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Africans in Calais: Migrants, Rights, and French Cosmopolitanism

1 Introduction

When I first came to France in the mid-1980s to join a PhD program at the Sorbonne University, my knowledge of racial and ethnic questions was very limited. The Anglo-American studies I had followed at the University of Tunis at that time offered a limited perspective on those issues. Though the discovery of the ethnic debate in France was intellectually stimulating, the feeling that I belonged to a separate group was unpleasant. It happened that the 1980s were a decisive moment in French ethnic history. The rise of the National Front (a xenophobic party), its intrusion into French politics, the emergence of SOS Racisme (a pro-immigrant organization), and the weakening of communist and socialist cosmopolitanism offered a picture of France I was not familiar with.

France had already integrated the Belgians, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, and many others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Noiriel). As a result, after World War II, Paris had become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. However, the family reunification policy, implemented in the early 1970s, began to stir feelings of paranoia and an open fear of the “Arab peril” that was supposedly threatening the very foundations of French society. The liberal policy of the socialist-communist government of the early 1980s alienated some segments of French society. The socialist president, François Mitterrand, used the immigration issue to increase the political woes of his conservative rivals, who had to face the inexorable rise of the far right party (National Front), whose ubiquitous slogan was “France for the French,” a slogan reminiscent of the US nativist call of the nineteenth century.

The terrorist acts of the 1990s increased the rejection of immigrants and put the spotlight on radical Islamist groups thriving within the immigrant population (Shapiro and Suzan). Interestingly enough, little attention was given to sub-Saharan Africans, whose numbers were increasing. As a consequence, racism in France targeted Arabs more than blacks. There is no doubt that the historical conflict between the West and East, the traumatic colonial war in Algeria, and the considerable number of North Africans in France triggered a large popular worry and resulted in a widespread rejection of Arabs. Blacks became the forgotten minority, even though there was a perceptible disdain and contempt towards them. When I was teaching in a high school near Paris, I was surprised by a colleague who told me that Arab students were smart but lazy, whereas black students were intellectually “limited.” This disdain had his-

torical roots in France and the West. However, public opinion surveys demonstrated that most people ignored the historical dimension of their attitudes. The number of those who considered themselves racists continued to be negligible, but the rise of the National Front told a different story and sent a different message. This xenophobic party moved from the margins of society in the early 1980s into mainstream French politics by the 1990s.

France was torn between its latent obsession with its image of cosmopolitanism, openness, and commitment to human rights on the one hand, and the rise of the National Front party with its racist and anti-Semitic ideas on the other hand. This became even more interesting to observe at the time the European project was making progress, signaling a growing dichotomy between the European inclusive cosmopolitanism and the growing fear of non-European foreigners. In line with what some intellectuals have suggested, European cosmopolitanism is deeply rooted in the Western European philosophical tradition and the development of liberal democracies (Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Society”; Bhambra and Narayan; Habermas, “The Crisis” and “Toward”). However, the rise of racism is necessarily connected to Western colonialism and the rise of the French empire. Therefore, the cosmopolitanism that has emerged in France and elsewhere in Europe refers more to diversity *between* states, not diversity *within* states.

If we consider that, in line with what Adam Elliott-Cooper has demonstrated, multicultural Europe had begun with the expansion of the existing empires, then French multiculturalism cannot be dissociated from the expansion of the French empire in North Africa, which is explicitly visible in Algeria (Elliott-Cooper). But following World War II, workers from the former colonies were encouraged to come to Metropolitan France to help rebuild the country, which was devastated by the war. When the European Economic Community was founded in 1957, Algerians became institutionally a part of it. However, Algerian workers were denied the basic rights (salary, movement, insurance) enjoyed by their French counterparts. Worse, Algerians were under constant surveillance and control, making them second-class citizens, considered potentially dangerous and socially unable to assimilate. Hence, the project which was under construction failed to recognize the former colonies and to integrate the former colonized into European state cosmopolitanism. Thus, from the outset the European project (European Union) was contaminated with colonial and racist logic (Bhambra and Narayan; Hansen and Jonsson, “Bringing Africa”). European cosmopolitanism actually aims at unifying European countries in order to achieve peace after World War II and prosperity, together with the intensification of globalization. Therefore, there is no way to dissociate European cosmopolitanism from the hegemonic neoliberal ideology in Western Europe. The expansion of the European community to embrace new countries, both South and East, is but a new impetus given to neoliberalism and its market-oriented ideology. However, the economic crisis which swept across Europe beginning in 2008 has demonstrated that the model Europe wanted to show and export beyond its borders has failed. The ideological premises that have

constituted the essence of the European model (deregulation, privatization, and the weakening of the nation-state), no longer guarantee the economic prosperity, social stability, and cultural integration it had been created for. This failure exacerbated the conflict, pitting some countries against another (Brexit is one example), and equally amplifying the social problems internal to each nation-state. Though European cosmopolitanism seems to be encountering troubled waters because of its tight connection with profits, markets, and neoliberalism, and its inability to go beyond the confines of its colonial history and racist past to integrate European and non-European others (e.g. European diasporic communities), major challenges still loom ahead. Indeed, the plurality of cultures, arising not only from European ethnic diversity but mostly from its colonial past, will constitute an intractable issue that will likely impact the economic-oriented cosmopolitanism that has prevailed since the end of World War II. The European model, an embodiment of diversity and cosmopolitanism, as heralded by Ulrich Beck, has to be reinvented and redefined, taking into account the growing presence of immigrants. Beck sees cosmopolitanism as an encounter and an addition (Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*; Beck and Grande). His work, as Bhabra argues, “takes little account of the diversity within Europe as constituted by its minorities within states” (“Cosmopolitanism” 319). If we consider European diversity as simply connecting the dots through an elaborate constitutional framework, then there is no place for integrating subaltern ethnic groups emanating from European colonial history. The restrictive, if not hostile, immigration policy implemented in many European countries imposes significant limitations on the European cosmopolitanism.

No other country in Europe embodies the dilemma of cosmopolitanism as France does today. Despite its intellectual attachment to human rights and its active pro-European policy, France harbors one of the most influential anti-immigration political parties in Europe.

This chapter explores the dichotomy between this attempt to bring together European countries into a single community, hailing on one hand the universality of human rights and promoting France as a cosmopolitan country, while at the same time displaying a strong hostility towards immigrants. Viewed from this perspective, the chapter will offer a sociological analysis of the case of migrants in Calais. Questions about the dynamics of social change, conflict, identity, and law will be raised. There are certainly some moral and philosophical concerns underpinning those societal questions as well. Indeed, the direction in which French society is moving cannot be dissociated from the constant search for a peaceful and harmonious society. The case of Africans in Calais constitutes a major challenge to this model.

2 From Arabs to Muslims: Reframing the Debate

France is trying hard to be the driving force in Europe and the reference point in terms of defense of human rights and values of equality and justice. Cherished in schools, textbooks, and the media, the Republican model values solidarity, equal citizenry, and a shared culture and ideals. In this narrative, the colonial atrocities inflicted on the colonized populations have been occulted and even denied. The Algerian Independence War is an interesting example, which shows how France has had a hard time recognizing its responsibility for the thousands of casualties. Certainly, such a recognition would have opened the door to a broader debate about colonialism and would have brought to the fore the contradictions between the values France would like to stand for and the reality of colonialism. This is deeply connected to the way politicians have handled the issue of colonialism. It does not say much about how France had welcomed the different waves of immigration, even though the first ones did not have to do with the colonial history of France. The first migrants to France were Europeans (Portuguese, Poles, Belgians, Spaniards, among others) fleeing internal strife or poverty. As the French colonial empire could guarantee economic prosperity and opportunities for all, the assimilation of those first immigrants, most of whom shared the same color, religion, and some cultural patterns with the French, was possible. With the second-generation immigrants, it was assumed at the time that France was heading towards a deminoritization of its immigrants and that the assimilation process was fully working. Partially because of this, when North African workers came in massive numbers to France to participate in the rebuilding of the country after World War II, little attention was initially paid to their presence. The need for these unskilled workers was more compelling than questions related to identity, culture, and social cohesion. However, the independence movements in Africa unleashed the racist discourse that had underpinned and legitimized colonialism. The dehumanizing and alienating French cosmopolitan rhetoric, which had been prevalent prior to that time, was challenged by a new radical ideology emanating from North African and black intellectuals. Their ideology, though in line with the republican idea of liberty, equality, and justice for all, gave way to a new alternative cosmopolitan philosophy, which reflected their strong attachment to self-determination and freedom. In his analysis of the French “colonial cosmopolitanism,” Babacar M’Baye writes:

Rather than being cosmopolitan, the policies that France developed toward Africans during this period were exclusionary and manipulative because they subjugated the peasants and *tirailleurs* and confined them in low and degrading positions in which racism, violence, and prejudice maintained the authority of an imperial system that defined rights as the privileges of the upper-class whites of the métropole (known here as metropolitan France) to the detriment of blacks and other colored people. (2)

The brutal response of the French to the liberation movement in Africa was in itself an indication of the manipulative civilizational rhetoric of cosmopolitanism. Additionally, with the arrival of immigrants in France itself, the demographic trend was reversed. Africa was now being invited to the *Métropole* (parent state). The French cosmopolitanism, with its colonial flavor, was shifting into a unique societal experience that was to confront theory with reality. The French self-representation (republicanism, democracy, and cosmopolitanism) is compared with the ‘triviality’ of well-known urban problems, found in any country hosting different populations with different cultural backgrounds.

After having put Arab immigration into the heart of the debate about the urban crisis and the social ills plaguing French society, opinion-makers have turned to focusing on Islam and Muslims. This political, and even intellectual, shift in the debate from “Arabs” toward “Muslims” is worth examining. If we consider “Arab” as a reference to language, many of the descendants of the first generation of North African immigrants do not speak Arabic. Much of the Arab cultural heritage they have maintained from their parents is related to religion. The reference to religion, rather than language or nationality, makes it possible to target more people in the anti-immigrant rhetoric. By shifting the debate from the danger of Arabism to the danger of Islamism, the opponents of immigrants were able to include most of sub-Saharan Africans and Asians in the debate. Those who feared the weakening of France’s religious or ethnic identity welcomed this discourse. At the time of proliferation of social media, trivial statements take on a national dimension, and a negligible event can become a world affair. Both anti-immigration Europeans and radical Islamists use these media to mobilize their potential supporters. Hence, Islamists resort to an old discourse about the western conspiracy against Islam, while French racists denounce Islamic violence, with its disrespect for women and tolerance for abuse and terror.

Though the question of immigration is still raised by conservative circles in France, the far right went, in its opposition to diversity, so far as to challenge the legitimacy of the European construction and cosmopolitanism. In its simplistic, albeit efficient, analysis of the situation, it argued that because the most recent immigrants have come to France through Italy, Spain, and Germany, the European project has to come to an end. Any acceptance of a multicultural France is beyond consideration. Unsurprisingly, polls have shown that more and more French are concerned about issues of immigration, insecurity, and identity. Hence, ideas which previously could not have had a place in the mainstream political debate have, in the last few years, become unavoidable.

It is in this context that the most recent migrants and refugees joined France. But contrary to the earlier immigrants, who came from the former French colonies for economic reasons, the newly arrived populations are refugees and migrants fleeing civil war and abject poverty in countries not necessarily connected to France via a colonial past.

3 Calais: Passage to England and the New French Cosmopolitanism

In the last few years Calais has become an embodiment of what has gone wrong with immigration and refugees in France. No doubt, Calais brought to the fore the contradiction between the official discourse of inclusion, diversity, and cosmopolitanism that France has been exporting for a long time, and a political, social, and economic model that is unable to assume, ensure, and put into practice the ideals France stands for.

A small port city in the north of France, Calais used to have a progressive political tradition. The communist and socialist parties used to be the two dominant political forces, not only in the city but also in the whole region. To many, however, Calais was just a depressed city with no economic or cultural interest, apart from its proximity to Great Britain. Yet the maritime connection between Calais and the south of England did not give a real impetus to the local economy. However, the situation changed in the 1990s. With the city constituting the closest point to England, it was natural that the Channel tunnel was to link the two shores in Calais. Therefore, since 1994, the regular freight shuttle and the Eurostar have been crossing the 31-mile tunnel on a regular basis.

No doubt, without this tunnel, Calais would have continued to be an anonymous city of approximately 80,000 inhabitants. However, inasmuch as it constituted the linking point with Great Britain, Calais immediately became a Mecca for various migrants who intended to cross the Channel. Apart from symbolically bringing the British Isles into continental Europe, the tunnel brought the world to Calais. The city, which had been negatively impacted by the deindustrialization process, began to attract refugees and migrants from different parts of the world in search of a way to reach Great Britain.

It happened that the Channel tunnel began to operate at the time of a changing international context: the collapse of the communist bloc, the accentuation of political instability even in Europe, and the transformation of political alliances. It was in this context of political confusion and reorganization of the world order that Calais became the center of a national debate about the role and place of immigration, international migration, refugees, and human rights. However, Calais also questioned the very basic values of human dignity, European cosmopolitanism, and a shared social cohesion in France and elsewhere.

With Calais, the question of immigration was presented in a new form. Contrary to traditional postcolonial immigration, when France was the last destination of immigrants coming mostly from the former French colonies, Calais represented something different. France had become not a final destination but a transit place. After entering France, the migrants seeking entry into Great Britain usually move to Calais in the hope of crossing the tunnel illegally on board a boat or a freight shuttle.

With tightened security measures, the numbers of refugees and migrants increased dramatically in the first refugee camp near Calais–Sangatte. In 1999, the French Red Cross opened the center to provide basic necessities to migrants. The government, unable or more likely unwilling to deal with the issue, left the camp to the NGOs. The Red Cross offered shelter and food to the migrants, whose number was estimated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to range between 1700 and 3000. New would-be asylum seekers flocked to Sangatte (approximately one hundred per day). Most of them fled the war in Kosovo, which was at its height, but also the Middle East, still suffering from the consequences of the Gulf War I. On a practical level, when Great Britain refused their admission, they found themselves stuck on the French side of the tunnel. They could not cross to England, and they did not want to stay in France. The Sangatte protocol of 1991 and the Touquet Accord of 2003 authorized customs on French territory and not on the British side of the tunnel.

In addition to the individual complexity of the experience of each asylum-seeker was added the complexity of space management. To the migrants, who by definition transcend political borders and embody the moral form of cosmopolitanism, the Touquet Accord is the perfect example of anti-cosmopolitanism: migrants stuck in a permanent status of asylum-seekers, with no possibility of assimilation. After the traumatic experience of exile, the horrors of displacement, and the violence of the human traffickers, those migrants were saddled with the feeling of failure and incapability.

When the situation became untenable in 2001 and a group of migrants stormed the fences—erected to protect the shuttle and the trucks from any migrant intrusion—the Eurotunnel Company asked the French government to close Sangatte. It was joined in this call by British and French local officials. However, their demand was turned down as many decision-makers, both in France and Great Britain, were convinced that the closure of Sangatte would not terminate the crisis. The British Refugee Council wrote that the center “was the symptom, not the cause of the problem” (“The Situation”). In response, new security measures were put in place, more resistant fences were built, cameras were installed, and more policemen were sent to the area.

Ultimately the center, which came to concentrate all the ills of migration and the mismanagement by both France and Great Britain of the problem of asylum-seekers, closed at the end of 2002. Nicolas Sarkozy, the then Minister of the Interior and in charge of immigration and border security, used this decision for political gain. As diversity, openness, and racial and ethnic mixing had become unpopular, Sarkozy needed to show no sign of laxity, permissiveness, and toleration vis-à-vis the Calaisian migrants. From the perspective of his victory in the presidential elections of 2007, it would seem he made the right decision. Sangatte disappeared out of sight, and the media images about migrants that had haunted the imagination of some French citizens, anxious about their national identity and worried about their security, disappeared, at least for a while. There was no indication, however, that migration had declined. Rather, the question was one of its salience and perception. Actually, many

experts had warned about the deterioration of the migrants’ condition since they no longer benefited from the support of civil society and government agencies.

The heated debate about migrants in Calais, which for a while overshadowed the debate about legal immigration, gave rise to a controversy between those who believed that helping the migrants with shelter, food, medical care, and moral support was necessary to meet the minimum standard of humanism and morality; and those—whose number and influence were growing—who believed that reinforcing the inhumane and inhospitable conditions of living would ultimately deter and dissuade others from coming to France. This latter category of French citizens and politicians believed that a lenient migration policy would encourage potential migrants to join Calais. In the words of Eric Besson, the conservative Minister of immigration, who had just gotten married to a Tunisian immigrant woman, “a new camp would create a powerful invitation to new networks of illegal immigration. It would not be a solution to the humanitarian problem” (“French”). On the other side of the Channel, the British Ministry of Home Affairs defended almost the same idea as recently as 2015, when it argued that “accommodation cannot provide a long-term answer to the problem. Such camps have the potential, like Sangatte, to make a bad situation worse” (Home Affairs).

4 The “Jungle” and the Racialization of Migrants

The situation in Calais has evolved rapidly since 2009, when the UNHCR established a permanent presence to deal with the refugee issue, which had taken on an international dimension. However, in 2012 the UNHCR handed over responsibility of the camp to NGOs, and in particular to France Terre d’Asile, a French NGO whose work in favor of migrants was recognized by most experts. The organization became the embodiment of the generous and hospitable spirit that had been lost in France. But at the same time it immediately became obvious that those NGOs could not be the solution to the problem. Providing a proper multidimensional support to thousands of migrants went beyond their financial and human capacity. As a result, the United Nations agency went back to Calais in 2014.

It was in this context that media reports in France and elsewhere began to refer to the “jungle” as the place where migrants were concentrated. The “jungle” in Calais was a place associated with confusion, misunderstanding, and exclusion. Understanding the word “jungle” in its literal and metaphorical dimension shed lights on the absence of cosmopolitanism and the attempt to racialize those migrants. The term appeared out of a biased representation and misunderstanding, symptomatic of the disconnection and the absence of dialogue between French nationals in Calais and the migrants. It seems that the term “jungle” was first used by Iranian and Kurdish migrants to designate a forest (pronounced “jengaal”). For many years, migrants

had explained to the journalists that they were living in the “forest,” outside the city of Calais. Thinking that migrants were referring to a jungle, a semantic displacement occurred, shifting the word “jengaal” to “jungle,” thus giving a metaphorical meaning to the term, much to the detriment of the migrants. The phonetic proximity between the Persian word “jengaal” and the English word “jungle” created this kind of syntagm. According to philosopher Sophie Djigo: “At the time the Persian word designated a place for refuge and resort, the case of the Garennes forest, located right next to the tunnel ... imposed a metaphor which reactivated the colonial imagination” (Djigo 38).

The “jungle” has become a concept that designates the reign of nature, lawlessness, anarchy, and chaos, in opposition to social order and the rule of law. In the public imagination, the jungle is associated with the absence of rules and the survival of the fittest, in opposition to the laws of civilization. Implicitly, the term ‘jungle’ serves the causes of the racists in France, who oppose racial and ethnic mixing. It opposes France, with its civilization, laws, and republican institutions, to the world of migration, refugees, and disorder. The jungle, popularized in Western culture by writers such as Rudyard Kipling (*The Jungle Book*, 1894) and André Gide (*Voyage au Congo*, 1927) is a habitat for wild predators. When transposed to the situation of migrants in Calais, the metaphorical use of the term ‘jungle’ allows an easy racialization of the migrants, a significant part of whom came from sub-Saharan Africa. The jungle gives those migrants a color, an origin, and associates them with a predominantly antisocial behavior.

The problems of violence, lack of hygiene, and theft, reported within the confines of the jungle, triggered a shock wave that went beyond the spatial limitation of the camp. Constant media reports about clashes between different migrant groups (usually East Africans) conveyed a subliminal message that these migrants were in their natural environment—the jungle, and the duty of civilized society is to protect itself from the proliferation of chaos. The opposition between Calaisians and the migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudan had never been so strong, with media playing a major role in accentuating the antagonism between the local citizens and migrants, and by extension the hostility between French nationals and immigrants. In addition, images of boats filled with thousands of Africans crossing the Mediterranean every day, sensational reports about the damage inflicted on the beauty of French forests and cities, investigative reports about human trafficking, and alarming analyses of the migration statistics have further negatively contributed to the debate about refugees and immigrants.

Migrants in Calais also triggered an anxiety in Great Britain, where politicians relied on the French uncompromising immigration policy to protect their own borders from what David Cameron, the former Prime Minister, called: “a swarm of people crossing the Mediterranean.” Certainly, Cameron was condemned for his “dehumanizing description of African migrants,” but his view, which went beyond racializing migrants, was shared by many people on both sides of the Channel (Elgot and Taylor).

The racialization of migrants is deeply rooted in the colonial history of France and Great Britain. However, in relation to the specific case of Calais, three stages can be identified: First, in the late 1990s, Kosovars fled the civil war and ethnic cleansing following the dismantling of former Yugoslavia. A chain of solidarity was put in place to help those refugees and migrants. Second, major waves of migrants included people from Afghanistan and Iraq. In the context of the public debate about radical Islam, migrants began to be seen as potentially dangerous for the cohesion of French society, with Sangatte exacerbating the public tensions. However, the fact that those migrants fled a civil war mitigated the public hostility. The third wave was made up of sub-Saharan Africans, though Afghans, Pakistanis, Iraqis, and Iranians also continued to travel to Calais with the hope of crossing the Channel. The African migrants who filled the news media reports were not associated with civil war. As a result, they were not seen as “deserving” refugees. In reality, 70% of them had fled dictatorship and civil war (“D’ou viennent”), but those wars were not represented in the public debate. After all, France had either none, or only a limited military presence or economic interest in those regions.

The issue of sub-Saharan Africans calls attention to the hidden racism that had been officially banned from the public discourse. Indeed, the Gayssot law of 1990 prohibits racist or anti-Semitic public statements. Obviously, the law cannot erase racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. These attitudes continue to be expressed indirectly in polls, leading to reinforcement of the far right parties, notably the National Front.

5 Politics and the Changing Nature of Migrants

Until very recently, (im)migrants from the Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia were practically unheard of in France. Most of the black Africans we could meet were from West Africa, that is Cameroon, Mali, Ivory Coast, or Congo. The arrival of East-Africans is related to the so-called “Arab Spring” and the weakening of the state apparatuses in Egypt and Tunisia between 2011 and 2014, as well as the continuing civil war in Libya, with its subsequent transition into failed state. Indeed, Libya, which used to harbor hundreds of thousands of African immigrants before 2011, has become a hostile place for sub-Saharan Africans. Today, it is not only a transit country used by human traffickers to smuggle Africans to Europe, but also a modern-day slave market with thousands of blacks caught in a web of violence, extortion, rape, and slave labor (Osborne). After Egypt and Tunisia strengthened their border control, Libya has become the only gateway to Europe. Qadhafi, the “King of all African Kings,” who used to hold Libya together with an iron fist, was toppled by the same Europeans who today are blaming Africans for an unacceptable “invasion,” a term constantly used by French politicians.

The migrants in Calais—in particular those from East Africa, with no Francophone tradition—who managed to leave Libya and reach the shores of Italy and other European places have no intention of staying in Italy or France. After a long and dangerous journey in search of the British paradise, they ended up in Calais with no possibility of either moving forward across the Channel, or returning back. Ironically, Calais thus became the most difficult hurdle facing African migrants.

The legal and linguistic barriers became insurmountable for thousands of migrants. Contrary to the Francophone Africans who, as most of them speak French, share a common colonial history with the French and have developed a network of associations and ethnic organizations, those who came from East Africa or Nigeria could rely on only a limited scope of ethnic, national, or family solidarity. Furthermore, although a considerable number of humanitarian organizations contributed time, money, tents, and food to make the situation in Calais more bearable for the migrants and almost a hundred associations were present at one time (Djigo 195–197); none of them was diasporically connected to East Africa or to the former British colonies. In fact, only one organization can be related to sub-Saharan Africa, and six others to North Africa. It should be noted that notwithstanding this, French religious, secular, and political organizations were very active in bringing support to African migrants, operationalizing the real meaning of cosmopolitanism, one which goes beyond the human encounter in time and place. Those organizations try to understand the needs, the expectations, and the dreams of these migrants. At the same time however, the quasi-absence of African organizations operating in Calais reflects not only the absence of East African organizations in France, where they have no diasporic base; it also reflects the absence of solidarity between the well-established Malian, Senegalese, or Ivorian organizations and the asylum-seekers from Anglophone African countries.

Indeed, the absence of government agencies, the negligible efforts of diasporic organizations, and the inability or unwillingness of those migrants to assimilate left them with no political, economic, or cultural support. Progressive or religious organizations involved in the support of Calaisian migrants were facing mounting police brutality, hostility on the part of the local population, and judicial crackdowns (“Like Living”). The police have lately fired tear gas against migrants and pro-migrant activists and prohibited any distribution of food in the camps. In so doing, local authorities have prevented the building of bridges between migrants and the local civil society.

Deprived of their basic rights outside the camps, identifiable by their color, behavior, and clothes, African migrants are facing the openly antagonistic attitude of the security apparatus and the local population. Journalists and observers have reported cases of racism, for example cafés, restaurants, and stores explicitly prohibited for migrants (“Migrants”); the police chasing them in the streets of Calais and ordering them to “*Allez! Allez! Go jungle!*”; and inhabitants hurling racial slurs at them. In 2015, for example, the use of the municipal swimming pool in Calais became restricted to the inhabitants of the city: a clear exclusion of migrants, whose inability

to speak French deprives them of challenging those racist measures, regulations, and attitudes. There is little doubt that the locals' refusal to serve these migrants in public facilities creates an apartheid-like system and a segregated space that causes these migrants run up against an impenetrable frontier. First unable to reach England, the migrants now are unable to get out of the camp.

6 Political Turmoil and the End of French Cosmopolitanism

Calais was a leftist stronghold until 2008, when the communist Mayor Jacky Henin lost the election to a conservative candidate. Henin may have been defeated because he had opened a center funded by the city to help migrants. Actually, many communist leaders, deeply rooted in local French politics, paid the price, not of their affiliation with a declining ideology, but for their financial and political support to immigrants, refugees, and pro-immigration organizations. The election of Nicolas Sarkozy as president of France in 2007 had already signaled a turning point in the immigration policy in France. However, until 2015, the northern region of France, which encompassed Calais in its jurisdiction, was governed by the socialist and the Green parties who acted to mitigate the local anti-(im)migration policy. They created the Réseau des Élus Hospitaliers (a caucus of friendly elected officials) to offer a coherent pro-immigration policy. This network remained weak and unable to react to the rising popular hostility to migration, until both parties have been practically wiped out from the region in the last local elections, held in 2017.

In 2014, the government decided to create a center for migrants to respond to their growing number and rising demands. The British, part of the issue, agreed to finance a barbed wire fence to keep migrants away from the tunnel, with Mayor, Natacha Bouchart, supporting the measure, arguing that it “would empty the city of 80% of its migrants” (Alaux 4). Indeed, since her election in 2008, she has acted to reinforce the antagonism between migrants and local residents. In the national conservative literature, she became the defender and the champion of the people of Calais. Very often, the latter were represented as the “angry people,” “angry residents,” “victimized residents,” or “exasperated residents.” In general, these representations victimized the local population and criminalized the migrants. Ironically, Bouchart, herself is a daughter of an immigrant family (an Armenian father and a Polish mother), which further illustrates the difference between the European and non-European immigrants in France.

Local politicians began to raise questions about sanitary risks, delinquency, and crime associated with migrants in the camps. Referring to the problems of hygiene, the mayor rhetorically formed an association between dirt, insalubrities, and culture and then indirectly associated those issues with Africans. The deputy mayor report-

edly said: “[migrants] are not necessarily bad people, but we have different standards of cleanliness. And it’s not a question of money. I mean there are trash cans, there is running water, there are restrooms in the camp. No, it’s a different culture” (Guenebeaud 6). A resident of Calais makes it clear that the French share little with migrants: “Unfortunately, in their home countries, they have no trash cans. They have no running water, no sidewalks; they don’t have anything. In our country, we are clean, it’s not the same thing” (6). Therefore, from this perspective, migrants, unable to cope with the cultural standards of France, have become the unassimilable others.

The (im)migration question has pushed the political debate towards the right, with the traditional conservative parties now embracing a hardline discourse about migration. Anti-migration ideas that used to provoke a political uproar in France back in the 1980s are today accepted as mainstream. Conservative politicians, including Sarkozy, have understood the political gains to be made out of their radical identity discourse.

France seems to have abandoned its project of becoming a cosmopolitan country. Therefore, even if diversity and multiculturalism seem to be in the scheme of the demographic evolution of French society, cosmopolitanism is fading. Different studies have shown the rising scope of hostility to immigrants. In a poll commissioned by *Valeurs Actuelles* in 2015, approximately 68% of the respondents expressed their hostility towards migrants, including 43% among those who identified themselves with progressive political parties. In 1999, when most of the migrants were from Kosovo, only 35% of those who were polled expressed the same feeling (“Les Français”). Rejection of migrants took a new turn, as more and more people blamed the government not only for opening the doors of the country to foreigners, but also for implementing a social policy favoring migrants over nationals. Indeed, in 2013, 67% of the French polled thought that the government was doing more to protect (im)migrants than the French; in 2006 they constituted only 40% (Lejeune). Politically, this perception has put pressure on the French political elite, which, in general, shifted its discourse to embrace the right-wing extremist ideas. The French political debate, which has avoided referring to French responsibility in toppling the Libyan leader Qadhafi, and the subsequent dismantling of the country’s institutions, which has allowed more than 90% of sub-Saharan African migrants to cross through this country, is focusing on how to reduce illegal immigration and dissuade potential migrants from coming to France.

On a local level, the inexorable progress of the National Front has been obvious in Calais. In this city, the party got 11.5% of the local vote in 1988. In 2002, the figure went up to 18.5%. However, the latest elections, which took place in May 2017, are even more revealing. They took place just months after the heated debate about the “jungle.” In the presidential runoff election, Marine Le Pen, the far right candidate, got 57% of the votes.

7 Conclusion

The question of migration is still plaguing the political debate in France. After the Calais camps had been finally dismantled in October 2016, more than 6400 mostly Sudanese and Eritrean immigrants had to leave the region and join the 450 “Welcome and Orientation” centers scattered all over the country. The police violently removed the last recalcitrants. The socialist government under pressure followed what Eric Besson had said years before: “On the territory of this nation, the law of the jungle cannot endure” (qtd. in Hughes). Some of those migrants seem to have relinquished the idea of going to Great Britain, but most of them have created street camps in Paris (in theory preparing to successfully moving to Great Britain), which are systematically cleared by the police. Xavier Bertrand, the Head of the Hauts-de-France region, where Calais is located, announced recently that migrants were back to the area, but he insisted that he refused to see this happen again: “I don’t like a return back to the Far West age” (“A Calais”). African migrants, wandering the streets of Paris or other cities with a sea connection with Great Britain such as Calais, Caen, etc., call out our attention, thoughts and concern.

Thirty years after I arrived in France, the question of immigration is still a burning topic. The image of potentially dangerous Muslims has replaced the image of North Africans coming to France to benefit from its social welfare system and job market. The invisible African of the 1980s has given way to a special representation: aggregates of refugees who try to enter the country illegally through Italy and Spain in order to join Calais and make their way to Great Britain, with no respect for the cultural, legal, and social codes of French society.

Like most of the immigrants of the 1980s, when I first came to France, I was immediately introduced into a family network that made my integration in French society relatively easy. The black migrants we come across today in train stations, parks, or in Calais are constantly on the road, but turning around aimlessly and hopelessly. No doubt, borders and regulations are becoming stronger. As a result, they are increasingly psychologically and physically deadly. However, the situation is becoming untenable and indefensible. More than ever, what Teresa Hayter wrote back in 2001 seems topical today: “Sooner or later, immigration controls will be abandoned as unworkable, too expensive in suffering and money, too incompatible with the ideals of freedom and justice, impossible to maintain against pressures of globalization” (150). The fight of the nationalist anti-migrant political parties to preserve national identity in France seems to be a rearguard action. Economic rationality and integration, in addition to political interdependency, will make it hard to seal borders.

France’s embrace of liberty, equality, and brotherhood as guiding principles seems to be shaken by a complex social reality and political experience. The question becomes then how to reconcile the harsh regulations and reactions with those ideals. Indeed, in the name of national unity and republicanism, communitarianism and even multiculturalism were rejected. Surely, the compression of space and time, with

the intensification of globalization, offers a better opportunity for cosmopolitanism. For the moment, France is changing rapidly, and any historical change is associated with major cultural and social upheavals. For the time being “cosmopolitan [France] as it is predominately defined in the existing literature, has very little to offer cultural minorities” (Baban and Rygiel 465). The migration experience in Calais, unique in many instances, may call for a “[restoration] of a sense of utopian possibility,” as Pierre Bourdieu wrote (Grass and Bourdieu 66). This utopian possibility is the essence of cosmopolitanism and should not be dismissed as unattainable.

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