This operation is actually part of a gesture of soft racism as they are trying to soften the act of racism with the mention of cultural differences, what Balibar called “culturalist racism”.

“*the problem is (…) to say for example ‘you are black, so you are a good dancer’*”.

The words of Boy C respond to that narrative, exposing the fact of racism hidden in the stereotype created about black youth.

Hearing racism in La Goutte d’Or

In this chapter we heard different soundscapes of the neighbourhood. First, music, as a way to denounce old and some new difficulties that immigrants have to confront in order to become legal citizens in France. A situation that numerous inhabitants of LGO experienced in the past and that some still have to battle for.

Through the change of rhythms and harmonies we could hear different options to evoke the discomfort of a situation that is close to some of the prejudices that the neighbourhood suffers. The result was a form of protest song, as a part of a new sound about immigration, and also in tune with the spirit of the neighbourhood, combative and irreverent.

The second soundscape showed the sonic distance between the integration policies applied by cultural agents indirectly linked to the local council and the sounds of the

neighbourhood's youth, and their needs. As we said, there is gap between both, a lack of fluid communication. The approach to hearing the sounds of the neighbourhood is done in a similarly exotic key, to that of the musical representation of the neighbourhood that Margo revealed (through the organisation of African themed events). Despite the narrative of integration, the practice shows that communication with people in the neighbourhood can still be improved.

In the third part, the voices took us in a different direction. It is not only about the voices and how they transmit their different interpretations about what racism is, but also about how the sound of the word racism differs in its uses according to who speaks. Hearing in this part is central as an exercise of attention to those different sounds in two different conversations that transit racism experiences.

The omission or replacement of the word "racism" occurs also in relation to its sounds and to the sonic burden that it represents. "Racism" is replaced or muted. The enunciation of the word appears as a problem, and also as an accomplice to an operation that disguises "racism" with other words, or that simply omits it. These actions are also part of attitudes of soft racism. The enunciation of the word, and its sound proved to be crucial to develop an anti-racist narrative.

In both streams we have listened to how people deal with racism in their daily lives through the dialogues of their voices. There is also a grounded sound of what the neighbourhood experiences as racism. While they are not broadcast shows, streams remain a part of the soundscape of LGO, with its own voices, and with a call to others, whoever listens or wants to listen.

As a listener of these stories and their resonances, I can also tell how the interaction of voices, the enunciation of the word "racism" and the act of speaking out against it, work together to create the possibility of mutual understanding, building an intimate space of the same voices, sharing experiences and thoughts about racism.

Both radio streams showed the power of hearing, generating resilience that lies in listening to the Other's voice[417]. The listening of each of the voices that we have followed also demonstrates that once immersed in dialogue, a conversation can lead to listening to each other, enabling the switching of places (being in the place of the Other for a moment).

Sounds, white noise and music in the different contexts that I worked in allow us to see how racism appears in different sonic experiences and also in which ways there are counter-narratives that fight back against those prejudices.

[417] In this regard the experience started by the Danish NGO "The Human Library" demonstrates that listening to each other talking about difficulties caused by discrimination can actually work positively. See their work, now at the international level here: https://humanlibrary.org.

CHAPTER VI: Smell

Odours as a narrative

"*Certainly, if you stuck your nose into some of the other neighbourhood households you could smell far worse things*".

L'Assommoir, Emile Zola

About Smell

To talk about senses implies, as we saw in the previous chapters, some subjectivities, some personal experiences, that can sometimes be expanded. In the case of smell, one of the most striking aspects is its tremendous capacity to trigger memories[418].

[418] Gottfried, J.A., Smith, A.P.R., Rugg, M.D. and Dolan, R.J.: "Remembrance of Odours Past: Human Olfactory Cortex in Cross-Modal Recognition Memory", in *Neuron*, Vol.42,687-695, May 2004.

As with any other sense, Smell can be quite impertinent and disrespectful of our own boundaries and repressions. It can transport us to that place where it connects us with the memory of a pleasant experience or, with the reminder of a bad one. Its particularity is precisely that: there is no passage, no path to walk backwards (as if we were retracing our steps to find our keys). There is only the pure ferocity of that landing in another place, a place of memory, which can be either pleasant, discomforting or painful[419].

Smell, as a sense, also activates different impassioned reactions and rejections. The strength of an olfactory experience can, and does, bring about changes of habits, of partners, breakdowns, amatorial crushes, political reactions, historical processes, discrimination from people against others and of course, racism.

Smell has been studied exhaustively since Dominique Laporte's[420] first texts, later taken up by Michel Serres[421]. Alain Corbin gave Smell a whole new direction; going beyond the field of anthropology and philosophy, incorporating a historical approach, despite Corbin's own criticism about the reluctance of historiography to analyse the senses seriously[422].

In his work, "The Foul and the Fragrant"[423], Paris is the epicentre of Smell. The process of deodorisation analysed by the author starts in 1750 and covers the development of science as well as the concerns for the city's hygiene and disinfection. This process of hygienisation is parallel to the rise of a new social interest based on the capacity of smell, and a growing division among social classes. In this process, the bourgeoisie

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[419] Jim Drobnick mentioned Sperber when he said, "*Smells bypass language and directly connect the material world to one's inner state*" (Sperber, 1975, 115-9)", in Drobnick, J: *The Smell Culture Reader*, Oxford, Berg, 2006. (p. 165).

[420] Laporte, D.: *Histoire de la merde*, Paris, Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1978.

[421] Serres, M.: *Five Senses, a Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, Bloomsbury, 2016. (Original version, 1985).

[422] Corbin, A.: "Charting the Cultural History of the Senses", in Howes, D. (ed.): *op.cit.* 2005.

[423] Corbin, A.: *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French social imagination*, Harvard University Press, 1986. (1982).

played both a cultural and a political role, boosting the cleanliness of a city (and of its individuals) and disguising odours with an unprecedented development of fragrances.

This deodorisation process that comprises a good part of Corbin's thesis serves to highlight the differences between classes. The bourgeoisie have a particular relationship with smell, they tend to occult bad odours, and relate them to working classes and low social sectors, creating a stigma against poverty. Popular sectors and working classes were defined by the Parisian bourgeoisie through a sense of "anomia", or lack of their own perception of the sense of smell, and of their own odour. Odours thus became the core of the stigma of poverty, a trademark of class, related to ideological interpretations of its own representation. As we will see in this chapter's two parts, the representation of working classes (in the 19th century) and of immigrants (in the 21st century) is identified with smell. Smells produced, in both cases, by their bodies, as emanations, but also generated by the remains of things, the rubbish and the dirtiness with which these two groups, different in time, but sharing the same space (LGO) are often associated.

This kind of discriminatory representation of poverty, is based on the first attempts to consolidate a separated space between the City and its limits, as Laporte shows with François I's Royal edicts of 1539[424]. One of these asks people to separate their rubbish, and start its recollection outside their households, it is accompanied by the requirement for homeowners to construct some sanitary system for their body-emanations. A second edict refers to language, providing for the cleansing of French from old words and dialects, and instituting French as the region's mother tongue. This resonates with what we saw in the previous chapter regarding the cleansing of language through the substitution of the word racism suffers (for discrimination), if not through its outright omission. We might be close to the cleansing of the term too.

[424] Laporte, D.: *op.cit*. (36-40).

The edicts are linked by a need to cleanse, both the Language and the City, and a rejection of rubbish. In Laporte's analysis, this deepened the division of classes (the bourgeoisie was settled inside the city vs. rural and future working classes outside the city) perpetuating the idea of private property. Laporte explains this movement as crucial because self-body emanations are also considered as private property (which is the basis of the capitalist system)[425].

This first movement of exclusion, where the city of Paris begins to establish its limits in relation to what is clean or disgusting (smelly), is also linked to a division of the space. The edicts also requested rural merchants to avoid leaving their rubbish inside the city, as well as live animals. The limits not only separated social sectors but spaces corresponding to these divisions. Laporte saw in this a capitalist drive:

"*Capitalism since the sixteenth century has not ceased to enclose the city in a ring of Moebius of a discourse whose very division constitutes it as One and links this dialectic of opposites (…): a narrative of the rich who associate the poor with the vile, the low, with corruption, in a word with shit; and a narrative of the poor who always suspect corruption in luxury and recognize the rich with what stinks. The same, it goes without saying, for masters and slaves, who can smell the Jew close by and show a perfectly refined flair for recognizing the Negro in the shadows, by his scent: common obstinacy in racism which, if it is a link between them, it is only as an effect of this link which the discourse of capital literally encircles them to make them mutually hold each other as rubbish*"[426].

Laporte's strong words help to understand how these narratives were clearly defining the Other, in this case the working classes, as odorously disgusting, as will be the case centuries later with populations of immigrant origins. This is a narrative

[425] There is pun made by Laporte in French with the words "propreté" (cleaning) and "propriété" (property). "*An ideology of "propre" (clean) will not be separated from the one of property*", Laporte, D.: op.cit. (p. 40).

[426] Laporte, D.: *op.cit.* (p.55). My translation.

of rejection, based and originating in the rejection of odours coming from the bodies of subaltern sectors, as we will see in Zola's *L'Assommoir*, as well as in a more recent case in Jacques Chirac's speech. Within the same space, LGO, discriminatory comments on the neighbourhood's odours repeat a similar formula.

Placing and Displacing LGO

We can situate the beginnings of LGO as a neighbourhood within the same period studied by Corbin. In the 18th century it was part of the rural landscape outside Paris, including its windmills and vineyards. In 1750 the neighbourhood was part of the area called the Hill of the Five Windmills. At the time, there were still 57 distinct entry points, called *Barrières*, into the city of Paris. They were part of a border called the Limit of General Farmers that existed until the French Revolution[427]. The corresponding entrance to what is now LGO was the *Barrière* of St. Denis, also known as the *Barrière* of La Chapelle, situated more or less where the current overground metro Line 2 goes over the Boulevard Rochechouart.

These *Barrières* constituted the city's frontiers, serving as hectic transit points. As such they were built as small fortresses, with walls dividing two spaces: Intra and Extra-muros. Outside, the law forbade erecting any kind of construction. Farmers, traders and some workers came through them daily to work in the city.

Until 1860, the *Barrières* served as a physical means to impose the difference between the rural and marginal, opposed to the idea of a bourgeois city space, especially in this northern sector. During the revolutionary wars, they served as refuge to some revolutionaries. Because of this, they were attacked, and semi-destroyed by state forces in 1830 and 1848. Subsequently, the decision was taken to demolish them altogether. Hence, this borderline was progressively incorporated into

[427] In French, *L'Enceinte de Fermiers Généraux.*

the city of Paris, as happened with LGO by 1860, creating a new border, now known as the Peripheral Boulevard, that encircles the city of Paris.

It is in this sense, that LGO still works as a representation of a frontier for the inhabitants of Paris. Not just because of its concentration of mobile residents, or the joys of its circulation, but also because the notion of a borderline has been imprinted upon it from its origins as a Parisian neighbourhood. Some scholars have acknowledged this situation as an integral part of its identity[428]. They also consider its more contemporary reality as a place of trade and circulation of imported goods[429], and also as a place that favours "alterity"[430] giving it the aura of a *mobile locus*.

The borderline notion about the neighbourhood has evolved over the years into different interpretations. Yet, it still resonates in the general representation that inhabitants of Paris have about it, seeing it sometimes, as an enclave. The idea of an enclave as a different place within another space of which it is a part of, is an image that will emerge throughout the chapter. The narratives of rejection of which LGO has always been the focus of, are linked to a game of placements and displacements of which its history is full. I want to demonstrate how those narratives were at play in two different historical moments through the case of *L'Assommoir* and the case of a speech by Jacques Chirac. The second part of this chapter, will go a step further, trying to interpret that narrative in relation to the history of colonialism and its powerful link to racism.

The two cases revolve around stigmatisation. The novel created a stigma regarding the neighbourhood and its inhabitants which the political speech revived. Both are linked not only to social exclusion (working classes are still very present in LGO) but

[428] Palumbo, M.A.: *op.cit*. Also, Lallement, E.: *op.cit.* 2010.

[429] Palumbo, M.A: *op.cit*. 2014. Also, Lallement, E.: *op.cit.* 2010.

[430] Palumbo, M.A: *op.cit*. 2014.

to racism based on cultural and ideological discrimination. They are related by a narrative of rejection built from the neighbourhood's origins as a defined space.

In the first part I will start by retaking the deodorisation process led by the bourgeoisie of Paris, as indicated by Corbin. Building on this, I will try to demonstrate how that process, can be related to the neighbourhood's history, and how that context helped to forge a narrative of rejection that has persisted over time and has exacerbated the neighbourhood's ill repute. I will work on this premise through the analysis of one the most representative cultural and literary works about LGO, the novel *L'Assommoir* by Émile Zola, a text that would establish unfortunate yet long-lasting associations with LGO.

In the second part I will work from a well-known anecdote that also marked the, more recent, history of the neighbourhood. But I will do so by trying to analyse it from another angle, considering the locutor, J.J. Chirac. Trying to understand how the historical marks of colonialism can also retake the same narrative of rejection but showing far deeper issues caused by the colonial order, and its relationship with the neighbourhood.

A literary experiment

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The drafting and publication of *L'Assommoir*, coincide with the foundational period of our district between 1860 and 1880. There is no doubt that this novel is the neighbourhood's most notable literary reference. It describes the neighbourhood through a gloomy lens, with tragic human stories. A prose full of details. References to odours, aromas and other olfactory experiences, play a significant part in the depictions of the district and its people.

The novel was originally published as a newspaper serial in 1876 and was published as a novel in 1877[431]. The plot was part of a major work organised by Zola into different periods, the saga of the family Rougon-Macquard; *L'Assommoir* was the seventh of the twenty volumes telling the family's story. Its genealogy was based around a French petit-bourgeois family. Zola's aim was to tell the history of the Second Empire through the stories of its characters.

[431] The feuilletons were published throughout 1876 in the *Bien Public* newspaper. The last chapter was published in *La République des Lettres* given the refusal by *Bien Public* to continue publishing it after the first negative critiques.

As a man of his time, he was heavily influenced by the period's scientific discussions, including Darwin's theory of evolution and the French hygienist trend that Corbin also studied. Zola was also highly involved in the positivist way of thinking of the time, aiming to make his work a "scientific experiment". "*Experimental science has no necessity to worry itself about the 'why' of things; it simply explains the 'how'*"[432].

His obsession with science will influence his interpretation of literature to the point of self-proclaiming himself the creator of a new style - "naturalism".

"*(…) naturalism is not a school, as it is not embodied in the genius of one man, nor in the ravings of a group of men, as was romanticism; it consists simply in the application of the experimental method to the study of nature and of man*"[433].

Naturalism, as a style of writing, was Zola's response to French Realism, where he actually made his first steps as a writer. According to E. Boyd[434], ten years before publishing *L'Assommoir*, Zola had come across a manifesto by Edmond Duranty about Realism, in the publication "*Le Réalisme*".

Zola called for a new literature confronting the values of Romanticism, trying to enhance the "realistic" perspective shown in the work of the genre's major predecessor, Balzac. Romanticism was highly contested by the new wave of writers led by Balzac, who actually flirted with it, retro-feeding both styles[435]. Nevertheless, Duranty stated that:

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[432] Zola, E.: *The experimental novel and other essays,* New York, Cassel Publishing, 1893. (1899). While this piece was released years after *L'Assommoir*, there were already hints of this project in the novel. Zola, E.: *L'Assommoir,* Oxford University Press, 2009, (1877).

[433] Zola, E.: *op.cit*, p. 44.

[434] Boyd, E.: "Flaubert and French Realism", in *Studies from Ten Literatures*, New York, C. Scribner and sons, 1925. The proximity of this text to the dates of *L'Assommoir* makes it almost a historical source.

[435] See Schehr, L.C.: *Rendering French Realism*, Stanford University Press, 1997. (p. 20).

"*Realism aims at an exact, complete and honest reproduction of the social environment, of the age in which the author lives, because such studies are justified by reason, by the demands made by public interest and understanding, and because they are free from falsehood and deception (…)*"[436].

Balzac traced the first ideas of such an endeavour, in *La Comédie Humaine*[437], his most extensive and significant work, wherein he crudely depicts the upheavals of a bourgeoisie in flux, focusing mostly on the lives of the middle classes.

This motivated Zola to make a switch (that would later become his ideological framework), of the perspective from which he wanted to write, detaching himself from Balzac and the Realists[438]. As Boyd mentions, Zola wanted to complement Duranty's manifesto with a focus on popular sectors[439].

With this in mind, Zola looked for greater veracity and credibility for his representation of the working classes. He seemed to be very impressed by the scientific extravaganza of his time and was attracted by the different evolutionary theories in vogue. Darwinism, and its unfortunate consequences, Eugenics and social Darwinism, were very popular in those years in France, as was Lamarck's approach. Zola sought to emulate the scientific method, in a positivist manner.

His scientific approach to literature was explained in *The Experimental Novel and other essays*:

"*The experimental novelist is therefore the one who accepts proven facts, who points out in man and in society the mechanism of the phenomena over which science is mistress, and who does not interpose his personal sentiments, except in the*

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[436] Boyd, E.: *op.cit*.

[437] Balzac depicted French society through different historical periods: the Restoration (1815-1830), the bourgeois revolutions and the new monarchy (1830 and 1848). He shared the French Realism movement with Stendhal, Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers and the same Duranty.

[438] Schehr, L.C.: *op.cit.*

[439] Boyd, E.: *op.cit*.

phenomena whose determinism is not yet settled and who tries to test as much as he can, this personal sentiment, this idea a priori, by observation and experiment"[440].

Beyond the strong male perspective and contradictions that this kind of statement entails, Zola seems to have misinterpreted the theories to which he was devoted. In his own understandings, he had interspersed Darwin and Lamarck's theories of evolution in order to define his own arguments to legitimise his social portraits. Indeed, Schwartz, considers that Zola had "misunderstood" Darwinism[441].

Why are Lamarck and Darwin important to understand his purposes within the Naturalist approach? Zola, in accordance with his naturalist perception, simply took Lamarck's theories and incorporated them into a social interpretation; as if it were a social Lamarckism combined with Darwinism. As if that was not enough, we can also detect some touches of Durkheim's social approaches in some of his definitions[442]. Zola translated those biological interpretations of evolution into what he considered to be a more "realistic" portrayal of the *negligées.* Trying to copy the scientific process, as a way to demonstrate the accuracy of his own work.

To make a simple and perhaps apocryphal definition of these two theories; while Darwin saw in the evolution of the species an exclusive tendency to adaptation and survival (due to changing environments) within some species, Lamarck added that some of those changes (adaptations) produced in the species by the environment, could become genetic and be transmitted to future generations of the same species. For example, if a giraffe extends her neck more than she was used to, to reach food further up trees, her progeny could incorporate that neck enlargement as a genetically transmissible fact. In other words, changes produced by the environment in species could be transmissible to future generations.

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[440] Zola, E.: *op.cit*. p.54.

[441] Schwartz, D.R.: "Emile Zola's Germinal", in *Reading the European Novel to 1900*, Wiley, 2014.

[442] In the way he considered the idea of a social organism, for example.

If Darwin's theory inspired the idea of genetic strength, or superiority, as seen in the schemes of Eugenics and in Social Darwinism (as in the racist narratives of those times), Lamarck, inspired other scientists and researchers in other, no less important, aspects[443]. Lamarckism seemed to be attractive for some ideological interpretations as well; creating a path as a counter-narrative to Darwinism, balancing the weight of the selective theory, which Condorcet interpreted as: "*render nature as an accomplice of political inequality*"[444]. It was social inequality that had attracted diverse followers in the search for validation of some of Lamarck's theories; seeking to reverse the huge influence that Social Darwinism was attaining in the late 19th century.

We can place Zola within this representation of Lamarck's theory, in his search to depict a social portrait of deprived sectors that according to Social Darwinism would not survive their own fate. Thus, Zola took Lamarck's considerations (always based on botanical experiments) of inheritance caused by environmental changes and transposed them into the idea of nefarious influences from a deprived and toxic environment, as fostering the possibility of generational transmission on the descendants of the working classes. It was in this context that he chose LGO to develop his theories.

This scientific hodgepodge hosted the ideological framework of Zola's concoction, his Naturalist manifesto and his "experimental method". He wanted to distance himself from what he thought was the ideology of the bourgeoisie, that he saw as represented by Balzac and his *oeuvre* (even though Balzac was known for reversing his own convictions[445]). He embarked on a search for a more accurate way (hence

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[443] Mendel started his research from some blurred points in Lamarck theory. In the 1930s the U.S.S.R. under Stalin's rule saw a revival of Lamarckism, in the project of T. Lysenko who took Lamarck as an ideological bastion (Lysenkoism) occasioning a witch hunt among scientists who did not agree with his project of genetic alteration on crops.

[444] Medawar, P.: *The Threat and the Glory, reflections on Science and Scientists*, Oxford University Press, 1991. (p.67).

[445] Schehr, L.C.: *op.cit.*

the conception of naturalism) to focus and depict the working sectors; although, as Lukács has said his ideological framework was still very bourgeois [446].

Zola adapted the idea of an influential environment into his characterisation of the "surroundings" as a key topic of his novels, particularly in *L'Assommoir*. Here is one example of the application of his scientific explorations:

"*I will only say a word on the subject of surroundings. (…) the study of those interorganic conditions which must be taken into account if we wish to find the determinism of phenomena in living beings*"[447].

In this sense, LGO was chosen by the author as the surroundings, whose more obscure facets (which he reinforced in the novel) would impact its inhabitant's lives.

Illustration by Ives et Barret. February, 1880. Source: Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

La Goutte d'Or as *surroundings*

[446] See Lukács, G.: "The Zola Centenary", in *Studies in European Realism*, New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 2002, (1964).

[447] Zola, E.: *op.cit*.

La Goutte d'Or supplies the novel's surroundings and is a key component of *L'Assommoir*; for some it is even the main protagonist[448]. Moreover, Zola was deeply involved in developing the genealogy of his characters: who they were and what they became once in the neighbourhood. Through *Gervaise*, the main (human) lead he linked his ongoing family saga into a new environment, from which to immerse himself into the trials and tribulations of mixing social backgrounds. This he did following his scientific interests, developing the role of observer, to analyse the influences that social environments can have on people from different social backgrounds. The novel explores this mixing as a form of corruption. In this, his naturalism was very close to the scientific racism of his time.

Emulating his scientific heroes, he engaged in exhaustive observational work for the creation of *L'Assommoir*[449]. His preparatory work is reflected in notes, schemes and drawings of the neighbourhood and also in his depictions of the sensorial experiences felt by walking in the neighbourhood -which was his main source of inspiration. He traces and re-traces his steps in order to look at the *surroundings*. He takes notes of everything accomplishing the observational task.

Among the sensorial impressions, olfactory ones would be integrated into the story. Both his notes and their transposition into the novel would play a critical role in the history of the stigma of La Goutte d'Or.

(From Zola's notes)
"*Rue Neuve de La Goutte d'Or*
The sloping street, from the middle; narrow, even sidewalks are lacking in places; streams still overflowing with soapy water. At the end, on the rue de la Goutte d´Or side, downhill: on the right, black shops, shoemakers, coopers; on the left,

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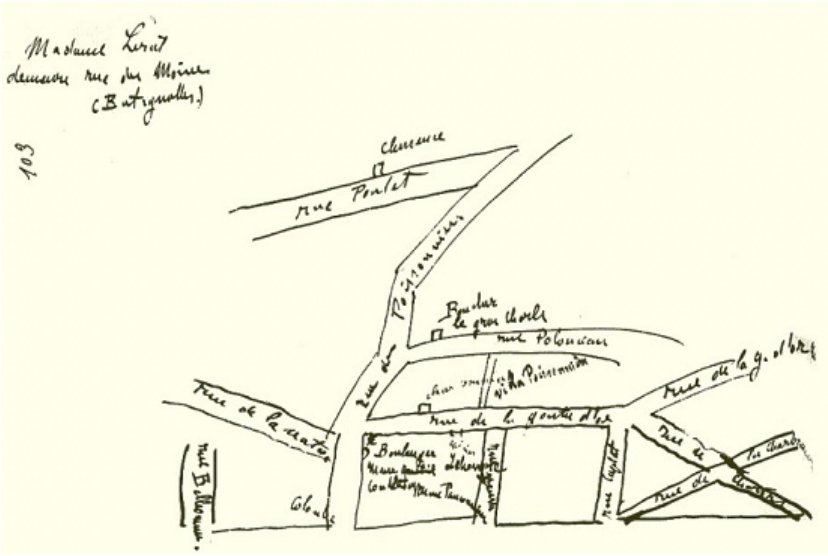
[448] Firet, A.: "La Goutte d'Or: (ban) lieu (e) de mémoire littéraire", *Relief*, 2 (1), 2008.

[449] "*I sum up this first part by repeating that the naturalistic novelists observe and experiment, and that all their work is the offspring of the doubt which seizes them in the presence of truths little known and phenomena unexplained (…)*". Zola, E.: *op.cit.*

haberdasheries, grocery stores. Shops closed with blinds. Then, in the middle, the houses get lower; only one-storey buildings; walkways leading through low walls; ***stinking courtyards*** *(…) After the laundry house (…) a tree, acacia, advancing in the street, the* ***cheerfulness of the street****. (…) The lower houses are painted in* ***green, yellow, red, blue, pale***"[450].

These manuscripts contain the initial elements that will be used to construct the novel. These references written and drawn on paper, are certainly the marks of a fieldtrip; the fieldnotes of the author's fieldwork.

His fieldnotes include intricate depictions of the life of the neighbourhood that go from architectural descriptions, reflecting the process of modernisation already started in the 1860s in Paris with Haussmann's urbanisation projects, to those *stinking* courtyards, also part of the social changes underfoot. These inspired his own perspective, focused on the miseries of working-class livelihoods in LGO. His sketches reflect how sensorial impressions and the creative process come together; where the real buildings located on real streets become the places where he will situate his characters, Gervaise, Lantier, Coupon, etc.



[450] Zola, E.: *Esquisses, Brouillons d'Écrivains*, Département des Manuscrits, Naf 10271 f° 105, BNF-Bibliothèque Nationale de France. My translation.

Zola, E.: Esquisses, Brouillons d'Écrivains, Département des Manuscrits, Naf 10271 f° 103, BNF-Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Zola's obsession for surroundings opened him up to the senses in his rambling in and around LGO. The detailed fieldnotes reflect an already existent liveliness and gaiety in LGO.

We can also find detailed perceptions of sounds, tactile, vibrating and rhythmical.
"*The pavement, thick, bumpy, with holes*".
Or:
"*Cats crouching and purring by the doors*".

Or more detailed experiences of his travels through the street named La Goutte d'Or (which still exists today), when he discovers the watchmaker's shop:
"*Cuckoos, at the bottom of the hole, working; in the window, watches showing their silver cases in front of the little workbench full of cute tools, and delicate things under the counter, a gentleman in a frock coat, neatly dressed, who works continuously (the image of fragility in the middle the din and jolts of the street rabble)*"[451].

The noise of the clock (the cuckoo) is replaced by the action, they are working, thus they are tic-toking in the background of the scene. Then the contrast in the end, between two different scenes, the inside of the shop, moving at its own pace, and the watchmaker surrounded by delicate utensils, all framed by the window; surrounded by the clatter and shaking of the streets outside. As in two different time dimensions, Zola locates, recognises the people and the sensorial marks in the streets with their own rhythms, which distance them one from the other.

He seemed absorbed detailing the conditions of buildings, in greater detail as he progresses along, reflecting an interest in the ongoing urban transformation of Paris

[451] Zola, E.: *Esquisses, Brouillons d'Écrivains*, Département des Manuscrits, Naf 10271 f° 102-114, BNF-Bibliothèque Nationale de France. My translation.

and its architecture[452]. He paid particular attention to courtyards; spaces that enable the ventilation of buildings, and the internal distribution of windows and doors for the people who lived there. The layout of those interiors reveals the social differences at play and how they cohabitated in the neighbourhood. Let us recall that LGO experienced a speedy urbanisation process after its incorporation within the city in 1860[453].

"*At the front (…) lodge people who pass as being rich. In the courtyard, all workers; clothes out to dry. There is the side of the sun, and the side where the sun does not shine, darker, more humid. Paved courtyard, the wet corner of the fountain. The crude day that falls in the courtyard*"[454].

He exhibits a keen interest in the living conditions of mixed popular sectors. He tries to follow his own rules, to be close to reality while observing LGO following his "naturalistic" ambition. His impressions as fieldnotes are the backbone of his creative process, and they also confirm Zola as a real urban ethnographer. This is not so incongruous if we consider that in the same period, ethnography was developing in parallel to the colonial interests and advances of French imperialism and its gained territories[455]. In this ethnographic collection of sensorial experiences, he was constructing a narrative about the realities of the district, but also about the social changes of modern Parisian society in the second half of the 19th century[456].

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[452] He similarly depicted the Market of *Les Halles* a few years later in *Le ventre de Paris*; another chapter in the Rougon-Macquard saga.

[453] Hamon, P.: "Les Lieux de L'Assommoir," in Breitman, M. and Culot, M. (eds.): *La Goutte d'Or Faubourg de Paris*, Hazan et Archives d'Architecture Moderne, Paris, 1988.

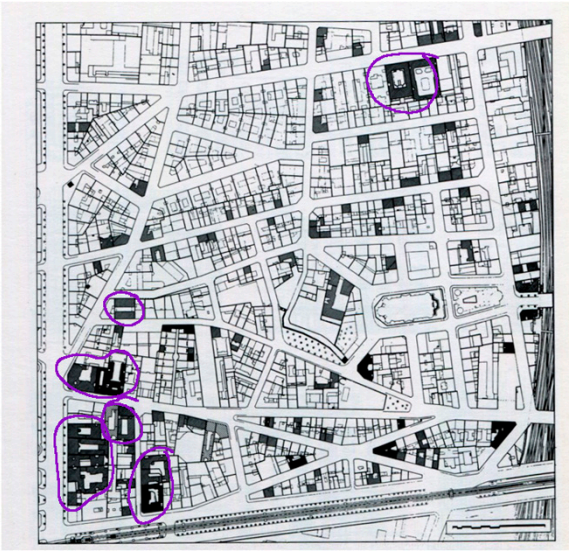
[454] Zola, E.: *Esquisses, Brouillons d'Écrivains*, Département des Manuscrits, Naf 10271 f° 107, BNF-Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

[455] See works like Leiris, M.: "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme", *Temps Modernes*, 58, 1950; and Balandier, G.: "La situation coloniale, approche théorique", *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, XI, 1951. Also, the recent work of Copans, J.: "M. Leiris et G. Balandier face à la situation coloniale des sociétés Africaines des années 1950", in *Revue de Sciences Sociales*, 56, 2016.

[456] We can say that he conducted his ethnographical work many years before the more recent works of M.A. Palumbo: *op.cit.* and E. Lallement: *op.cit*.

Unlike Benjamin's *Flâneur*, covering the streets and passages of Paris and its bourgeois spaces, Zola dives into urban diversity, open to all sensorial experiences. This could well be the first time that the district was approached and documented in such a profound and comprehensive sensorial manner.

He focused on the buildings in LGO, their closed quarters and internal social hierarchisation[457], observing how those spaces affected the life of the urbanised working classes living in the city. Among these buildings we can actually cite numbers 49 and 61 of the *Rue La Goutte d'Or*[458], those on *Rue Charbonnière*, and those at the *Cité Napoléon* in the 10th arrondissement, just two minutes' walk from the Barbès Metro station which is today one of the epicentres of LGO.



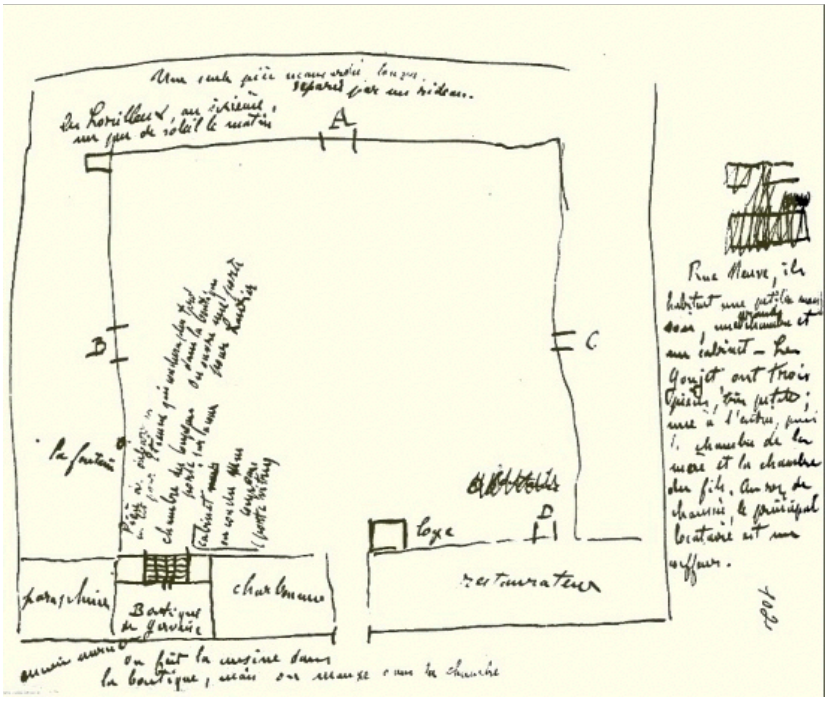
● Examples ofcourtyards in a map of La Goutte d'Or
Source:M. Breitman, M.Culot: La GOutte d'Or Faubourg de Paris, Hazan, AAM, Paris, 1988.

[457] The first storeys were reserved for richer sectors and those higher up for the poorer ones. Similarly, those rooms that enjoyed direct sunlight were reserved for the wealthy while the darker side of the buildings would be for the poorer residents.

[458] Concko, T., Daguillon, F., Eugène, R.: *Étude des caractères distinctifs des immeubles de La Goutte d'Or*, in Breitman, M. and Culot, M (eds.): *op.cit.* (p. 183).

A Courtyard in the 49 of the Rue La goutte d'Or
Source: La goutte d'Or Faubourg de Paris, M. Breitman and M. Culot, Hazan, AAM, Paris 1988.

The croquis of the Big House (*la Grande Maison*) where his characters will lodge in the novel, contains different references of his walking experiences through the, still existent, *Rue Neuve*.



Zola, E.: *Esquisses, Brouillons d'Écrivains*, Département des Manuscrits, Naf 10271 f° 102-114, BNF-Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France.

He depicts two coexisting universes, the real district, and the fictional one. He is foreseeing the evolution of his novel through his sensorial interpretation. In the

croquis above, we can see the courtyard that he imagined, inspired by those in LGO (as seen in the photos). The location of the characters within the building follows naturally:

"*1. A single long attic room, separated by a curtain, 2. the Lorilleux, on the sixth floor, a little sun in the morning (…) A bed for Étienne who will sleep later in the shop. Bedroom of the Coupeau family. A door opens onto the courtyard for Lantier. (…) Gervaise's shop (…) They cook in the shop, but they eat in the bedroom. (…) Rue Neuve, they live in a small house, a large bedroom and a study. The Goujets have three very small rooms; one at the entrance, then the mother's bedroom and the son's bedroom. On the ground floor, the main tenant is a hairdresser*"[459].

La Goutte d'Or has fulfilled its rite of passage, becoming a character in the novel.

<u>The Smell of La Goutte d'Or in *L'Assommoir*</u>

There is strong use of senses in the narrative of the novel. Smell is particularly used as a way to express the characters' behaviour, feelings or interactions. The different smells portrayed belong to the order of intimacy (food, love, body, death) and to the surroundings, such as fumes from the factories and workshops, the laundry where the protagonist works, or the bar that gives its name to the novel (*L'Assommoir*).

"*Gervaise could smell the odour of tobacco and that of a man whose linen wasn't too clean (…)*"[460].

"*Smoke arose from certain corners, spreading about and covering the recesses with a blueish veil. A heavy moisture hung around, impregnated with a soapy odour, a*

[459] Zola, E.: *Esquisses, Brouillons d'Écrivains*, Département des Manuscrits, Naf 10271 f° 102-114, BNF-Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

[460] Zola, E.: *L'Assommoir*, Chapter VIII, p. 367.

damp insipid smell, continuous though at moments overpowered by the more potent fumes of the chemicals"[461].

Zola zooms obsessively closer to details, trying to copy, in his own interpretation, the scientific approach that he aspired to concrete.

"*There's a strong smell of onion soup. Someone's having onion soup, I'm sure*".
Says Coupeau ascending the stairways, the story continues:
"*Staircase B, with its grey, dirty steps and hand-rail, its scratched walls and chipped plaster, was full of strong kitchen odours. (…)*"
Kitchen odours are related to comforting times, to camaraderie, to solidarity in Zola's interpretation of a working Durkheim social organism:
"*The smell of roast goose was so strong that it made their mouths water. And Gervaise was very pleasant, (…) without letting that interfere with her preparing the thickening for the stewed veal at the bottom of a soup plate. (…) A sweet scent of flowers mingled with the odour of cooking. All of them kept coming to smell the air above the saucepans and the roaster*"[462].

There are also abundant references to the smell of alcohol. This is a key aspect of the novel (remember that *L'Assommoir* is a bar) and is the main reason behind the author's purpose: to tell the story of the decline and fall of these families. He applied all his scientific dedication to portray the dark side of his characters, and transposed the idea of species to them, trying to explain how the environment, the surroundings in his own language, impacted those lives, triggering behaviours that, he seems to assume, would lead to their reproduction on future generations of working-class groups.

[461] Zola, E.: *L' Assommoir*, Chapter I, p. 22.

[462] Zola, E.: *op.cit.*, Chapter VII, p. 306-307.

"*When they left, l'Assommoir was packed to the door, spilling its hubbub of rough voices and its heavy smell of vitriol into the street*"[463].

"*Coupeau had arisen and was becoming angry thinking that he had been accused of drinking brandy. He swore on his own head and on the heads of his wife and child that there was not a drop of brandy in his veins. And he went up to Clemence and blew in her face so that she might smell his breath*"[464].

In that scientific ambition, he also dared to play with the idea of species applied to human beings, this time closer to the racist narrative of the time; using the character of Gervaise to show how the influences from the environment, supposedly changed her good habits.

"*Yes, she laughed at the things to see in L'Assommoir (…) big flames of gas which lighted up the looking-glasses and the bottles of liqueurs. The smell no longer bothered her, on the contrary it tickled her nose, and she thought it very pleasant*"[465].

In the novel, Gervaise (of the Rougon-Macquart family) is involved with two men from different social backgrounds to hers: Coupeau, her husband, is a worker from the zinc industry, while her lover, Lantier, is also a worker but in the laundry of LGO. This situation, which would incite criticism from readers, was regarded by the author as having a tacit link to his own scientific interests. In so doing, he seems to juggle with two different categories: class, and race. This is visible in the way he demonstrates his own considerations about the mix of different backgrounds, genetically affecting the characters (from his interpretations of Lamarck). In other words, Zola is demonstrating his own condemnation to the mixing of classes, as if they were race parameters following the ideology of biologic racism inherited from

[463] Zola, E.: *op.cit.*, Chapter II, p. 65.

[464] Zola, E.: *op.cit.*, Chapter V, p. 223.

[465] Zola, E.: *op.cit.,* Chapter *X*, p. 512.

Social Darwinism. The result of his experiment will be the character of Nana[466], daughter of Gervaise and Coupeau, on a trajectory from streetwalker to high-class prostitute. Despite a change in the social status of one of the characters born in La Goutte d'Or (Nana will mingle with the aristocracy), she will maintain the neighbourhood's aura, defined as a woman with raw manners, manipulative behaviours and with a working-class background.

The author refers to *Class* in a genetic/biologic perspective, recognisable as a racist narrative inspired by Darwinism, especially at the end, when the spiral of failure and catastrophe seems inevitable (demonstrating, in contrast, the idea of the survival of the fittest). Following his scientific referents, he slipped the idea of hereditary characteristics (again, his readings of Lamarck). In addition, he reshapes the behaviour of Gervaise once she becomes part of LGO, following a change of influences (from a bourgeois upbringing to a poor neighbourhood).

"*One morning, as there was a bad smell in the passage, it was remembered that she had not been seen for two days, and she was discovered already green in her hole*"[467].

This judgemental and discriminatory perspective on the inhabitants of LGO, will be the beginning of a real, no longer fictional, narrative about the neighbourhood and its people.

<u>The ideological framework</u>

It is revealing to observe how Zola's scientific efforts -what we could call his creative method- open into a type of racist narrative. His avowed goal to provide a naturalistic and truthful portrayal brought back his own ideological mark, bringing a reflexion of

[466] Zola, E.: *Nana*, Dover, 2006, (1880).

[467] Zola, E.: *op.cit.*, Chapter XIII, p. 642.

his original prejudices against the working classes and popular sectors into the conclusion of *L'Assommoir*.

Paraphrasing Lukács[468], Zola was a spectator, a chronicler (maybe more in tune with his work as a journalist) keeping a distance from his object, believing that in this way he would be able to be more truthful. Moreover, he did not realise his own positionality, as a liberal and bourgeois writer. Zola fell into his own trap, because his own ideological framework[469] merged into his scientific aspirations, and finally seemingly uncovered his own discrimination. Lukács considered his impartiality a failure, given his own position as a liberal and bourgeois writer.

"*…Inasmuch as he had some inkling of the change in the writer's position in capitalist society, he, as the liberal positivist that he was, regarded it as an advantage, as a step forward, and therefore praised Flaubert's impartiality (which in reality did not exist) as a new trait in the writer's make-up. Lafargue (…) criticized Zola (…) and saw very clearly that Zola was isolated from the social life of his time (…) with Zola's own programmatic statements about the correct creative method in literature*"[470].

If Zola's goal was to be closer to reality in his narrative, he was also challenged to subvert his own ideology to avoid those marks on the text. As Schehr pointed out[471], the real challenge of Realism was always to defy its own precepts, something that not all the writers of this current achieved. Zola actually tried to go further, inaugurating his Naturalistic method as a way to achieve this goal, while ultimately falling in the same trap.

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[468] Lukacs, G.: *op.cit.* (p. 90).

[469] The ideological influence on a fictional creation has a strong link, impacting, beyond the ambitions of the author, the result of the piece. See Eagleton on the relationship between ideology and literature, being ideology the history that underlies any text giving it a reflexive impulse. Eagleton, T.: *Criticism and Ideology, a Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, Chapter 3: "Towards a science of the text", (60-100), 2006.

[470] Lukacs, G.: *op.cit.*

[471] Schehr, L.R.: *op.cit*. (11-13).

His efforts went in the opposite direction, highlighting his belief in determinism regarding class and race, applied to his characters in *L'Assommoir*. Zola employed his initial sensorial fieldnotes but transformed them into images according to his own conceptions on Class, Race and surroundings. The novel itself, as a creative product, has in fact laid the foundations for the stigmatising narrative of rejection about LGO and its inhabitants, a label that has persisted to this day.

The smelly world of the critiques to *L'Assommoir*

L'Assommoir was one of Zola's most heavily criticised novels. The negative reception given by the public and the press actually pushed the author to explain himself in a preface added to the published-book version. Interestingly, most of the critical comments were expressed in sensorial impressions of disgust to the novel. For example:

"*I have just read with all the attention I am capable of, this new production by Mr. Zola (…) At the point of disgust at which we are, there is no longer any reason to be silent. The least sensitive of readers is revolted. (…) he will have depraved his talent and nauseated honest people. L'Assommoir: Never has so much putrescence been stirred and so frightfully*"[472].

[472] *Le Gaulois,* 9 September 1876. My translation.

L'Aurore, 13 January, 1898 Caricature by Lenepveu

Le Trombinoscope, 6 July 1881.

Images of Zola related to the potty, related to disgust, appeared frequently in those years.

This tone of disgust is directed to the work in its entirety. This rejection comes from different sectors of the press, right and left, accusing the novel of being too cruel, or ironically, "too realistic". As one of the reactionary journals said:

"*Mr. Zola's novel has already generated a lot of talk and for good reason. It is a study of rare crudeness and first of all I ask people with a little delicate nerve, friends of the beautiful, (…) not to glance at it. So, is M. Zola's book a work of immorality? On the contrary; the author wanted, while initiating us into the mores of the lowest class of workers in Paris, to preach against the drunkenness which decimates them every day, and to show us real types, who in no way resemble the conventional workers of Paris. From this point of view, he has completely succeeded*"[473].

Meanwhile, the left understood that the "realistic" (or naturalistic) tone of the novel did not serve the working class well; pointing out that Zola's intention to portray the

[473] *Le Figaro*, 2 October 1876. My translation.

difficulties that they confronted in their everyday lives, was closer to a moral sermon, to a discourse of spite.

"*The reactionary newspapers, with remarkable silliness, attacked Mr. Zola's book, allowing themselves to be frightened by some brutality of expression. (…) The conclusion is that brutes like the ones L'Assommoir shows us have no social or political rights whatsoever. (…) Zola has committed yet another political fault. He gave a weapon, which is powerful by his talent, to the enemies of his political ideas. I know very well that this Parisian mud exists; but an artist as well as a Republican has the right to display it in the public eye, only on condition of spreading therein the ray of sunshine of art or hope*"[474].

This mirrors some of the author's ideological framework. As long as poverty was portrayed as a disgrace more than as a consequence of an economic system already in vogue at the time, Zola's political intentions of making justice on a veridical base, were simply blurred.

The critiques gravitated around two main topics: the language and the content. They were focused on the chosen form of expression: argot, and in the content: descriptions of disgust and sensorial explorations of a place, LGO, that was actually at their doorstep, inside Paris.

In the preface to the first edition, Zola offered the following reply:
"*When L'Assommoir appeared in a newspaper, it was attacked with unprecedented brutality, denounced, charged with all sorts of crimes. (…) I wanted to paint the fatal downfall of a working-class family, in the pestilent environment of our suburbs. At the tail end of drunkenness and laziness, there is the loosening of family ties, the refuse of promiscuity, the gradual oblivion of honest feelings, then as a denouement shame and death. It is simply morality in action*"[475].

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[474] *Le Petit Parisien*, 2 February 1877. My translation.

[475] Zola, E.: Preface to *L'Assommoir*, 1877. My translation.

The vocabulary used (rubbish, promiscuity, pestilence, laziness), could have been penned by the bourgeoisie that Zola himself detested. The narrative of rejection is clearly shared by both author and readers, exposing once again the trap of his own ideological basis. Considering his scientific ambitions regarding the creative process, and knowing the socialist and leftist flair that the author had maintained throughout his career, why did Zola not contemplate the idea of the fight for survival or resistance against oppressions in his observed characters? This was not fully considered when he related humans to animal or vegetal species, according to his scientific inspirations. If his goal was, the storytelling of a social group that tragically fail when confronted with an allegedly cruel environment, told as a "morality tale", or as a "physiological portrait"; why were these groups not able to fight against the odds, to rebel, or to resist, in order to survive the contempt of that environment?

Instead, the narrative reproduces a positivist and a racist discourse, in tune with colonial narratives, where people are defined by genetics of superiority or inferiority, according to class or race. Almost all of his characters, have succumbed to the forces of the same surroundings (the neighbourhood) in which they live.

The presence of the sensorial impressions in the novel were used to reinforce the sense of smell to reject that population, to condemn them as victims of their own culture, of their own (bad) habits and of their own fate. This tragic and dramatic denouncement exemplifies how Zola's narrative echoes an ideological racism and a racist perception of the neighbourhood.

Thus, Zola, and his readers actually shared the same narrative. The key to their discussion had to do with how to depict those sectors they both rejected. Zola was convinced that he had the power to tell the true lives of the working classes, but he ended up providing those sectors with rejectable characteristics, in the same way as

the bourgeoisie built the narrative about the "smell" of poverty, as observed by Corbin[476].

"*It is a work of truth, the first novel about the people, who do not lie, and which smells of the people. And we must not conclude that all people are bad, because my characters are not bad, they are only ignorant and spoiled by the environment of hard work and misery in which they live*"[477].

The narrative of rejection

L'Assommoir therefore laid out the first elements for a narrative of rejection in relation to LGO. The derogatory references, particularly concerning smell, bad odours -linked to dirtiness- were also part of the bodies of the characters and of the space they occupied. As Corbin notes, the condemnation of the working classes was made alluding to their smell. What we can see in Zola's work, is that it is also related to the place. It is worth recalling that the incorporation of the neighbourhood to the city was not completely welcomed. It continued to be considered as rural, far from the city, a symbol of contrast between economic development, cultural growth, poverty and a lack of access to education.

This narrative of rejection against LGO is linked to the narrative of abjection against the popular sector that Corbin[478] mentions. It can be traced to the historical process that Laporte[479] defines, where the bourgeoisie started to differentiate itself from the *lower* sectors. Laporte also tries to demonstrate the close relationship that exists between the formation of the bourgeoisie, the role of the state as the main regulator

[476] Corbin, A.: *op.cit.*

[477] Zola, E.: *op.cit*. My translation.

[478] Corbin, A.: *op.cit.*

[479] Laporte, D.: *op.cit.*

of order in the urban space, and the need to get rid of everything that represents dirt and rubbish.

This movement of separation and distancing is not just about distinguishing themselves from other social sectors, initially rural groups and then working-class sectors. It also indicates a moment, in which this narrative started to be effective, when the noses rise above the ground. We can relate this to a moment in life, as S. Freud defined in 1897 when he wrote to his friend Wilhelm Fleiss talking about his thesis on repression.

"*… In my case, this presumption was linked to the change in the function of olfactory sensations: the adoption of erect locomotion, the nose that moves away from the ground and, with it, a series of sensations linked to the ground that were once interesting become repugnant (...)*"[480].

According to Freud, the sense of smell which was essential in the first moments of our lives, before sight and hearing, was the sense that guided us in our discovery of the world around us. It later transforms itself, not only into a relegated sense, but also into that which is closely related to repression. In a child's education, there is a distancing between the everyday life smells and the subsequent (in adulthood) links to disgust and shame, possible because of the impact of language[481]. As Freud defined it:

"*The drive to cleaning corresponds to the effort to remove excrement that has become unpleasant for the sensory perception*"[482]. (…) "*Such a subversion of values would be impossible if these substances withdrawn from the body were not*

[480] Freud, S.: "Letter to Wilhelm Fleiss, 14 November 1897", in *The complete Letters of Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Fleiss, 1887-1904,* Harvard University Press, 1985.

[481] See Freud, S.: *Civilisation and its Discontent,* New York, W.W. Norton, 1989, (1930). Also, Ortiz, F.: *¿A qué huele una pulsión?* in Espacio Psicoanalítico de Barcelona, April, 2014.

[482] Freud, S.: *op.cit.*

condemned, due to their strong odours, to share the fate reserved for olfactory stimuli"[483].

The narrative of rejection was therefore shared by the readers and critics of *L'Assommoir* at the time of its release as well as by the author himself. The differences between them are only due to their perspectives and purposes. If the bourgeoisie are pushing this construction of stigmas on the working classes, Zola will share the space from another perspective: his filiation and fascination with science. The naturalist style of his novel placed the accent on the physiological aspects of his portraits, very similar to contemporary discourses about those Others "discovered" in faraway lands, which later fed the racist narrative of imperialism of the 19th century.

The rejection on the one hand, and the portraits on the other, combined to create a powerful representation of the popular sectors and the working classes as repulsive (based on the supposedly different sensibilities of their noses). That narrative of rejection helped to condemn, from its very origins, the history and possibilities of the neighbourhood. The result has been a pervasive and powerful stigma created essentially by a fictional story located there.

In *L'Assommoir*, Zola describes LGO in the second half of the 19th century, as a repugnant place, not just because of its social conditions but because of its (his) characters' failures. He placed its inhabitants in a spiral of decay, from which there was no escaping. However, none of this transpires from his initial notes, from his fieldwork. This confirms the strength of the narrative of rejection and his own racist convictions, which ultimately pushed his writing in that direction.

The stigma originated by Zola's work has been passed on from generation to generation and is still palpable today. The history of LGO is also that of a struggle to fully integrate itself into Paris, and against that narrative of rejection, against the

[483] Freud, S.: *op.cit.*

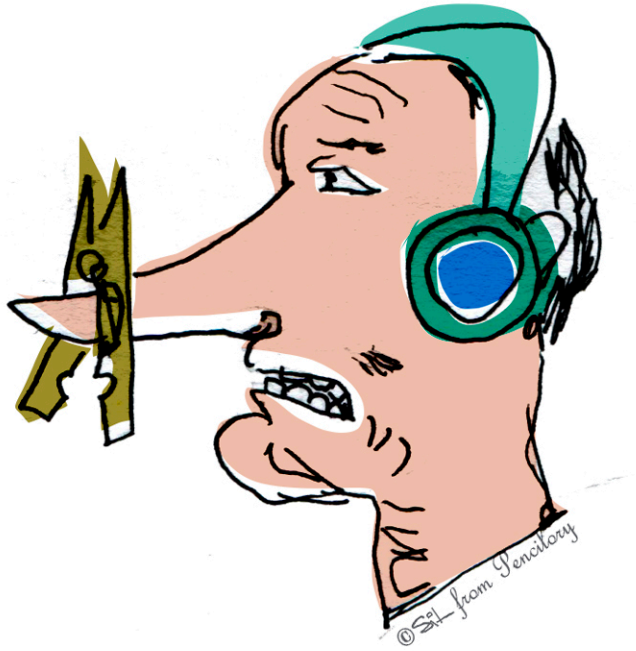
stigma. Having been physically integrated into the inner sanctum of Paris for nearly 150 years, this narrative of discrimination and exclusion still exists against LGO.

Smell, Memories and Racism

"What do you expect of the French worker who lives in La Goutte d'Or, -where I was walking with Alain Juppé last week- (…) and who works with his wife and who together earn around 15,000 FF (he coughs) and who sees on the landing next to his Council Estate, a crowded family, with a father, with three or four wives and about twenty kids and who earns 50,000 FF in social benefits obviously without working ... (clapping from the audience) If you add to that (the applause continues) ***If you add to that: the noise and the smell*** *(audience laughter). Well, the French worker on the hallway, he's going crazy. He's going crazy, that's how it is! And you have to understand, if you were there, you would have the same reaction…! And it is not being racist to say that. We no longer have the means to honour family reunification and we must finally open this debate which is essential for our country which is a real moral debate to know if it is natural that foreigners can benefit in the same way as the French of national solidarity in which they do not participate since they do not pay taxes"*[484].

Jacques Chirac, June 1991

[484] Originally broadcast on the public TV broadcaster TF1 News on 20 June 1991. https://www.ina.fr/video/CAB91027647/meeting-cresson-le-pen-video.html.



In 1991, Jacques Chirac made himself a special place in the history of racist and stigmatising narratives. This fragment belongs to a speech known as "the Orléans speech" which unleashed not just a fair number of critiques, but also references to it being an example of open racism. This speech has become part of the neighbourhood's history, or more precisely, of the history of rejection and racist narratives against LGO[485].

The first thing that comes to mind when listening or reading the speech is a sense of continuity. These words seem to flow from the narrative of rejection or stigmatisation 125 years after Zola's *L'Assommoir* and its critiques.

There is enough interesting material in that speech for us to address it through two different channels. The first one is related to the previous account on discriminatory discourses erected around and about LGO (which as we saw were simultaneous to its incorporation as a neighbourhood of Paris), using the sense of smell, once again as a way to differentiate it from the rest of Paris. The second channel to interpret this quote in relation to triggered memories introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

[485] It has been referenced in songs, jokes and innumerable comments over the years.

Through this approach, I will try to connect Chirac's words to his own memories, particularly those that are linked to his experiences in and about the African continent. We can actually break down his experience into two phases, one prior to and one after 1991.

Both of these phases are punctuated in his own Memoirs, published in 2013, and in a number of interviews and mentions appeared in the media related to the "Orléans speech", and later references to it by Chirac.

From social discrimination to cultural racism

After the narratives of rejection and stigmatisation of popular sectors and working classes at the end of the 19th century we have the words of a slightly different type of communicator. This time the target is singled out more specifically, focusing on immigrant workers or unemployed persons who were already living in LGO. Undoubtedly, the narrative that comes out of Chirac's terms is part of a racist manifestation that had emerged in France in the mid-1970s and had evolved in the 1980s, despite initial intentions to appease the conflict in the Mitterrand years[486].

Chirac is bringing olfactory experiences to that narrative. Moreover, he is laying down so much realism ("*add to that smell and noises*") to his story, that he seems to be building on more than what he is actually describing. In a similar way to Zola, perhaps, Chirac is also adding something from his own background (or from his own prejudices); not exclusively from LGO, but from somewhere that looked or smelled similar. In this way, he might be resorting to some memory reference that triggered his disgust and the virulence of his words.

[486] For a good record and analysis of migratory politics and debates in France since the 1970s, see Gastaut, Y.: "Français et immigrés à l'épreuve de la crise (1973-1995)" in *Revue d'Histoire Vingtième Siècle,* Vol.4, nº 84, 2004, (107-118).

LGO was chosen by Chirac and his team as the backdrop for this speech, for clearly electoral purposes. The speech underlines how the narrative of rejection and racism was well entrenched in France in 1991. The choice is not an innocent one; Paris' 18th arrondissement, was at the time the area with the largest and most visible immigrant population inhabiting in Paris. Within the 18th arrondissement, LGO was the neighbourhood with the highest concentration of immigrant families.

In the second half of the 19th century, the period we covered when analysing Zola's novel, the majority of LGO's residents were from the working classes, largely from outside Paris, notably the north of France, as well as some foreigners from Belgium and Poland. In the 20th century, the neighbourhood's population was more diverse. Between 1926 and 1930 the neighbourhood welcomed workers from further afield, more migrants from Belgium as well as Portugal and Spain. After the First World War[487], the influx was mainly from French territories in North and West Africa. Gradually, the number of Algerian men, mostly under the status of *indigènes*, coming to work in the metropolis, grew, peaking around 1954. In the words of Toubon and Messamah:

"*In thirty years (1926-1956) the foreign population which was very diverse (in LGO) especially in 1926, became very homogeneous especially in the south of the district (where three foreigners out of four were Algerians) whereas in 1926 they did not represent more than 11% of the foreign population. Since then, other national groups have almost disappeared from the south of the district under the triple effect of the upheaval of trajectories caused by the war, residential mobility, and naturalizations. Thus, from 1954, it appeared that an Algerian territory was constituted in the district of La Goutte d'Or (…). 'Barbès' as a word connoting a North African appropriation made its appearance at the end of the 1940's: the Algerian territory of La Goutte d´Or being the main residential support from 1954"*[488].

[487] After the First World War, soldiers of the Empire who fought in Europe in the French forces were left administratively in a confusing status. Many of them stayed in the metropolis during the 20's, as the first "migrants" from French territories from abroad. See Toubon and Messamah, op.cit.
[488] Toubon, JC. and Messamah: *op.cit.* My translation.

Chirac's aim is self-evident -to seek electoral gains from a (significant) part of the electorate that was opposed to the then existing immigration policies, as he also was. A secondary aim was to tap into the electorate who sympathised with the tougher right, the National Front party of the former Vichy collaborator, J-M. Le Pen[489].

"When Le Pen whispered to Chirac. The noise…and the smell"

Charlie Hebdo, nº 501, 23 January 2002.

Since the first wave of political attacks against immigration, LGO has played an important role in the social and political struggles of undocumented immigrants working in France. These individuals, often referred to as "*Sans Papiers*", organised

[489] Chirac's tone regarding the immigrant population was so harsh that Le Pen declared on television that "people should prefer the original to the copy". Part of the same TF1 TV News programme, broadcast on 20 June 1991. https://www.ina.fr/video/CAB91027647/meeting-cresson-le-pen-video.html.

themselves to lead numerous challenges in the neighbourhood[490] as seen throughout this thesis.

Ever since the critical onslaught against *L'Assommoir*, the working classes were linked to unpleasant olfactive experiences, forming the basis of this narrative of rejection. In 1991, that narrative evolved into a more divisive theme, replacing the working classes with immigrant groups, while applying the olfactive distinction as a mark of stigma. In this modern variant, the division was established between foreigners and nationals. The origin and the external precedence of those immigrants became the focus of the rejection, making it therefore more openly racist. In a further twist, the dominant sectors use the local-national working-class sectors to oppose the immigrant groups, alleging that the latter have "stolen" their jobs. All of this takes place in consonance with an increasingly consolidated political rhetoric among European governments in response to immigration[491] [492].

As Chirac's speech demonstrates, the dominant sectors had created a new social (and economic) opposition: French workers vs. Immigrant workers. Effectively, they had added discrimination and racism to the now centennial narrative of rejection. The class conflict that workers represented in the past, within the bourgeoisie's deodorisation process, had turned into a conflict between class and race as Chirac's words make patently clear.

Furthermore, as Chirac continues, the role of the state was in question, in a manner that was consistent with the neoliberal optimism of some of his supporters (those who we can hear clapping, laughing and apparently enjoying the speech; and as confirmed by some of his political followers including the later president N.

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[490] See chapter Sight.

[491] See Gastaut, Y.: *ídem.*

[492] It is in this political context that the "*droit du sol*" (*jus solis*) was replaced by new legislation in-line with general European Union provisions based on origin - "jus sanguinis"- denying the automatic right to opt for citizenship and French nationality to many second-generation migrants settled in France, as mentioned in chapter Sight.

Sarkozy[493]). In this narrative, and with the criticism against unemployment benefits and social aid policies to some immigrant workers and their families, the state is presented as an accomplice, contributing to the misfortune of the "nationals". The speech reflects a national debate about immigration, which is all about opposing the locals against the foreigners, validating and reinforcing nationalist and racist ideologies. Apparently, in the words of Chirac, the national worker and the immigrant share the same space, the HLM or social housing, the striking differences revolve around noises and smells.

There is a particular correlation from the narrative seen in Zola's novel to the racist narrative present in Chirac's speech. In the 1990s we see how, immigration becomes the target of what E. Balibar termed in 1989, *new* racism, or the *biologic return*, in recognition of how the old narrative re-emerged.

Balibar says:
"*In this way we see how the return of the biological theme is permitted and with it the elaboration of new variants of the biological 'myth' within the framework of a cultural racism. (…) What they (narratives of cultural racism) aimed to explain is not the constitution of races but the vital importance of cultural limits and traditions for the accumulation of individual aptitudes, and, most importantly, the 'natural' bases of xenophobia and social aggression. (…) There are of course no 'races', there are only populations and cultures, but there are biological (biophysical) causes and effects of culture, and biological reactions to cultural difference. (…) Conversely, where pure culturalism seems predominant (as in France), we are seeing a progressive drift towards the elaboration of discourses on biology and on culture as the external*

[493] Among the many links between Chirac and Sarkozy we can cite the continuation of the idea of "*the need to debate*" at a national level. This "need" would materialize under the Sarkozy administration into the debate on "national Identity" and the Ethnic Statistics debate that we discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

regulation of 'living organisms', their reproduction, performance and health. Michel Foucault, among others foresaw this"[494].

The reluctance that French political and social narratives have had around the use of the term "race", is reflected in all the preparatory stages of the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, which was signed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, among other notables, in 1951[495]. This reluctance persisted until its final endorsement in 1978, as well as that of its 1995 amendment, the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance. The 1978 amendment establishes that: "*the differences between the achievements of the different peoples are entirely attributable to geographical, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors*". Even more poignantly, it disposes that, "*Population groups of foreign origin, particularly migrant workers and their families who contribute to the development of the host country, should benefit from appropriate measures designed to afford them security and respect for their dignity and cultural values…*"[496].

It is here that I would like to underline the link between this idea of difference, following Balibar, that substitutes the old biological definition of races, by one of cultures, and race by ethnic groups. In the UNESCO text it is easy to mirror it with this idea of culturalism that would become preponderant in the 1990s, notably when France was implementing various policies in support of the UNESCO declaration, including the creation of a system to control those groups of foreigners, which were officially entitled to "integration" plans and policies destined for immigrant

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[494] Balibar, E. and Wallerstein, I.: *op.cit.* As for the reference to M. Foucault, Balibar points to his work *History of sexuality, Vol. I,* wherein Foucault writes about his notions of Bio-Power and Bio-Politics (Part V: Right of Death and power over Life). English version, 1978.

[495] The debate began after the Second World War and the atrocities of the Nazi regime. However, it was not until 1978 that UNESCO published its "Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice". 27 November 1978.

[496] UNESCO: Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, 1978.

individuals and families[497]. Chirac uses the senses of smell and hearing to denote rejection towards those who came from abroad; smell is identified as part of those "cultural values" that the UNESCO declaration refers to. Those cultural values rapidly become cultural differences that operate as new forms of exclusion and ways to proffer racist[498] comments and practices, while veiling them under a "soft" narrative of cultural differentiation.

Crucially, what Balibar later addresses is how politicians are constantly blaming "obstacles" in the path to integration. The policies of integration bear with them their own point of failure, given that the "obstacle" is always the lack of integration of different cultural groups. If we translate this once again into what it means - foreigners, then immigrants- we find ourselves in a vicious semantic circle.

Balibar's reference to this "obstacle" to integration points to the nationalist discourse in which people with foreign origins do not always "assimilate" (well) to the demands of their new nation. Difficulties in school achievement based on those parameters, and in more recent years the problem of access to better paid jobs, have been regularly cited as being due to an inability to integrate. This not only places the responsibility on the immigrants, but extends to the succeeding generations, already born in France, from foreign parents or grandparents, as we saw in chapter Hearing.

Racism is represented in Chirac's speech through this interpretation of "culture"[499], which replaced what Race signified for racist purposes. It is around this concept of culture that all the new narratives of racism from the 1990s will stem from, such as complaints about the lack of integration of immigrants in French society or the

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[497] Despite the policies of pacification, the expulsions and restrictive measures against immigration also grew during the years of Mitterrand's administration, who tried to oppose another more comprehensive policy towards the problem.

[498] There are similarities to the colonial system of *Assimilation*, but in an inverted situation.

[499] This paraphrasing of the title of Clifford Geertz's work might not be casual, as cultural anthropology was one of the main sources for the construction of a narrative of rejection based on culture instead of race.

debate over laicism with a strong focus on the religious practices of Islam. Cultural racism always finds an obstacle, as a counterpoint to a narrative of racism and rejection (as we can see in the more contemporary history of LGO) and also, at an institutional level: a political capacity that implements the policies of integration[500] which sometimes achieve the opposite, more social exclusion and discrimination.

Culture is endowed with some disguised biological characteristics (echoing its older brother - "eugenics") as well. The importance of national origins is stressed as a way to justify exclusion or discrimination. We can see how cultural racism established the concept of Culture as "inherited", as something that comes with genes. Culture, in this perspective, is not something to build as such, something that we can create with others, it is something that has already been created within the framework of a nation. This assumes that the immigrant population must respond in a fixed way to a supposed culture of "origin"[501].

We can also find this new form of racism in the negation, by French politicians from all parts of the political and social spectrum, to accept or adopt the term "multiculturalism", to which we have already alluded to in this thesis[502].

The negation of racism

[500] Doycheva, M.: *op.cit*. Schnapper, D.: *op.cit.* 1994 ; *La France de l'intégration*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991 ; *L'Europe des Immigrés*, Paris, F. Bourin, 1994.

[501] We saw this in the previous chapter Hearing. How do we understand what culture is ours or that of others? Might this not be another way to simplify, stigmatise, and discriminate in a soft way those who are labelled as foreigners? Recall the reply of one of the youngsters when he said, "*My life is more complex than that*".

[502] See the first chapter and chapter Hearing.

"I know someone who clouds his senses to have a place on the scale…"[503]

Chirac is not alone when he is delivering this speech. Firstly, because there are indicators of the presence of an audience. In the video, we can see and hear them laugh and clap, visibly and audibly enjoying themselves in a demonstration of acceptance and complicity. At the time of Chirac's demise, some witnesses were asked again about this famous speech. Alain Juppé said "*It was simply the truth (…) I made the same observation. Does that mean that we are racists? If there was something that was profoundly foreign to Jacques Chirac, to his ideas, to his deep convictions, it was racism and anti-Semitism*"[504].

Michel Brisson, departmental general counsellor at the time, who was present in the audience recalls the speech as "*quite inflamed*" and continued "*it drew a few smiles, but no one seemed shocked by that sentence*"[505]. Lydie Gerbaud, who was Chirac's press officer for nearly twenty years, said that "*It's a phrase that escaped him, and it absolutely did not correspond to his state of mind*"[506].

We can understand this "*escape*" as the emergence of a repressed idea that simply came up. Like a *lapsus*, saying "It is not being racist to say that", while it was actually racist; not just because he was very explicit but mostly because he immediately denied it. Later in 2009, he described his words as a "*stupidity*", significantly downplaying the incident.

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[503] *"Sé de alguien que enturbia sus sentidos para obtener lugar en la balanza …"* Lyrics by C. Solari and S. Beillinson, from the song: "Maldición, va a ser un día hermoso", *Patricio Rey y sus Redonditos de Ricota.*

[504] Berrod, N.: *Chirac et «le bruit et l'odeur»: les dessous d'une phrase polémique*, Le Parisien, 27 September 2019.

[505] Berrod, N.: *ídem*.

[506] Berrod, N.: *ídem*.

"In political life, you can't avoid talking nonsense from time to time. Well, when we say something stupid, we must admit it, it was an unfortunate remark that I should not have made, it came to me spontaneously, it was nonsense, there you have it"[507].

S. Freud mentions a patient who once told him, "*Assuredly I do not want to insult you by saying what I am saying*". Freud explains that this must be translated as "'*I want to insult you'; (…) this is a rejection, by projection, of an idea that has just come up. Such an intention is never lacking*"[508]. Jean Hippolyte further analysed Freud's ideas on negation, translating the fragment from German to French, in a seminar of J. Lacan. Hippolyte offers a more refined interpretation of Freud's words, which fit Chirac's speech very appropriately.

Jean Hippolyte says:

"*At this point Freud tells us: 'negation is already an Aufhebung (lifting) of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed. (…) The person speaking says: 'This is what I am not/ It would no longer be repressed' (…) In its essentials, the repression persists, in the form of non-acceptance. (As Freud said) in this, the intellectual function is separated from the affective process*"[509].

When Chirac revisited his words in 2009, he did not recognise himself either. Instead, he recalled the speech as "*an unfortunate remark … nonsense*"[510]. This confirms the Freudian analysis of a feeling disconnected from intellectual control. The negation is the outburst of a repression, and by downplaying it, he merely confirmed it. What was at play in the "nonsense" was actually the senses expressing an "*affective process*", that once revealed demonstrates how sometimes repressed thoughts

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[507] Radio Europe1, Chirac to the journalist Jean Pierre Elkkabach, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wM7W4IPrG5w

[508] Freud, S.: *The unconscious*, 1915.

[509] Lacan, J.: *The Seminar, Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

[510] Radio Europe1, Chirac to the journalist Jean Pierre Elkkabach, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wM7W4IPrG5w

speak for themselves. In conclusion, those remarks were in fact part of his political understanding of immigration, as channelled by his own sensorial experiences.

His senses helped him to show us how disgust was triggered in his own words. Those smells and noises that he pointed out were coming from somewhere. Maybe not from the visit he was carrying out at that present moment in LGO in 1991. Perhaps from his own memories of rejection or discomfort.

Smell and Memories

In 2004, smell was formally understood by some neurobiologists and scientists as the closest of the senses to our memory storage and furthermore to our own emotions.

"*Episodic memory involves the conscious retrieval of contextually unique events (Tulving 1983). A cardinal feature of such memories is their multisensory quality. For example, the recollection of a seaside holiday may conjure up the sight of a beach umbrella, the sound of crashing surf, and the smell of brackish seaweed. Thus, remembering a prior episode frequently relies on the reactivation of associations that span multiple sensory domains*"[511].

As the same researchers explained to the Journal Nature:
"'*(…) odour memory seems to be the most resistant to forgetting', says Gottfried. Previous work has shown that memories of images begin to fade days or even hours after viewing, whereas recall of smells remains unimpaired for as much as a year. Gottfried suspects that odour-linked memories may persist even after the hippocampus has given up its orchestrating role. Patients with damage to their*

[511] Gottfried, J.A., Smith, A.P.R., Rugg, M.D. and Dolan, R.J.: *op.cit.*

hippocampus can have amnesia stretching back several years, but still recall smells from their childhood"[512].

"If you were there"

By saying "*if you were there…*", Chirac is transporting his public to a place in an attempt to ground, to visualise, to transmit more veracity to his words. He uses similar resources to Zola. The resort to sensorial experiences makes the story more real, bringing the audience (or readers) closer to, or actually into LGO. However, in Chirac's case, he was perhaps trying to transport the public to a place much further afield, inspired by his own memories.

What might have triggered Chirac's disgust towards smells and noises during his visit to LGO? Specifically, in relation to olfactory memory as a trigger, I wanted to know if there were past experiences in Chirac's life that might be related to the neighbourhood.

At the beginning of his Memoirs, Chirac mentions his first steps in Algeria and his love for the country.
"*Even before the landing in Algiers, the sailors had spread the word. I was treated to the big game. The 'bosco' asks me if I'm a virgin. I tell him yes. 'So, we'll fix it, you'll see!' he told me. It was very kind of him, it had to be done! And he took me to the famous neighbourhoods of the Casbah where we spent the whole night. When in the morning I went back down to the port, in the smell of cresyl on the sidewalks, anisette and colonial products, I was no longer the same man*"[513].

[512] Hopkins, M.: **"**Link proved between senses and memory. Brain scans show how sights and smells evoke the past", *Nature-International Weekly Journal of Science*, 31 May 2004.

[513] Chirac, J.: *Mémoires,* Vol. I: *Chaque pas doit être un but*, Nil, Paris, 2009.

Thus narrated, this olfactive experience is related to three elements: *cresyl, anisette and colonial products* without further detail. There is actually an interesting connection: Cresyl is the brand name (established in 1892 according to their packaging) of a powerful disinfectant liquid, which, as per their ads and packaging is also sold as a deodorising product.

"*Eliminates the dirt carried by our animals (earth, grass, dust, grime, grease, urine, droppings) - Deodorizes by destroying animal odours. Cleans disinfects and deodorizes surfaces*"[514].

Cresyl is still used, particularly in the cleaning of animal and agricultural environments such as stables and henhouses but also more domestically around pets (they have special products to deodorize "pet odours")[515]. Interestingly, it is also used for the cleaning of large buildings or blocks of social housing, including HLMs[516], as we can see through another set of memoirs, in this case of Isabelle Maurant, a public figure identified as a social activist fighting against poverty. Maurant's memoirs are shaped around her own life and experience as a working-class woman. Among her childhood memories she describes how she had to help her father, who was a building *gardien*, clean the common areas of an HLM, where they lived; "*We had to help him disinfect the common areas with Cresyl, what an awful smell*"[517].

This olfactive memory of rejection of a particular smell, gives us some insights into Chirac's potential perceptions that day. He was visiting an HLM, as it was the setting

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[514] See Cresyl packaging.

[515] It is interesting to note that the notion of "*deodorising*" has been used, as the advert and packaging suggest, in an animal and agricultural setting (farms, stables), and also, as Chirac says in his memoirs, in colonial overseas contexts, as well as in HLMs in the city. This "subtlety" in the application of this deodorising product reminds us again how smell continues to play a role in the separation of populations according to their class or race. Here again, class and race are imbricated in the same narrative of discrimination and prejudice.

[516] HLM: *Habitation à Loyer Modéré* (literally Housing at Moderate Rent or Social Housing).

[517] Maurant, I.: *Je ne baisserai plus les yeux*, Paris, Les Arènes, 2014. Chapter I. My translation.

for the scene he reproduced in his speech. We can therefore suspect that there might have been some smell of Cresyl in the air. Could that smell of Cresyl, the combination of fumes, have triggered the memories of the Cresyl in his olfactive memory of Algiers that morning? It could have been combined with “colonial products”, “exotic” smells, perhaps coming from a flat where a family of foreigners lived, as in his example…

The force of his repugnance must be related to the other two odours as well. Anisette might correspond to the exotic interpretation of the place; while colonial products, in the own ambiguity of the term, reminds us that there is a place where Chirac wanted to take us in his speech. This combination of smells served as fast-track access to his memory and it is highly likely that it might have activated very profound feelings, including disgust, hence the racist remarks.

What I am trying to show here is that the rejection and disgust demonstrated in his own words regarding the “smell and the noises” is linked with a memory; and that memory is a presence of something repressed, that remains unresolved, and which surfaces from time to time. The brief olfactive memories of his time in Algiers, give us the information about that place that triggered his odorific repulsion.

Algeria was for Chirac a first love. Although involved in the war, his participation saw two distinct phases. Initially, as a lieutenant, coordinating a battalion on the border with Morocco (1956-1957), and later as a state official in 1959, following orders from the government in the final attempts to negotiate an exit and avoid the unfolding of the war of independence.

"*I arrived in Oran on April 13 and soon after I took the lead of a platoon of thirty-two men belonging to the 3rd African Chasers Squadron, under the command of Captain Henry Pécherau, a veteran of Indochina. We were stationed in Souk el-Arba, near the Moroccan border, in the middle of the mountains. A wild, desert area, limited to a*

few mud houses placed on a promontory, at the top of which we had a very ample view of the wadis to the south and the plains to the north"[518].

Reminiscences of the War and the colonial era are present in this fragment. A captain from an older colonial war and the description of the area, isolated and wild. There are more details in his memoirs concerning his own thoughts about the Algerian War, which help to appreciate his perspective on the events:

"*We didn't deserve to be defeated. Besides, we weren't. For many of us, the most important thing is that we had time to spread the word and honour of France, by asserting to the populations rallied to our cause that we would never abandon them. Then came the moment when it was necessary, in spite of ourselves, and with death in the soul, we had to leave those who had us in their favour to the mercy of the adversary*"[519].

The importance of the statement "*we would never abandon them*" cannot be overstated in terms of the populations in Algeria that supported the colonial status quo, and also, of course the population of *Pieds Noirs* affected by the War, as well as the *Harkis*, Algerian soldiers battling beside French forces. The fact of not wanting to leave them, is a clear manifestation of the strength of the colonial tie for Chirac, and of his commitment to work to maintain that situation. Chirac would later repeat similar statements, once President, in terms of his policies towards former African colonies, already independent nations[520].

Regarding the Algerian War itself, he declares:

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[518] Chirac, J.: *op.cit. (*p. 60). My translation.

[519] Chirac, J.: *op.cit.* (p. 57*).* My translation.

[520] The period of new relationships between France and Africa during his administration has been defined as "*Françafrique*", which many claimed to be little more than the reproduction of old colonial ties, now called "neo-colonial relationships". See the special number of Politique Africaine, *La Françafrique fait de la Résistance* 1, 105, 2007. Introduction "La fin du pacte colonial? La politique africaine de la France sous J. Chirac et après" (7-26).

"*Arrests of suspects are frequent. They will continue to intensify over the months. Most of these suspected guerrillas are transferred for questioning to the cantonment of our regiment in Montagnac. Are some of them tortured, as we are more and more openly asserting in metropolitan France? The only thing I can say for sure is that I never witnessed any such acts in the, admittedly, very limited area where I was. This does not mean that such practices did not exist there. (…) If I am unaware, at that time, of the fate of the prisoners sent by helicopter to Montagnac, I strictly watch, as far as I am concerned, the respect to the Algerian populations*"[521].

This is part of the official and paternalistic discourse of the colonial system, which has apparently seeped into and marked his memories. He depicts himself, unwittingly or not, in the role of a protector, a guide, or as a father of those, implicitly considered incapable of reacting for themselves.

"*For those like me who spontaneously seek contact with others, this experience is humanly as rich as it is fascinating. It was one of the only times in my life when I truly felt that I had a direct, immediate influence on the course of events and the lives of those for whom I was responsible*"[522].

Algeria will come into his life again, as he returns a few years afterwards:

"*Claiming to be 'French Algeria', when one has never been a fanatic follower of the colonial system, may seem contradictory to say the least. (…) I do not dispute the right of Algerians to independence and do not ignore the unfair treatment inflicted on them. But I also understand the confusion, the anger of those who have been rooted in this land of Algeria for generations, who are legitimately attached to the fruit of their labour and anxious to preserve it*"[523].

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[521] Chirac, J.: *op.cit.* (60-62), *ídem*.

[522] Chirac, J.: *op.cit.* (p. 61), *ídem*.

[523] Chirac, J.: *op.cit* (p. 66), *ídem*.

There is something in his words, as we saw in the negation-affirmation game, akin to "*it is not being racist to say that*", that comes through his memoirs. He denies being a colonial sympathiser, presenting his visceral feelings before any political causes, which remains quite contradictory, as he ultimately admits. That same instinctive reaction was the one that came out in the "smells and noises" comment on LGO. Once again it showcases some aspects of the colonial issue that remained unresolved within him, and which reappear many years later in his memoirs[524].

The colonial issue keeps coming back in his narrative. In the same way that the olfactory experience of *smells and noises* in an HLM in LGO, and his own first memories of Algeria -both olfactory references- share some commonalities. The key common element is Algeria as a colonial place, and this resonates in LGO where a significant proportion of its population originates from Algeria. Some of the Algerians settled in LGO were part of the "*indigénat*" system. They were therefore part of the colonial regime and allowed to work in France after the Second World War. Some of them stayed and managed to reunite their families on French soil. Others came before the end of the Algerian War and also settled down in LGO. The Algerian War had some repercussions in LGO although some aspects, such as whether there had been an explicit support to the FLN (National Liberation Front), remain unclarified[525].

<u>The colonial Issue</u>

We can also trace strong links between that colonial issue and the existence of the neighbourhood. As already mentioned, its population came in different waves of immigration from former colonies. This element is consistently raised in the

[524] Between 2009 and 2013.

[525] See Blanchard, E.: *La Goutte d'Or, 30 Juillet 1955, une émeute au cœur de la métropole coloniale*, in Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales, n° 195, 5, 2012, (98-111). Blanchard points out that the support to the Algerian War was not clear in LGO and that there were other different interests inside the district in relation to it. The media largely presented the neighborhood as a bastion of the FLN without proof and to justify its control by police forces while disguising other irregularities.

narratives that stigmatise the place and define it as conflictive and rejectable. All of these narratives have isolated the neighbourhood, essentially cornering it into some form of enclave. Even the most openly friendly interpretations of the neighbourhood, by scholars who recently became more interested in the district, usually fall into the same trap, understanding LGO[526] as an outsider space inside Paris.

Chirac's 1991 speech is a clue to understand why this rejection has maintained itself over the years and how it might be linked with these other inevitably related topics, such as the Algerian War and colonialism. Chirac is bringing out what is repressed not just in him, but in so many other Parisians regarding LGO and the narrative of resentfulness, discrimination, stigmatisation and racism, manifested in harsher or softer ways. Crucially, what is repressed is the unresolved conflict of colonialism within the history of France and its relationships with its former territories.

What is coming back in all these narratives is what we can call a "symptom", a force of what is not controlled intellectually, or rationally. In other words, a conflict that has yet to be solved. This unresolved issue keeps resurfacing and it is no coincidence that in his choice of words Chirac returned to a sensorial, olfactive experience. If we can link this speech to other situations in Chirac's career, this symptom, becomes clearer.

As mentioned in his Memoirs, Chirac enjoyed a particular relationship with Algeria, more exactly with "French Algeria" as he called it. As a nostalgic or stubborn idea that he might have kept in his memory storage. In 2003, Chirac as President, tried to restore the broken relationships between France and Algeria since the end of the War. He went on an official visit to the country, and according to his recollections he was openly and warmly received by the Algerian population. During this visit he visited the War memorial, together with the then President of Algeria, A. Bouteflika. He also ensured that an artefact that had been handed over to French occupiers in 1830 was symbolically restored.

[526] Palumbo, M.A.: *op.cit* and Lallement, E.: *op.cit.*

"*After laying a wreath and bowing in front of the monument to the Algerian martyrs, I performed two other symbolic gestures of the change of epoch which was taking place: the first was to return to my hosts the saddle of the Bey of Algiers that the latter had given, in 1830, as a sign of allegiance, to the leader of the French expeditionary force which had just landed. I made a point of making it the founding act of the new history that must take place between our two countries. The second was to go and shake hands with some of the former FLN guerrillas who were in the audience at the People's Palace, and whom I had fought against during the Algerian war. As they say, 'Those who have made war are those who can make peace*'"[527].

But his intentions to restore that relationship were shattered, once again; this time by the Law on colonialism, approved in the National Assembly in 2005. In its article 4, the law stated that secondary schools were required to teach the "*positive role of colonialism"*. As a consequence, Bouteflika cancelled all the following steps that had been agreed for the renewal of Algeria's relationships with France calling the Law "*(…) mental blindness and negationist*". Chirac's response was to derogate the Law by the end of 2005, a move which was accepted and approved by the Constitutional Council in 2006. The debate was re-ignited around different aspects, principally around colonial history, memory and the concept of official history[528].

The discussion about the "*positive role of colonialism*", provides us with further elements to understand how the problem of colonialism is yet to be properly discussed within French society, and still generates divisions among different political sections. The Algerian War is one of the most important flashpoints in the colonial memory of French history. For example, the fact that it was not defined as a "war" until a law was passed in 1999, is indicative of how the interpretation of history and

[527] Chirac, J.: *Mémoires*, Vol. II. My translation.

[528] Different historians protested against this law, along with teachers and students, accusing the state of revisionism, and putting into question that History as a discipline should not be controlled by the state.

memory still operates for some sectors under a colonial rhetoric[529]. The racist narrative against immigrants, that we tried to expose has a lot to do with the context of these discussions about the colonial role of France overseas.

Immigration coming from African countries that had been former French territories had been condemned, as a continuation of the first narrative that we saw. But these were now imbued with elements of discrimination, and racism, also inherited from the old colonial regime and the wealth of prejudices built at that time. Colonialism is more than a figure of postcolonial interpretation. It still appears as a symptom of French society that continues to avoid accepting the role it played in the history of the colonisation of those territories and its interference in those future independent nations. What reappears is the symptom. It is bothersome, because it is not accepted or recognised and, in this negation, we can find the evidence of racism[530].

La Goutte d'Or, the symptom

We can define Chirac's "smells and noises" speech about La Goutte d'Or as a symptom, and we now also understand that (and why) the neighbourhood has suffered so many racist acts throughout its history. The neighbourhood and its rejection exemplify the symptom of colonialism in the mind of Parisians. They attack it with the narrative of rejection, as something that certainly has not been completely discussed, assumed or resolved.

The conflict over memory and history, continues to haunt French society. This is patent, more recently, in the measures taken by President Macron, notably

[529] These have been called "Politics of the Forgotten". See Pervillé, G.: "Une politique de l'oubli. La mémoire de la guerre en France et en Algérie", in *Le Sociographe*, 46,2, 2014. (85-95).

[530] In the first chapter of this thesis, we discussed how Albert Memmi considers the immigrants of today, the colonial subjects of yesterday. See Memmi, A.: *op.cit.* 2007.

entrusting a historian to draft a comprehensive report on the Algerian War[531]. It is true that history should not be regulated by the state, but it is also true that it might make a difference if a nation can assume its responsibilities for the colonial system and its exactions.

Arguably, Chirac tried to deal with these memories, including through his efforts to reconstruct relationships with now independent African countries. But the most recognisable result was the consolidation of neo-colonial ties between France and its former colonies in Africa, what is called "*la Françafrique*"[532].

"'They stink less where they are from than in our social housing buildings'".

Charlie Hebdo, nº 227, 23 Octobre,1996.

In 2007, at the end of his career, Chirac made a final speech at the summit of the France and Africa Convention in Cannes:

"*For France, Africa will never be a partner like any other. For twelve years, I have insisted that, while faithfully assuming its historical heritage, it accompanies the*

[531] The report by Stora, B.: *Les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d'Algérie*, 20 January 2021. https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/278186-rapport-stora-memoire-sur-la-colonisation-et-la-guerre-dalgerie

[532] For more examples of policies surrounding "*Françafrique*", see the Journal Politique Africaine, *op.cit.*

evolutions of the continent in a new spirit. It was a question of reformulating our links into a relationship turned towards the future (…) All French cooperation mechanisms, civil and military, have been renovated. With a key word: partnership"[533].

It is undeniable that Chirac worked to reinforce the dependence of some African countries on French deliverables, instead of solving the issue of colonial memory, he reinforced those relationships, keeping the symptom of colonialism alive.

SOME LAST THOUGHTS

I began this thesis with the idea that the neighbourhood of *La Goutte d'Or* deserved a deep exploration about the different aspects at play behind its long-standing bad reputation. Among those aspects, racism was for me one of the main reasons why the place was so easily targeted by different condemnatory narratives.

The politics of integration that had been applied for many years and that have been on the agenda of different local and national administrations had to some extent diluted the ways in which racism is interpreted. Beyond the wilful omission of the term "racism" and its recurrent replacement by other terms (euphemisms), there

[533] Chirac, J.: Speech, Cannes, 2007.

have also been elements that have served to hide or disguise racism. This aspect is not only observable in the present time and daily life of the neighbourhood but also throughout its history as a district within Paris. To dismantle the narrative of rejection has been crucial to show the different ways in which racism has been and still is present in the reality of *La Goutte d'Or*, and crucially in the representation that other Parisians make of it.

Soft racism as a concept has helped me to detect those hidden messages and muted attitudes that reflect what is often unspoken racism, or narratives that distract from the aggression that is racism. Soft racism shows its presence not only in the small spaces of gestures and acts manifested or received by the senses individually, but also in the broader narratives and representation of the neighbourhood, as well as in non-explicit agendas (the omission of the word "racism" or in politics of rejection as in the case of the Mosques).

All of this proves that it is a comprehensive concept that merits further elaboration and development, notably through the identification of complementary methodological attributes.

The sensorial approach to the topic has contributed to resolve different questions about situations or realities of soft racism that I have detected in the representation of the neighbourhood, both in the past in the present. In sensorial terms, I have tried to show how to approach a type of apparently hidden conflict, such as soft racism, from the perspective of each of the senses. This has helped me to detect the mechanisms of those acts of racism exercised directly or indirectly against the people of the neighbourhood or against the representation of its population as Others. The senses have effectively enabled me to dismantle different acts of rejection throughout the neighbourhood's history. This approach has opened up even more situations for analysis, which will guide further research interests.

Although history has not been reviewed in a strictly chronological fashion in this thesis, situating the different historical moments of the neighbourhood and the

correlative experiences of those times has been important. Crucially, in chapter Smell, arriving at a theory for the origin of the consistent narrative of rejection that the neighbourhood still suffers is significant.

Soft racism is also powerfully linked to the experiences and history of colonialism as we also tried to demonstrate. Colonialism and the politics of empire developed by France in its former colonies, such as the *Indigénat* and *Assimilation* systems, have also impacted the life of the neighbourhood. Revealing how those systems still operate, through muted techniques, replicating old habits from the colonial relationships of the past, has been striking but not completely surprising.

That these historical relationships are still part of our present societies should not be surprising. The problem arises when these relationships remain unacknowledged, when their impact and responsibility for our present is omitted. These bigger muted acts of racism, as we saw through the senses in all the chapters, are also part of what I call soft racism.

The uncovering of certain elements of response or reaction against that soft racism is something that emerged beyond the thesis' initial principal questions. Particularly in the chapters Taste, Touch and Hearing, I have tried to highlight how people have reacted against those experiences or situations of soft racism. I have noted a powerful response against the historical narrative of rejection about the neighbourhood within a new generation of young entrepreneurs in *La Goutte d'Or*. They are exploring different ways to counterbalance those prejudices against the place (and themselves) with commercial ideas that also situate the community in a fairer place, compared to the historical representation. The incorporation and popularisation of Other's flavours within a rigid and seemingly immutable construct such as French cuisine is another example of muted success in the silent struggle against racism. The same applies to the conversations about racism on the radio, the neighbours show an awareness of the situations of racism that have been persistent in their lives and that have impacted the image of the neighbourhood and its

community, that go beyond the definitions of the official terms used to describe them.

Finally, as much as I know that this is the end of this thesis, I know that there still are other angles to draw out in further analysing racism in *La Goutte d'Or* and its relationship with the history of colonialism. Ultimately, I consider that that this thesis has managed to demonstrate how useful it can be to work on a topic like racism from a sensorial perspective. This approach gives us more elements to think about and work on; to understand the mechanisms of daily, muted, soft racism, as actually experienced by persons, not only within a small neighbourhood of Paris, but potentially in other LGOs and similar contexts. Hopefully this understanding can help guide a response and reaction to it that is helpful to those that live through daily experiences of racism. I hope that my work serves as an inspiration for further explorations on the forms of recording and denouncing racism, and more importantly on how to fight against it, which has actually been my driving motivation.

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STATEMENT

Submission date: 3 September 2021

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: ……

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