

French national report category 5: Migrants

Risks and opportunities in experiences of migration and ethnicity

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The report is organised in five parts

- 1) A discussion of migration and ethnicity
- 2) A brief report on the French situation
- 3) A general discussion of the risk involved in migration
- 4) A study of our main case and other cases
- 5) A general conclusion

1) Migration and Ethnicity

The category 'ethnic minority' doesn't exist in the same way in France as it does, for instance, in Britain or Greece. Officially in the French model we only have the categories 'citizen' or 'foreigner'. The latter comprises two sub-groups: Europeans, entitled to vote in local elections, and non-Europeans who are not entitled to vote in any elections. Of course there are many arguments against such a way of categorising, the first one being the sheer visibility of ethnicity. As N. Glazer and D. P. Moynihan (1975) point out: 'The hope of doing without ethnicity in a society as its subgroups assimilate to the majority group may be as utopian and as questionable an enterprise as the hope of doing without social class in a society' (quoted by P. Simon, 1997). An examination of the French model might reveal that it emerges from 'a republican sociology' (F. Lorcerie, 1994), i.e. not only a sociology unaware of the visibility of ethnicity, but also a conventionalist, state-inspired sociology.

'Republican sociology', whose most outstanding figure is E. Durkheim, is in fact one that challenges 'visibility'. With regard to the visibility of ethnicity, it should be recalled that:

- firstly, the visibility of ethnicity enters into the racist argument to rebut all anti-racist argument. This is probably why the concept of ethnicity, in France as well as in other countries, is always contaminated by elements of racism (C. Guillaumin, 1992). It's also why racism and anti-racism are a diabolical couple that cannot be separated.

- secondly, the visibility of ethnicity loses its power as soon as you go deeply enough into the multiplicity of past and present experiences which particularise an individual and through which he particularises himself.

- thirdly choosing ethnicity as a basis for characterising groups and individuals is not neutral because race (as the hidden substrata of ethnicity), nation and class are the words of a struggle whose outcome will be as crucial in the coming century as it has been in this one. In the leftist tradition, class is still preferred. It can be argued that in the past 20 years in France race discrimination has been a mask for class discrimination (M. Tripier, 1990). In the Paris region, half of all working class people are migrants.

On the other hand, of course, evidence exists that ethnicity, as well as nationality, is a simple and commonly used way of characterising a group and/or an individual and for a group and/or an individual to characterise himself. It is more interesting, therefore, to argue, without recourse to fundamentalism, that ethnicity as well as nationality, is a categorisation existing in daily interactions, and sometimes is a State categorisation too. But not in France. This is not to plead, therefore, for the 'French model'. It is hypocritical, but its hypocrisy is not the same as the British one. In the French situation, one pretends to ignore ethnicity, to make passive (law-based) anti-discrimination policies, and yet practice discrimination in hidden ways (Urmis, 1998). In the British situation, one recognises ethnicity, makes active (affirmative action) anti-discrimination policies, but sustains a post-colonial order with second class citizenship (P. Gilroy, 1987).

It can be argued, for these reasons, that ethnicisation is an outcome of the development of the welfare state. In order to develop anti-discrimination policies, national states have been developing ethnicity-based categorisations (U. Börklund, 1987). But this is a short view. It is a fact that the welfare state is a nation-state. It should be called a social-national-state. Class characterisation and national characterisation have been dominant in the frame of the social-national-state, because work was the basis of socialisation and nation the basis of world competition. The question is whether, in the context of the de-nationalisation of the welfare states, ethnicity will become an important characterisation of, for instance, a European welfare state, challenging both nationality and class (E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, 1995). Obviously these questions go far beyond our report, but we must keep them in mind while studying the general situation and the particular cases.

2) The French situation

It is not possible to review the literature on the subject, for it is enormous and over-determined by political-ideological issues, nor the past and recent history of migrations. We shall only mention the most recent and outstanding survey, conducted by Institut National des Études Démographiques (INED), together with Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE) on the basis of the 1990 census, with a panel of 13,000 individuals. The decision to undertake this survey (M. Triballat, 1975), titled 'Faire France' (the closest translation might be : How Migrants Become French), followed a debate among demographers and sociologists over French hypocrisy, 'the French taboo on the use of origins in the social sciences': how could we complain about inequalities, racism and the political rise of the National Front (a racist and fascist party) without any reliable, scientific information on migrants, their past, and their present situation? Effectively the census, as well as the other sources of information, ignore the questions of origin, of ethnicity, and only deal with nationality and citizenship, while the most burning question in the political debate is about the integration of those who became French by virtue of the *jus soli* (1851) but are still considered, because of their colour or accent, to be foreigners, under foolish names like 'beur' (the reverse of 'rebeu', itself the reverse of 'arabe'), or 'second generation'.

This 'schizophrenia' (M. Triballat) reveals itself in the official and common idea of 'integration'¹, while the French model, in fact, is aimed toward assimilation, i.e. the convergence of behaviours, the decrease of specific character, the blending of populations. The origins of this schizophrenia can be found very far back in history, at least as far back as Louis the XIVth, with the Fronde of the French regions against the centralised state. It then found a source in the long period of internal migrations from all French regions, feeding patriotism and nationalism with elements of all regional traditions, in a first republican melting pot achieved in the First World War, but re-opened between the wars with foreigners from Poland, Italy and Spain. It was re-opened again after the Second World War with foreigners from Portugal, Maghreb, Turkey, Asia and Africa. At every period the French melting pot (G. Noiriel, 1988) has been of a rough kind, made of poverty, violence, discrimination and racism. At every period, the dominant feeling, also expressed in politics, has been the fear of France disintegrating. The aim to assimilate reveals, therefore, rather the desire not to integrate others, but to avoid the danger by making them invisible. Unhappily, skin colour cannot be changed. In that sense, the survey undertaken by INED can be said to open a new era of thinking about migrations, at least in the field of social science and decision-making.

We have in France 4.1 million migrants, i.e. people born abroad. 1.3 million are now of French nationality, therefore full citizens. The survey makes very clear the process of assimilation and some features of discrimination. It also shows the changes in migrations. The assimilation is visible in the private sphere: language, religion, marriage, sociability - as well as in study or work - and in politics. The first criterion is time: the earlier the migration, the greater the assimilation; the children of migrants, whatever their origin, religion, or language, behave and think like French people of the same age and social milieu. The second criterion is the socio-economic context of the migration: migrants from the Maghreb are less and less frequently uneducated peasants and ever more frequently urban and educated, while Portuguese migrants are still very often working class; Turkish migrants are uneducated peasants, Asians are upper class; migrants from Africa come from both peasant and upper class backgrounds.

The third criterion is political, linked to the French colonial past: Algerians face more discrimination than Moroccans or Tunisians. On the other hand, migrants from countries without historical links to France assimilate more slowly, as is the case of Turkish migrants, or of migrants from South East Asia. These three criteria allow us to understand the situation of the different migrant's groups without referring to the question of ethnicity.

3) The risk of migration

To emigrate is risky, and often it is dangerous. The fewer the resources, of all sorts, the more dangerous. But the risk presents also a chance, an opportunity and even, in many cases, a solution to a problem, whatever this problem may be. To emigrate is to take the risk of being in a risky situation in order to find a solution to a problem. To emigrate will be a solution if resources allow the migrant to cope with the risk, face the danger and to overcome the risky situation.

¹ The concept of integration is owed to E. Durkheim. It is an equivalent of our modern 'cohésion sociale'. The level of integration in Durkheim's theory depends on the coherence and density of the relationships between social groups. Therefore it is collective. In contrast, the current meaning of integration is individual, it is the will and ability of an individual to be a member of society.

If the risks of emigrating are of an ambiguous nature, so also is the case of ethnicity itself. Ethnicity can be a resource as well as a handicap. It is a resource when your origins allow you to find support in your community, but community can also be a constraint from which it may be difficult and risky to emancipate oneself. On the other hand, ethnicity can be a handicap, if the community to which you belong is stigmatised in the country to which you emigrate; but it can reveal itself as a resource when you find, in our complex society, allied persons fighting discrimination, or when you can distinguish yourself from the other members and become a leader.

The ambiguous nature of risk and ethnicity is related to the ambiguous perception of the stranger, of the foreigner. Threatening and attractive. Both are also reflected in State policies. Nation-states want foreigners in periods of labour shortage, as in France in the years 1945-1975. And they want to avoid migrations in periods of labour redundancy. Migration has been made very difficult in France since 1975. The only ways to enter France legally are through political asylum, family regrouping (for those who have been working in France since 1975) and marriage². And it is only under the pressure of activist groups that the government has passed anti-discrimination laws. Until the 80s the only anti-discrimination measures were founded in the old, anti-nazi based, articles of the 1945 constitution.

Social policies toward migrants were set up in the 50s with the general idea that migrants, mostly individuals, were in France for a short period and would go back after a period of work. Instead of defining an actuarial risk and an answer to this risk, the policies were aimed at meeting the basic needs of single male workers, mostly working class: hostels for single migrant workers were the first provision for migrants, together with the creation of a fund, Le fonds d'Action Sociale (FAS), for sending money home for the children of migrant workers, entitled to receive family allowances because of their work but at a lower rate, when the children were abroad, the difference being used to develop language courses for the migrant workers. When the children of migrants began to be born in France, when families began to arrive, this specific, discriminative policy was extended to the entire migrant population, while migrants, because of laws and because of their work, were entitled, but not entirely³, to the same welfare benefits as French people. In summary then, there is no actuarial risk associated with migration. Foreigners participate in the welfare state for one thing, and, for the other, depend on specific social policies aimed towards migrants⁴. In other words, even if migration is a risky affair, there is not any actuarial risk in migration.

4. The cases

² As quoted by M. Triballat, this situation has encouraged the traditional marriage organised by parents with a consequent rise in dowries; young French men and women from migrant origins (Turkish, Maghrébian), being pressed to take a partner from the country of the parents, thus restricting the tendency to 'mixed' marriages.

³ As foreigners they are not entitled to several minimum benefits like old age pensions or handicapped minimum benefit. They cannot receive a pension if they have gone abroad, etc.

⁴ There are for instance specific policies toward 'Harkis', i.e. Algerians enlisted in the French army during the war, then coming to France after the independence, but not becoming French.

We shall see now, in the biographies of our interviewees, how they have coped with the risk of migration. We will discover how this risk is faced and talked about in the French context.

4.1. Main case: Mercia. The strategy of the fairy tale

Mercia (aged 48) came from Spain to France at the age of 21 and still lives here. She wants to write her autobiography, because, says she, there are ‘interesting things’ in it. As a witness of her own life, presenting herself for more than an hour, the interesting thing, she explains, is how difficult it is to succeed at the professional and social level when you are a woman, uneducated, a foreigner, somewhat naive, sentimental and harmless. The self-presentation is completely devoted to her life in France. In answer to the interviewer's questions about the Spanish period, the interesting aspect turns out to be very different - it is the story of a difficult childhood, youth and coming of age, a story of violence and guilt. While telling her Spanish story, Mercia gives information about the French period and throws new light on it. This very rich story, interrupted in the middle of the interview by a few seconds of emotional breakdown, mixed laughter and tears, is not miserable or populist, but rather proceeds by alternating information, anecdotes and feelings, funny or tragic, but is always emotionally coloured and almost never neutral. When neutral, they reveal themselves to be in fact problematic. This is the case in particular of one turning point in Mercia's life: the departure to France.

When talking about going to France, in her first self presentation, Mercia just mentions how she came to France, like many young adults like her, to work due to the lack of jobs in Spain. And also, she adds, in order to study because, having been working from the age of 12, she didn't go to school very often. With regard to learning, she adds an odd remark: ‘to learn things that one didn't have the opportunity to learn there’. Learning is effectively a leitmotiv of Mercia's lived life, as well as of her current aspirations. But more than knowledge or skill, learning means learning what life is, who others are, who she herself is. And leaving Spain, far more than work, even more than study, there appears in the second part of the interview the theme of escaping a problematic childhood and youth, a risk taken to escape a situation she cannot either solve or tolerate, as a decision taken very quickly, thus tipping her life in a new direction. In order to understand this departure to France and its followings, we shall follow the biographical path from the beginning.

Mercia is the eldest child of a family of ten from northern Spain. Her father, a son of farmers, left the farm to become a miner and then, around the time Mercia was born (1950), a policeman (at the lowest level) in Franco's police. Her mother owned a café. Mercia was not raised by her parents but, until the age of eight, by her maternal grandmother. It is an idyllic period in her narrative. She is ‘the spoiled child’. She calls and thinks of her grandmother as her mother. Her story, says she, is Heidi's story, except for the fact that the role of grandfather is held by her grandmother. The first black episode in the scenario - she reveals it as the first turning point in her life - is when she is taken by the parents, ‘removed from her own life’ she says. Answering questions about her mother, Mercia explains her resentment towards her mother, who she judges as responsible for this rupture, a mother who never said ‘I love you’, a mother who was hostile to Mercia's first love affair, who unfairly called her a prostitute, and who does not notify her when her grandmother dies. When narrating this turning point, i.e. her departure from her grandmother's home, Mercia explains that it's actually her father who had been the one to decide to take her away.

This turning point occurred when her father's brother, in 1958, came to Spain for a visit from Venezuela where he had emigrated for political reasons. What happened between the father, Franco's policeman, and the uncle, a political refugee? In Mercia's recollection, probably reconstructed through another narrative (from her father?), her father and uncle attended a big party at the farm with the whole family gathering around the uncle. The uncle notices with disapproval that Mercia is dressed in a peasant manner, with the long shirt peasants traditionally wear; sitting in the uncle's beautiful convertible car when they go for a ride; the discussion about Mercia is started by her uncle and concluded by her father's decision to take her away. Mercia doesn't seem aware in the interview of political conflicts in Spain, and she is not astonished at the friendly discussion between father and uncle. Neither does she mention any political dimension in the conflict between her father's and her mother's families, conflict in which she later will be a victim. She has to hide from one family when meeting the other. Mercia explains she is not interested in politics because while people argue about politics they don't work and they don't make things change.

Work is the way to freedom for her. When she arrives, aged eight, at her parent's home, Mercia has a sister and three brothers, a father already sick (and severely alcoholic), a mother with a café to run, and very little money. For Mercia, it means domestic work from six in the morning, then school, then domestic work again until late at night. Instead of caring for her siblings, she is happy to work at the age of 12 as a cleaning lady in the neighbourhood, so small that she needs to stand on a footstool to clean the dishes. According to her narrative, she decided as soon as she left her grandmother to leave her parents. Her mother was not affectionate, her father was nice; strict but affectionate, he offers her candies, but he drinks too much and often. Mercia robs money from her employer, not to put in her mother's purse - although her mother often doesn't know how to feed the children - but to give it to her father, who drinks it, comes home drunk, beats the children, including Mercia, beats and abuses her mother because she doesn't want more children, although she does have one more. Perhaps I was wrong, Mercia thinks now, for she has often re-assessed her past life, but maybe, she thinks, I gave money to father so that he wouldn't beat mother. There is no resentment against her father in Mercia's narrative, nor against the other men she will suffer from. She could be said to be naive, as she says of herself, but she is not. Aged 15, she gets involved with a young man of her age in the neighbourhood, they are together for five years. They plan to marry when her boyfriend comes back from military service, but she decides to remain a virgin because of her Catholic faith she says, and she refuses to have a sexual relationship with him. While her boyfriend is on military service, her uncle comes again from Venezuela with a friend, a Venezuelan, married, a fair man. He is interested in her, wants her to study, to become a nurse-assistant. He speaks to Mercia's father and offers to take her to Venezuela in order for her to be trained. Her father refuses, he tells Mercia that this man only wants to rape her. Mercia doesn't believe it and still doesn't - she and he were just born for each other, everybody could see it. When she met him several years later, his wife was so jealous, as was Mercia's husband, but there was never any idea of sex in their idyllic relationship, and it has been her 'secret garden' since, her 'secret love'. He told her he would have married her if she had remained in Spain, but her boyfriend was returning home from military service. He demands a sexual relationship with her but she refuses. A female friend of Mercia who had emigrated to France comes for a visit. Mercia says she wants to go to France. She asks her boyfriend to follow but he says no. She stops feeling

guilty about him. 'I decided to go on an impulse'. Thus emigration for Mercia is as well as a solution a risk.

1971. Mercia is in Paris, crying for hours at the window of her friend's room, looking at the sad, rainy roofs of the big city. And the friend's boyfriend is harassing her to the point of abuse. Working is not only a need, in order to send money home, but also a joy. She is caring for a baby so cute that she feels like an affectionate mother, and cleaning the house at the same time. But the couple who employ her are weird. The man hangs around her almost naked, then entirely. And he screams at her when she doesn't understand orders because of her bad French, despite the language course. A new employer has to be found. No problem for once, neither with the couple, Franco-American, nor with the child, a three year old boy. She can breath. Instead of attending the language courses when she has some free time, she goes dancing at 'Le Bataclan', a famous dance hall in popular Paris, frequented by many Spanish and French people. She meets a Spaniard who belongs to a group of young communists who mocks her: since coming to Paris, she is 10 kilos heavier and the man mocks (and touches) 'her big ass'. Mercia hates him and she stops going dancing to avoid him. But she feels trapped in her employer's house. The boy goes to school during the daytime now. Mercia applies for a part-time job at the supermarket in the neighbourhood. The boss is of Spanish origin. He engages her as a cashier.

Mercia goes for a visit to Spain, comes back with her sister and takes her dancing. The man is at the front door, has a beautiful leather jacket, and looks sad. His girlfriend has left him. He doesn't tease anybody anymore. They speak. He reveals himself to be a fair, educated, literate kind of man. They get together. Virginity seems no longer to be an issue. She's pregnant by the time she marries and the first child, a girl, is born the same year, 1974. Mercia is 24 and her husband 26. He arrived in France at the age of 14 with his parents, brother and sister. Her husband works in his father's small masonry firm. Emigrating has been a painful rupture for him because he was playing football for Madrid and could have become a professional footballer. Her husband's parents are not affectionate with Mercia. They had wanted the child to be a boy while Mercia wanted to have a girl. But, she says, she let them persuade her. When the baby was born, at the hospital, and the husband's parents put the baby on Mercia's abdomen, the umbilical cord not yet cut, she realises it's a girl and closes eyes and refuses to look at her. After re-assessment of her life, she realises how wrong she was and therefore feels guilty again; later she talks about it with her daughter who urges mother not to worry about it, but Mercia is sure it's too late, the baby did not receive the love she deserved from her mother. It is not clear, in fact, that Mercia's rejection is due to the husband's family's persuasion, because, in the first self presentation, she showed herself to be a good mother to the girl, a mother who decided to leave her job at the supermarket and take another job as a concierge in order to care for the baby at home. And it is only in the second report that she blames herself for not being a good mother.

It does not happen with the second child, a boy, born in 1978. Again Mercia leaves her job. In the meantime, effectively, she has stopped being a concierge to work as a cashier again, full time, in another supermarket outside Paris, where she settled with her husband. Her husband's parents have retired and gone back to Spain. Having left her job to care for the second child, she starts sewing dresses for her daughter. She dislikes sewing, something her mother had wanted her to learn when she was a child. But she is looking for things to do at home. The idea came during a visit to Spain. She liked the Spanish traditional-folkloric dresses. She wonders if she would be able to make them. With the

help of a Spanish friend she succeeds. Soon, at school, other parents want to know where her daughter gets her dresses; they understand Mercia does sewing so they ask her to make minor alterations. As soon as her son is able to walk, Mercia looks for a new job. She is engaged as a finisher, through a job advertisement, but quickly gets bored with it; she wants to make dresses, and, through another advertisement, presents herself at the shop of a famous ladies' tailor in Paris.

Here begins a new phase of the fairy tale. To demonstrate her skill, as she has no official qualification, she is asked to sew a very complicated muslin coat. The outcome is a catastrophe. But instead of turning Mercia out, the tailor reveals himself to be helpful and asks his assistant to teach Mercia. From then on begins for Mercia what will remain the best period of her life. She is making beautiful dresses for rich, powerful, famous people from Paris and abroad, under the benevolent eye of the tailor, something of a god for her, she says, 'my master', rich, intelligent, handsome but, however, misleading because - she is informed by her colleagues- he is homosexual.

But the job doesn't satisfy Mercia's ambition. As soon as she is skilled, she decides to open her own workshop, i.e. to create her own firm, in order to design and make dresses for other tailors and one day have a collection under her own name. She settles outside Paris in the neighbourhood of her home, engages workers, designers and sewers, becomes influential in her small city, meets the local politicians and every year gives a show of new designs. Further evidence of her strength is that she becomes her husband's employer. At the point when she created her firm, her husband was the owner of the small masonry firm his father had created. Instead of being the wife-secretary of her husband's firm, as is traditional in many craftsman couples, she not only creates her own firm, but decides it is too much work to run two firms within the family and her husband accepts the closure of his firm in order to become the agent, commercial traveller and errand boy of Mercia's firm. The children go to school, with success; both of them at the moment of the interview are undertaking university degrees.

Is it Mercia's naivety or the brazen rule of capitalism? In any case the firm reveals itself precarious due to lack of capital, dishonest clients, pressed suppliers, inefficient wage earners and inflexible tax collectors, and so the firm slowly sinks and Mercia has to close it after five years. The ghost of poverty appears again - of being expelled from the house. The marriage runs into difficulties. Here is the third turning point in Mercia's life. Friends of the good years reveal themselves to be unhelpful and politicians who were offering support do not respond to Mercia's requests. Parents were right when they said: 'you're only worth the money you own.' Mercia falls into depression. She goes to a psychiatrist, who takes Mercia's apparent naivety into account. He asks her to make the list of her real friends. She realises she can only rely on her husband and children. Her daughter offers Mercia a dog. Is it time to think about returning to Spain? From the beginning this is her husband's project, whose parents returned as soon as they retired. Obviously Mercia is and will remain Spanish. Spain is her home and her roots. Mercia has remained a tenant and didn't try to become a homeowner in France. She judges French people as sad and unfriendly, and when she is sad herself, she says: 'I am becoming French'. But precisely because family means no more than husband and children, and although 'one can never know', Mercia will not go back. She has seen the disappointment of migrants going back to Spain in order to find their idyllic pasts. And children should not suffer a rupture in their studies. Mercia already foresees that the children will marry French partners, and that she and her husband, when retired, will divide their time between Spain and France.

In this difficult period, she will not go casually - it would be like emigrating again. She tells her husband: 'go, and we will come later'. But he doesn't.

At this moment of professional failure, Mercia re-assesses her past, reconstructing her biography, reconsidering her childhood and migrant experiences, again with guilt - because she wasn't such a good mother, she was too much involved in the firm, not caring enough for the children (good events in her life are due to God; bad events to herself) - and with nostalgia too, and self compassion because at the age of 45 she has never had what she longed for, i.e. romantic love. She was never in love with her husband who was too tied to his mother's apron strings and she never managed to live her romantic love with the Venezuelan doctor. But she feels hope too - that she will one day prove her parents wrong about the value of money and show them that love is important too.

What lies at the heart of the crisis? Work, as always. Mercia is engaged again as a finisher and plans to open a shop like the one where she is employed but she has no capital. Another fairy tale! The reason why, she says, she believes in God and stays faithful. At the shop she meets a rich, beautiful, aristocratic, helpful woman who belongs to a very rich and very Catholic family (they care for abandoned children), who offers her financial help to open the shop. Once again a dishonest man who she wants to take as a partner in the shop tries to take advantage of Mercia's naivety. But this time she realises it and stops the partnership. But she cannot open the shop. The helpful family doesn't want the money back, so she invests it in the new firm her husband is creating. Despite the lack of a romantic love, she is resolved to 'build something with him'.

Conclusions from Mercia's case

In Mercia's life, as in others, migration is a risk, but yields in the end more solutions than further problems. It can be judged by the fact that welfare services and provision are completely absent. Migration is a means to escape poverty and unemployment or bad working conditions, but also to escape traditional family life in a context of conflict, violence and suffering, both internal and external. Clearly the risk of social exclusion is there, in the sense that a nuclear family is something different, less supportive, than the large, traditional family. Mercia has few contacts with her siblings, even with those who have settled temporarily or permanently in France. But her destiny is also congruent with the larger changes, in Spain as in France, and in family models. And it is precisely, compared with the destiny of Mercia's siblings, the expression of her special case, as the eldest, as the one raised by grandmother. Heidi's story may end as Mercia wishes it to end, at this moment of restructuring the past and foreseeing the future: Mercia is not aiming any more towards social success. She wants to have time to think about herself, to learn, to learn how to write in French too, and maybe to write her own story. And the other aspiration is more like a dream; it is the dream of creating a charitable organisation to help abused children. In her dreaming Mercia seems faithful to her own life story. But she is also modelling herself on the most recent model she has found: the aristocratic, rich, Catholic and helpful family. She reveals herself once more as less naive than as easily influenced (the price of an open mind) by powerful, rich and helpful people, like the tailor she imitated in her firm, the shopowner, the couple of parents, the Venezuelan platonic lover, the Venezuelan uncle with his convertible car, and probably her father with his affectionate manners. In that sense, the conclusion is not yet written because Mercia has not found herself yet; and the charity project, despite its apparent psychoanalytic origins in her childhood, is probably more real than the fairy tales in books which are often

demystified. Learning is multi-faceted itself: from her different employers or models (for example Mercia's aspiration to paint or play the piano), or opening up a political and social history in which she is a figure?

4.2. Other cases

Kemal: the strategy of transferring the stigma

Kemal, aged 25, was born in Konya (Turkey) in 1973. His father and mother emigrated to Germany in 1979, following their parents, who emigrated in the 60s, then they went to France, together with Kemal's younger brother and sister. Kemal, the eldest and most beloved son, remained in Turkey with his mother's parents, under the protection of the uncle, a police inspector. Kemal's parents used to come home every year for a holiday, his father bringing electronic games for his son. Kemal is a good pupil and his tutors allow him the freedom to do a variety of things, like going up into the mountains, hang around by himself, 'disappear'. Kemal shows a strong cruel streak: throwing a cat from the tenth floor in order to verify that cats always come down on their feet. Then, the cat still being alive, throwing it in the river. Pouring acid onto a rabbit to test if it is true that acid can make a hole in anything. Indeed, obsessed with scientific experiment, Kemal is under strict control in chemistry lessons, where he on several occasions mixed dangerous preparations to the point of explosion. Nevertheless, he fails two exams, taken at the age of 14 in order to get selected for a career in the police (inspired by his uncle) or the career of a pilot (inspired by his interest in electronics, due to his father). Kemal hates failure - it makes him 'irritated' i.e. ready to do something foolish. This failure is one reason for emigrating, the other one being, as he says in the first self-presentation report, suffering from his parents and sibling's absence. Kemal calls his father, tells him he cannot stay in Turkey and he wants to come to France, otherwise he will stop doing any work. Kemal is proud to recount how he threatened his father.

At the age of 14, his father having asked the French authorities for the family to be re-reunited, Kemal is admitted to France, learns French, follows a professional career path in electronics and computing, and successfully joins the university where he is awarded a BA (licence) in computing. At the same time, he starts working as an administrator in an association supporting the Turkish community. Kemal has no worries about his future; he thinks of himself as fully integrated as he hoped to be. Kemal's brother has started his own firm in the building trade, a traditional sector for migrants, where his father is also now working having been a wage earner in the same sector. Kemal's sister finished school successfully and will probably enter university.

The successful story of Kemal can be seen as the result of a strategy undertaken by the father and continued by the son. His father spent two years in Germany and observed the fate of Turkish migrants there. When arriving in France, because he had official papers, his father, despite his low status, settles in a district of Paris where no Turkish people live. This is an unusual path for Turkish migrants, but may derive from his German experience and also the higher status (compared to other Turkish migrants) of Kemal's family in Turkey.

At school, there is only one other Turkish pupil. Kemal stands out. He remembers being pointed at. His French is bad and Kemal is laughed at. In the beginning, he remains mute, arouses the compassion of the teachers who help him after school, then of female friends

who behave like mothers. Kemal claims he is usually excluded from the parties his schoolmates organise. He becomes the nice Turkish guy, a guy you can talk to in order to learn about Turkey - it being a country of cruelty, a country where your arm is cut if you commit an offence, a country which oppresses its Kurdish minority after having exterminated the Armenian one (according to Kemal, all these arguments belong to the same category of stereotypes). But soon he becomes friends with a good 250 of the 400 students in his college and builds a relationship with a French girl during the four years.

Kemal's strategy is to give a good image of himself by transferring the stigma to the other Turkish migrants and moreover to migrants in general. In his opinion and experience, the other Turkish migrants have problems because they live together, they don't integrate. The Turkish boys he knows arrived in France the same time as himself, left school at 16, have no job, no opportunities, no French friends, can hardly speak French and do not know much about the history and current reality of Turkey. While he, thanks to his father's strategy, can in the same period of time participate in French society and still not forget his origins. As an active member of a Turkish association, he is teaching the children of the community how to understand and value their origins and how to make choices between Muslim and French culture. Mutapha Kemal's portrait is hanging in the association (where the interview is taking place) and we can be sure that Kemal is ready to give thorough explanations of the Armenian and Kurdish story, and remain 'neutral', in the best Kemalist tradition, about religion. Giving the stereotypic example of the contradiction between religion and science in terms of human origins among the apes, Kemal explains he will let the children make their choice between the two theories. During a discussion about Turkish migrants he develops the official and common theory about migrants in general, i.e. migrants being unable to make a choice between two cultures, anomie (drugs and alcohol) being the outcome of this inability. His pride in being Turkish appears when comparing Turkish migrants to others, mainly Maghrebians, whom he blames for having completely forgotten their roots, and of having been completely perverted by modern culture.

Kemal's case illustrates well the flimsiness of the culturalist theory. When a stereotype is positive, he takes advantage of it (like 'we (the Turkish) are not afraid of working hard'). Obviously integrated, over-integrated it could be said, Kemal has profited from his better status. With regard to Turkey, his loyalty is clear: he refused to become French despite the fact it could enable him to enter the military sectors in which he wanted to work. Nevertheless, since coming to France in the late 80s ten years ago, he's only been to Turkey three times. He misses it, would like to go more often, would like maybe to live there, but his projects, professional and matrimonial, are in France. Kemal's parents want him to marry now - they could probably get a big dowry if Kemal would accept marriage to a Turkish woman - but Kemal has already declared: 'when I want, who I want, where I want'. The last item, the 'where', is probably the only thing that can distinguish Kemal from any young Frenchman.

Sharmen: the strategy of security

Sharmen, 31, is the oldest child of a middle class Malaysian family of six children. The grandparents on her mother's side are Chinese refugees, her grandfather a Buddhist and her grandmother a Christian. Her mother is a Buddhist. Her father's side is Catholic, while the majority of Malaysia are Muslim. Her father is the concessionary in Malaysia for Japanese cars. He has a reasonable amount of money, though not enough really to offer

study in western countries for his children. But Sharmen's narrative begins at the moment her brother - a diplomat - offers to take Sharmen to France for three years of study, when he is posted to the Malaysian embassy in Paris in 1987 when Sharmen is 20.

Sharman's narrative begins at the moment an unhappy love affair ended. But through the questions of the interviewer, we learn what happened before. Sharmen's father was strict but reliable; Sharmen would have loved to feel secure in his arms, but he was not affectionate. Her mother was obsessed with gambling, playing cards day and night, and Sharmen, as the eldest, had to care for the younger siblings while her mother's mother, the Christian, was caring for the house, food and cleaning. Sharmen's most outstanding memory of childhood is walking in the night with the siblings in order to find her mother. Her grandmother died when Sharmen was 12 and Sharmen became Christian like her. She's been under God's protection since then.

It's clear then that going to France is not only an opportunity to study but also to escape an unsatisfying situation. Long before this opportunity occurs, Sharmen has started to work in order to save money, as a clerical assistant. Arriving in Paris with her uncle and aunt, she goes to the Catholic University but leaves because she says, she is not very intelligent, too slow and not interested in intellectual matters. Her aunt suggests learning dress designing. It is not Sharmen's desire, because she rejects the idea of sewing, but she accepts and discovers the nice side of it - rich dresses for rich people. Her father doesn't have enough money to pay for Sharmen so she works part-time in a Chinese restaurant and then finds a job in a cabaret, where she is the assistant to a comedian. The artistic manager of the cabaret is tall, handsome and rich. Sharmen falls in love, has a secret affair with him, then, five years later, against the advice of the whole family, they marry. In the meantime -it was for him, to impress him, she says- Sharmen has become a dress designer, opened her own shop and workshop and is working hard. Once married, she slowly realises her husband is changing. She eventually discovers that he is having a love affair elsewhere. Her dream is falling apart. The shop business is decaying. Her husband doesn't help. She has to close the shop and start as a wage earner again. In 1997, ten years after meeting him, they separate. He lets her go. They are going through the process of divorce at the moment, but the family doesn't know.

Because of the divorce, Sherman has re-examined some of her past. She thinks her mistake was to believe in a love that turned out to be untrue, and also to desire social success and money. Nevertheless, when speaking of her aspirations, she is still oriented almost entirely towards the idea of finding a man, even if less striking than the first and only one she had before, creating a family and devoting herself to a family. Consequently it can be argued that this rupture is only the first turning point. The whole story has little to do with migration or with exclusion. Everything indicates that Sharmen has emigrated without being conscious of doing so, because she is entirely caught up in her love affair. She says she misses her family, but she went back only once, and then only an opportunity to have a quarrel with her mother. When things go wrong, she thinks she should have remained in Malaysia. She will probably remain in France, but the decision has not been taken, and the rupture of her marriage has not provided the opportunity to take it. It could be said that she is not yet a migrant.

Seydou: the strategy of balance

Seydou, 53, was born in 1945 in a village in south Mauritania, near Mali's border. He belongs to the group of Soninke people, living on the river Senegal, in Senegal, Mali and Mauritania. They are a people with a mixed economy of agriculture and trading, with a long tradition of men living away from the village for months to trade and bring the goods and wealth that agriculture cannot give. His parents belong to the most famous family of the village, the one who created the village a very long time ago, and give to the village its traditional headmen.

Seydou is the eldest in the family. He went to school in Mauritania up to the end of primary school. Then, aged 19, he started the journey to France in the family tradition, with two uncles in Paris waiting for him. He had to work in Senegal as a well digger, then as a domestic (a so-called 'boy') for a rich family of civil servants while the uncles were saving money in France for his boat ticket. He arrived in Paris in 1966, and worked for the Paris local authority as a dustman until 1968, then resigned, having participated in the May 1968 movement and been an activist in the union, and been persecuted for this reason. He had settled, like many of the single Soninke migrants, in a hostel for single migrants. There, as he explains, the community life was strong but the living conditions awful. It is not surprising, therefore, that, after a few months in his new job as an unqualified worker in a big factory, he contracted tuberculosis. He went to hospital, recovered, and went to work in another factory on the assembly line.

In 1970 his parents proposed the idea of an engagement with a woman in the village and he accepted, returned home for a year, married there, came back to France and worked as an adjuster, sending money home as he had from the beginning. From then on he goes back to the village every two years. He undertakes professional training as an electrician, gets his professional degree, but again faces discrimination because his employer wants him to work at the level of his skill but doesn't want to pay the same wage as he does to a French worker for the same task. He rebels, resigns and finds another job in the textile sector, as a shop assistant. In the meanwhile a girl and then a boy are born. In 1986 tuberculosis returns and his employer is going to close the workshop. Seydou asks for his family to be allowed to join him, and this is granted before he's dismissed. His wife comes first, then the children follow when he's taken on by Drancy's (a small city in the north of Paris) local authority and gets adequate housing. The Mayor, a communist, had been helpful because of Seydou's political commitment and the discrimination he had suffered.

Three more children are born subsequently. The eldest girl is handicapped at school because of her level in French. She is following her class normally now. Seydou lives in an apartment, but still goes to the hostel to meet other Soninke people, still sends money home, for the marriage of his brothers and to invest in their trading business, in land and in cattle. He thinks of himself as somebody with two families and is proud and happy about it. He participates in the co-operative created by Soninke migrants to feed the village. They have also created and partly funded (together with State funds and volunteer organisations' s funds) a health centre and an irrigation project. His plan, as that of many other migrants, is to be back in Mauritania when he's retired, when he will get from the State 'the death's money' as they say, not enough money to be wealthy in France, but enough to have 'a little happiness' in Africa. Seydou knows that the children will not necessarily want to follow their parents to Africa, it is a chance for them to have two cultures, but it is not the most important thing. The most important thing is that children continue to contribute to the collective project, to commit themselves to Africa as a whole

and the village in particular. As a Muslim, his honour derives from participating financially in the projects. As an African, his pride lies in belonging to a poor community but one characterised by solidarity.

Seydou's commitment is not only to Africa. In the neighbourhood of the hostel, in another small communist city of northern Paris, Seydou belongs to local support groups dealing with the authorities to facilitate relationships with migrants, to fight racism and discrimination, including racism between migrant communities. The city is involved in development projects in Senegal as well. Seydou explains therefore, very consciously, how important it is to balance individual and collective interests (this is why, while not refusing to answer questions about his private life, Seydou is not prepared for individual introspection), as well as French and Mauritanian investments. Seydou's commitment is the outcome of his peculiar position, as the eldest son of a family whose responsibility in the village is high.

In Seydou's case, to conclude, it can be said that discrimination and racism are not strong enough to create social exclusion because working entitled him to healthcare while he was ill with tuberculosis, and will entitle him to a pension, even if at a low level (work is also the centre of self-presentation in his narrative, organised as a chronological account of his successful jobs). This allows us to imagine the social exclusion that occurs when work opportunities vanish, but also when migration is stopped by State decisions that not only make the life of migrants more precarious, but also send African villages like those of the Soninke people back to worse poverty.

Ahmed: the strategy of ambivalence

Ahmed, born in 1968, is the eldest of five children of a Kabyle family. His father, a grocer, was in France from 1956 to 1962 (the year of independence for Algeria), and a member of the FLN (the National Liberation Front). His mother died of cancer in 1993.

Ahmed came to France at the age of 21. His father was against this decision. We don't know exactly why Ahmed decided to come to France. He had created his own firm (electrical) and had three employees. He explains that at the 'bled' (the village) there were many things you couldn't get, many things you couldn't do, like drinking alcohol, or going out with a girl, or rather, he says more precisely, you could do it but you had to hide, or suffer stigmatisation.

Ahmed arrived with a regular passport at Marseilles, where his aunt lives, then went to Paris where he started working in the electricity sector. He explains he remained in Paris because of the friends from 'le bled' he has in Paris. In 1992, the government voted in the Pasqua law. At that same moment, Ahmed was requested by his father to go to 'le bled' because his mother was sick. Ahmed went and his mother died. After two months, Ahmed leaves 'le bled', not for France because he has no visa, but for Italy, and enters France by train without any official papers. He therefore has remained in an illegal situation.

Despite this illegal situation, Ahmed tries somehow successfully to live a 'normal' life. He has an apartment in his own name, in an area of social housing north of Paris, where others from 'le bled' are living. He has a bank account, the only paper in his name, from

the time of his first stay in France. He is doing business⁵ under the name of an official firm, to the boss of which he gives a 10 per cent commission because he cannot be officially a proper owner. He has therefore no problem for work or money. He goes out at night, always manages, when checked by police, to find a cover story. He has many friends, not only from Algeria or the Maghreb. His girlfriend is Catholic, of Portuguese origin, while he regards himself as Muslim, by tradition and not by faith, not praying, just behaving like others during the Ramadan period.

Ahmed's only apparent problem is his lack of official papers. But many other problems are linked with this objective situation. Having a clandestine side to one's life is not so easy. It deprives you of a normal public life, of citizenship. Ahmed has been arrested several times and the neighbours have been informed. But he told no one, except the friends of 'le bled', about his situation; therefore others probably believe he is not a respectable man. Eventually he is obliged to hide, this being precisely the reason why he decided to leave Algeria. But more seriously this clandestine situation operates as a situation where things are hidden from himself as well as from others. Ahmed tells us that his girlfriend doesn't know about his situation and that anyway he is not going to marry her⁶. Who is he going to marry? Ahmed has had the opportunity for a convenience marriage, a marriage with a French woman⁷ in order to become French himself. For 30,000 F, which he could afford. But he refused, for he wants his marriage to be a real one, a marriage to create a family, to have children. Ahmed says he will marry the woman for love with no regard for her origin, nationality or religion. But at the same time he worries about the children. How will they be educated? In the French tradition or in the tradition of 'le bled', that is the Muslim tradition?

This ambiguity regarding his matrimonial future is also detectable with regard to his migration project. Ahmed declares he will return to Algeria next year, as soon as the political situation is secure, because he misses his family and because he feels so good there. But he also declares that it is impossible for him to start a life there: his friends are married now and he doesn't know people any more. Ahmed suffers this situation deeply. He feels himself to be in a tunnel, unable to see the future. This is indeed the objective situation. Ahmed could be expelled to Algérie at any time. But it is also a subjective situation in that it allows him not to make a decision about where and who to be in the future. In a way Ahmed could be accused of irresponsibility. But it should be said here that restrictive laws like the Pasqua law are precisely what blocks the future. But instead the restrictive law prevents young migrants like Ahmed from moving from one side to the other of the Mediterranean sea, a classic process through which, in recent years and earlier migrants have slowly found their own path and made their own choice, instead of remaining suspended on a decision of the authorities. The circular shape of the narrative, from the tunnel and to the tunnel, expresses the socially as well as the biographically constructed situation and the strategy of ambivalence.

Jean: The strategy of escape

⁵ And we know from people of his entourage that it is not an illegal business. Ahmed has a reputation for being a kind man and refusing dirty business.

⁶ And we also know from our informers that Ahmed is the father of her child.

⁷ Probably the daughter of Algerian migrants.

Jean, aged 28, has been a political refugee since the beginning of 1998. He was born in Burundi, from a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother; since then he has been on the run to avoid the consequences of the so called 'ethnic' conflict, i.e. to remain alive. His father was a manager in an international firm, based in Benelux. When troubles started in Burundi, in 1973, his father went to jail like many upper class Hutus. He escaped jail and went to Rwanda, Hutu dominated then, his wife remaining in Burundi by force. Despite the fact that they have a Tutsi mother, Jean and his siblings are registered as Hutus because of the patrilinear pattern, and are threatened with death until their father organised their escape into Rwanda. His father, already very sick after his time in jail, died a few months later. Jean's uncle takes charge of the children but becomes a victim of the fight between Burundi's refugees and dies in 1980. Nevertheless, being among the better-off refugees, Jean goes to school and is sent to Lome (Gabon) to finish his baccalaureate, which he obtains in 1991. When he returns to Rwanda, the situation is very bad; the war between the Hutu government and the Tutsi rebels is about to start. The family moves to Zaire under the leadership of the eldest sister. As a refugee in a Rwanda camp, Jean works for a volunteer association and earns some money. He also shows his desire to help by saving the lives of several children in moments of panic during the Rwanda war. But the war catches up with them in Zaire when Kabila's army, including a number of the FPR (Front Patriotique Rwandais), mainly Tutsi, shows itself in Kinshasa, and starts to persecute the Hutu refugees. Thanks to the money saved from his work, Jean is able to pay for a trip to Lagos, Cotonou, Lome and finally Paris, where he arrives by plane with, for his only paper, his birth certificate from Burundi. He declares himself to the police and is admitted as a person seeking political asylum. Since then he's lived in a hostel for political refugees. His siblings remained in Kinshasa and Jean has no news from them; his mother died in 1991.

There is little comment to make about Jean's interview, in the sense that the interview is entirely dominated by the story of the war, that is by the historical context. It is a succession of escapes. Jean doesn't remember much about Burundi which he left at the age of six. He presents himself as a refugee. We learn that he was a good student, honest and sensitive. Death and exclusion and constant threat has been his daily life. He has been confronted with animality of a human kind such that being in France, even if roughly questioned by the police, is just too great, too beautiful. His only aspiration up to now has been to remain alive and to find basic security. The social exclusion question is therefore not pertinent up to this point. It will become when his request for political asylum is answered. Whatever the answer is, Jean will have to show his ability to become a migrant, whether legal or clandestine.

5. General conclusion

Reviewing the cases, it appears clearly that each case is strongly related to the history and current situation of every migration process involved as analysed in the available literature: in Mercia's case, the political context of Franco's period and the traditional path of Spanish migration (domestic work or sewing for women, building trade for men). In Kemal's case, by contrast, we perceive the situation of the Turkish migrations in Europe and their specific feature, linked to the Kemalist history and the absence of links between Turkey and Western Europe; his case shows the weakness of culturalist, ethnic-based theories. Sharmen's story illustrates how a project to study abroad becomes a migration, the situation of well educated Asian migrants providing the background. Seydou's case illustrate the Soninke tradition of migration, from 'internal' (African) to 'external'

(European) trips. Ahmed's case clearly shows the weight of political decisions, the opening or closing of borders, and also of police practice in the street; his case could open up a whole chapter in French-Algerian history, its suppression in French culture, and the effects of this collective suppression on the individual's reflexivity. Jean's case recalls the fact that migration can be no more than escaping to save one's life, in our current world as well as in the past (though we had no case of earlier migrants, political refugees of the Second World War, for instance).

Individual's strategies are framed and constrained by this history and context. They are individual strategies, i.e. each individual has his own way of coping with the migration risk, but this individual way, as well as the reflexivity involved, is a habitus, itself built within the frame and context, according to the different resources that individuals have at their disposal. Migration from this point of view doesn't offer a specific field for the study of risk and strategy. But what is specific to the migration issue is that these habitus will be rewarded differently in the context of French society, some of them positively and others negatively. Mercia's strategy will be rewarded positively as long as she remains in the low status of a Spanish migrant, as expected by others. Sharmen's strategy was available as long as she remained under the protection of the family, or in the role of the decorative spouse of a French man, but she will have now to prove its feasibility without this protection. Seydou's strategy of balance between France and Africa, between individual and community, is rewarded by community as well as supported by a number of groups acting within French society. Ahmed's strategy is congruent with the existence of an underground economy, but places him outside French society, reinforcing therefore the most discriminatory stereotypes about clandestine Algerian migrants, as well as his own community; because he represents a danger he is not fully respectable, he is, in Goffman's term, a discredited individual, forced therefore into a life that's partly clandestine. Jean's strategy of escaping for his life has not yet received a response from the French authorities. Getting political refugee status depends on his presentation (will he remain humble as currently or join an activist group?) and on the instructions given by decision-makers to accept a pre-determined quota of political refugees from the 'ethnic' war in Africa, a decision itself related to the importance given to this war in political debate and in society.

The issue of migration, in biographical terms, presents another common feature: in all the biographies, the departure to France is a turning point. Exile is a shaping of life, but its meaning is only revealed later on, at the moment of marriage, at the moment of retiring or at the moment of difficulty. To go back to the country of origin is to go back to the past, unless the migration has included the opportunity to escape low status and to gain a new position. Therefore travels in space are also travels in time, and the meaning of these shiftings is deeply sociological. Migrants travel in two different spaces, in two different times and this is why their biographies are so rich: the number of hypotheses, of possible paths being greater than the biographies contained within the borders of a national space. Spirals of retroaction, in action and in reflexivity, take baroque forms, repetition hidden behind change, change behind repetition, in such complicated ways that the researcher, unaware of the meaning of many of the features, is tempted to choose the simplest explanation, unaware of his own ethnocentrism. Marriage is for instance the core criterion of integration, in the official and common discourse about migration. Will she (or he) marry a French partner, or a partner from the country of origin? The 'mixed' marriage is supposed to entail integration, but in fact it implied nothing in itself, as shown by Sharmen's marriage, for instance. Mercia's marriage to a Spanish migrant is far from

being a way of remaining 'Spanish', it is a way of settling in France. Seydou's marriage to a Soninke woman is also the way of avoiding being a single migrant in a hostel and becoming a citizen of his city. We don't know what Kemal, Ahmed or Jean will do, but we know for certain that the nationality or ethnicity of their female partner will not be the pertinent criterion for assessing their situation.

In fact, as in the case of pre-retired people, we can see, through the different cases, people building new ways of life, not nation-centred any more, but organised in a backward and forward motion between two countries or even more, Seydou being, for instance, oriented toward not just one country (Mauritania), but a cultural area - the Soninke area, between Mauritania, Senegal, Mali and of course France, itself a part of this area thanks to the long history of the migration process. Consequently the integration debate, as well as the 'ethnic' issue reveal themselves to be what has not been acknowledged: an out-of-date issue, giving evidence of Western hypocrisy, of the fact that the Western world prefers to consider itself as a white, closed world, protected from the risks undertaken by people in poorer countries, while they themselves, Western Europeans notably, establish their own ways of life between several countries. These new ways of life, therefore, face less the risk of exclusion by loss of culture, or contrary-wise cultural identity intensification, than the risk of seeing their own processing of these new ways of life hindered by national-European restrictive migration policies, as well as by daily discrimination and racism. Again, in the European nation states, this is not an actuarial risk, but a political one.

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