

**Ordinary Cosmopolitanisms:
Strategies for Bridging Boundaries
among Non-College Educated Workers**

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Ongoing discussions about cosmopolitanism are often slanted toward elite cosmopolitanism. The Enlightenment, the *République des lettres*, and the “universalistic” European culture of intellectuals are among the main points of reference used to define cosmopolitanism. In the case of Ulf Hannerz (1996), cosmopolitanism is largely defined in terms of an upper-middle class occupational and experiential culture that implies a voyeuristic appreciation of other lifestyles. In contrast, I move the discussion in a new direction in order to explore ordinary cosmopolitanisms, defined as the strategies used by ordinary people to bridge boundaries with people who are different from them.¹

This argument speaks to the issue of cosmopolitanism to the extent that the latter is often conceptualized in terms of allegiance to the community of humankind, of the breaking down of boundaries and acceptance of differences, and in opposition to the drawing of boundaries exemplified by nationalism or the promotion of primary allegiances (Nussbaum 1996). Along with Michael Ignatieff (1999), I take cosmopolitanism to refer to a moral commitment to universals. However, unlike Ignatieff and Beck (1998), I do not ground it in abstract moral choices (in “what one chooses to make oneself”), but in the cultural repertoires of universalism that are differentially available to individuals across contexts. Also, I am less concerned with commitment to universal values such as human rights and due process than with beliefs in human equality and solidarity. My goal is to analyze such repertoires by looking at how low-status white-collar workers and blue-collar workers think about human similarities. I focus on how non-college-educated white and black workers in the United States, and white and North African workers in France, discuss human similarities with others. Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour (1983), I center my attention on the types of evidence that ordinary people use to show that we are the same or that we should (as human being, people with red blood, etc.) be construed as the same.

Drawing on in-depth interviews, I will examine the types of evidence used by the four groups under consideration and sketch an explanation for the similarities and differences, which will emphasize the cultural repertoires they have access to. I will conclude with a discussion of the ways in which this approach broadens our understanding of cosmopolitanism.

My analysis draws on the tools of cultural sociology: I asked 150 randomly chosen workers to describe to me the types of people they feel superior and inferior to, and the types

¹ This is in line with Robbins’ (1998) call for analyzing plural cosmopolitanisms.

of people they describe as “their sort of folks” and “the sorts of folks they don’t like much” (see the methodological appendix for details on the respondents and the sampling method). I use these interviews to reconstruct the mental maps and symbolic boundaries through which these individuals define “us” and “them”, simultaneously identifying the most salient principles of classification and identification that are operating behind these definitions. In the process, I gain a clearer understanding of their views of the true bases of universalism and particularism. These are articulated around how people define their own identity and the boundaries of their community.

Due to space constraints, my analysis will focus on the types of evidence used by workers to show that various racial groups are similar – what I call anti-racist rhetorics. I take these rhetorics to be one of the main forms that ordinary cosmopolitanism takes in contemporary societies. Note that my analysis does not concern individuals, but the rhetorical apparatus per se, focusing on which arguments and types of evidence are present and absent in France and the United States.

In both countries, the men I talked to generally use universal criteria that can be applied to all human beings to evaluate other groups and themselves, whether these criteria have to do with morality or common physiology and human nature.² In doing so, they establish an equivalence between individuals whom they believe belong to a same universe of reference and can be incorporated in a same community, as children of God, humans, moral beings, people with similar needs, etc.. In other words, they use broad principles of inclusion, which they take to transcend individual groups or ascribed characteristics.

We will see that American anti-racists appeal to market mechanisms, and more specifically to socioeconomic success, to establish the equivalence of races, a strategy not used by the French. For their part, French workers draw on solidaristic and egalitarian

² The term “universalism” is used differently in sociology, in the French literature on racism, in anthropology, and in philosophy. The functionalist literature in sociology compares cultural orientations cross-nationally along a number of dimensions including “universalism/particularism”. A universalistic orientation consists in believing that “all people shall be treated according to the same criteria (e.g., equality in before the law)” while a particularistic orientation is predicated upon the belief that “individuals shall be treated differently according to their personal qualities or their particular membership in a class or group” (Lipset 1979, p. 209). In the French literature on racism, universalism is opposed not to particularism, but to differentialism. For instance, Taguieff (1988, p. 164) opposes a universalistic racism (that posits that *we* are the humanity) and a differentialist racism (that posits that *we* are the best). The anthropological literature opposes a universalism that posits an absolute and shared human essence -- which includes the liberal notions of freedom and equality -- to a relativism that affirms the diversity of cultural identities. Finally, the philosophical literature juxtaposes a universalism defined through shared moral orientations or Platonician ideals (the good, the right, the just) and communitarianism, which stresses moral norms that emerge from the collective life of groups (e.g., Rasmussen 1990). In this paper, drawing in part on Walzer’s (1994) notion of thick and thin morality, I

themes that are part of the Socialist and Republican traditions and are absent from the American anti-racist rhetoric. This suggests that French and American ordinary cosmopolitanism draw on vary different cultural bases. In a few instances, I will compare workers' anti-racist rhetoric with their racist rhetoric, which is explored in depth in my forthcoming book, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (Harvard University Press 2000). Let the discussion begin on the other side of the Atlantic.

1) White American Anti-Racism: Market Arguments and the Universality of Human Nature (Purple or Green)

The white American workers I talked to privilege two types of arguments to demonstrate that whites and blacks are equal, and these have to do with earning ability and human nature.

In the American workplace, where an ideology of meritocracy prevails and where ascribed characteristics are in principle irrelevant in the assessment of employees' performance, money is often used, paradoxically, as a basis for equalization. Workers argue that earning capacity makes people equal, market mechanisms being the ultimate arbitrator of the value of people. Most tellingly, Michael Brandon,³ a petroleum company foreman, explains that:

No matter who you are at Exxon, you're making pretty good money, so it's not like you've got a disadvantaged person. Their kids are going to good schools. They're eating, they're taking vacations because of Exxon. You don't see the division or whatever, so Exxon kind of eliminated that because of the salary structure . . . With black people, you talk sports, you talk school, you're all in the same boat. It isn't "What's it like to have a new car?" You've been on vacation, and they've been on vacation.

Michael presumes a community of citizens in which membership and dignity are based on work, earning capacity, and consumption. In fact, the legitimacy of earning capacity, as a criterion of evaluation, is one of the few assumptions shared by American racists and non-racists. Michael echoes the productivist/republican tradition central to the American workers'

contrast universalism, defined as the application of abstract general standards to all, to particularism, defined as the use of standards that are specific to certain groups.

movement from its inception, and according to which individuals legitimized gaining social and political membership by being self-reliant and productive.⁴ A number of American workers take market performance to be a legitimate and efficient arbitrator of worth, by contrast to the socio-democratic European (and French) model in which the market produces inequalities that must be remedied by the state.⁵ Having high status occupations can make blacks equal to whites.

White workers also often offer as additional evidence of the equality of races the universality of human nature across races. They argue that good and bad people are found in all races. In the words of Billy Taylor, a foreman in a cosmetic company:

I could have a problem with you as a black but I could have the same problem if you were white, or green, or yellow, or whatever. People are people. There's good cops, there's bad cops. There's good whites, there's bad whites . . . I haven't noticed any major cultural differences.

Similarly, for Murray DiPrete, the receiving clerk who admits to “having my prejudices,” “There are blacks and there are niggers. There are whites and there is white trash. There are wonderful Spanish people and there are Spics . . . If you are a skuzzball, then I want nothing to do with you no matter where you come from . . . I like nice people, period.” A truck driver also stresses the importance of treating people case by case: “If you treat me nice and you and I get along, great. If you treat me bad, then I try to decide on my own how people are and how I'm going to deal with people, and it does not matter if you are black or white, or pink, or purple, or yellow, or green. If you're a miserable SOB, you're just a miserable SOB, no matter what color you are.”

These men posit that human nature is universal and that one should not generalize about blacks or any other races since there are so many differences among people.⁶ A mechanic goes further by universalizing this principle beyond race to talk about the importance of treating everyone equally, even in the context of class differences:

It comes down to: whatever color you are, treat everybody fairly and don't be prejudiced. I don't want the blacks to be prejudiced against me [thinking] I'm the

³ All names are pseudonyms.

⁴ See Wilentz (1984).

⁵ Esping-Anderson (1990).

⁶ This position is different from rationalist universalism, which considers people to be equal because of their perfectibility and ability to make moral judgments. Patterson (1977, p. 215) links rationalist universalism

same as every other white person. I think I'm willing to give them a chance and the same thing as white people. Just because they don't own a house, they live in an apartment, they're driving a bombed up car, and their kids are dressed sloppy, I'm not gonna just assume that they're white trash and I'm gonna treat them fairly. If I did work for them, I'd do just as good a job as I could and I'd give them a price as fairly as I could until I see them doing something that's gonna hurt me or somebody else.

Among American interviewees, this mechanic is exceptional in his belief that we should ignore ascribed characteristics and accord equality to all. He also rejects the notion that we should only be fair to "our own kind". The infrequency of this universalist argument among workers is particularly striking in the light of the prominence of egalitarianism in American political culture, starting with the first lines of the Declaration of Independence. As we will see the anti-racism of French workers is very different, as it is articulated around arguments pertaining specifically to human solidarity and to the equal dignity of human beings, and where market performance argument are absent.

Note that only one American respondent, a clerical worker, promotes the principle of multiculturalism by celebrating the importance of "exposing our children to a diversity of people so that when they hear slurs, they can ward off these preconceptions [better] than others who don't have experience with people from different backgrounds." Cultural relativism, multiculturalism, or the celebration of racial differences that are widely viewed in academic circles as effective antidotes to racism, are absent from the worldviews of the workers with whom I spoke.⁷ Perhaps anti-racist academic discourse should focus more on the theme of the universality of human nature, as it might resonate better with the worldview of ordinary people than more intellectual arguments having to do with multiculturalism and cultural relativism. The latter arguments (also called "race-recognizance" in the literature)⁸ might appeal more to college-graduates, who tend to be more tolerant and to appreciate a wide range of cultural tastes and practices than high school graduates.⁹

to the Stoics and Alexander the Great; Alexander would have developed this notion to ground the unity of a multitude of people and races in their perfectibility through rationality.

⁷ Along these lines, fully 65 percent of the respondents to the 1993 General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Corporation agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "it is a shame when traditional American literature is ignored while other works are promoted because they are by women or by members of minority groups" (DiMaggio and Bryson 1995).

⁸ On race-recognizance as a form of multiculturalism, see Frankenberg (1993).

2A) African-American Responses to Racism I: “Money Makes You Equal:” Earnings, Consumption, and Competence as Bases of Cultural Membership.

John Lamb is a black worker employed by a recycling plant in Patterson. A native of Georgia, he thinks that Northerners are uncaring and hopes to return to the South soon, perhaps to find a wife (“a high quality person”). He built a house in Georgia, and on his last trip, he found it defaced with “KKK” graffiti on the front door and the porch. Barely 31, he “pulls in \$60,000 a year” thanks to “lots of overtime”. He remains very close to his family and the tight-knit community where he grew up, but he also likes to “do his own thing”. He “like[s] religious people, people that believe in respecting people and treating people right,” and is attracted to black homeowners.

John has often had to deal with racial discrimination at work and has given much thought to racial equality. In his theory of how the world works, money is what gives everyone voice, including blacks. He says: “Money separates people . . . It gives you power in the world, it gives you an ability to do anything you want in the world . . . That’s the way the world’s set up. Regardless of what you hear on this or that, money means everything.” John also believes that money is the key to respect, and implicitly, equality and social membership (that is, to being construed as “belonging”).

If you ain’t got no money, you got no respect at all. You can be the smartest, prettiest woman, man, or whatever, on earth, but that don’t get you nowhere. You got to have some money to back you up. Money gets you places. Money gets you to get to meet anybody you want to meet, get involved in anything that’s going on. Money’s basically everything, without a doubt.

For John, competence is the other key to access to mainstream society and to social membership:

Basically it comes down to, once you prove yourself that you’re just as good as [your white coworkers] . . . that you can do anything they do just as well as them, and you carry yourself with that weight, then people respect you, they kinda back away from you. I’m kind of quiet, I just go there, I don’t miss a day on the job, I do what I gotta do, and I’m one of the best throughout the whole plant at what I do.

⁹ On tolerance and the broad range of taste of the college-educated, see Lamont (1992, p. 105) and Bryson (1996). Peterson and Kern (1996) coined the term “cultural omnivorousness” to label this latter phenomenon.

Competence is a particularly legitimate piece of evidence of equality in a blue-collar world where coworkers are often direct witnesses of each other's expertise on the job, and where physical proximity leaves little room for hiding mistakes. Accordingly, skilled workers often expressed pride in their know-how, and respect for those who do their work properly.

Tyrone Smith, a chemical worker, shares John's perspective, though he extends it to cultural membership and stresses consumption over production. He says:

I'm accepted [at work] and I work with really white people. I think when you get into the money scheme, it doesn't really matter [what color you are], because then the money makes it equal . . . I'm overcoming [the limits put on me because of my race] because I am achieving the same thing [as my coworkers] money-wise. If I was poor and on welfare, they would just call me another nigger on the street. I may not be as equal as them, but they know it's not too much below. If they buy a house, I could buy a house too.

Others follow Tyrone in stressing consumption as a criterion for cultural membership, equating money with "belonging."¹⁰ Abe Lind, a 32-year-old plumber who lives on Long Island, offers evidence of his place in mainstream society by describing his childhood as follows.

I never lived in an apartment, I always had my own room. I never thought that I was lacking anything that was provided by a white man, that my father was inadequate, in any way . . . I always got a new bike. We had Christmas, I mean. I received allowances. They had new shoes, I had new shoes. I never had that problem.

These workers put less emphasis on production than consumption as evidence of equality. Under slavery and Jim-Crow, the ability to work did not give African-Americans cultural, let alone civic, membership. They indeed produced, but could not consume. Today, work gives access to consumption, that is to external signals that one is "in" (a bike, new shoes, and latter, a car, a house etc.). Working and consuming are individual strategies for coping with racism, in that they signal that one "belongs".¹¹ However, these modes of equalization perpetuate particularism, in the sense that they are unevenly spread across groups, even

¹⁰ On consumption and cultural membership, see Ong (1996). Also Molnar and Lamont (forthcoming). On the importance of consumption for cultural membership among poor black residents of Philadelphia, see Nightingale (1993).

¹¹ For political philosopher Judith Shklar (1991, p. 3), American citizenship has involved primarily the right to earn a living.

though they are in principle available to all.¹² In other words, it can be viewed as a classist mode of equalization as it correlates people's worth with their class position.¹³

2B) African-American Responses to Racism II: "What Brings us Together?" Children of God, Family of Man, Physiology, and Citizenship.

To demonstrate racial inequality, blacks mobilize other pieces of evidence that are not used by whites. In fact, they use a wider range of anti-racist arguments than whites. Adopting universalistic strategies, they point to evidence having to do with whites' and blacks' shared status as children of God, common physiology, and common status as Americans.

Reflecting on the importance of divine intervention in black narratives of emancipation, W. E. B. Dubois pointed that historically, the church played an important role in affirming equality and providing blacks with tools for spiritual empowerment.¹⁴ The Biblical notion that "God created men equal" was also alluded to by Martin Luther King, and it rests on a notion of basic humanity for all, with love as a basis for similarity.¹⁵ Accordingly, blacks do use religion to demonstrate that we all share something fundamental. For instance, Abe, the plumber, points to the diversity of God's creation to demonstrate that the races are equal. He wishes that "people would realize that we have one creator, and not many creators, and as there are many different colors of birds, and trees, and fishes, and everything that cross this globe [there are different types of people]." Similarly a black Jehovah's Witness draws on Biblical themes: "Where has a man come from but the dust of the earth? If we look at the dust of the earth, we're all of color."

Religious arguments are appealing to blacks in part because they offer a useful counterpoint to racist evolutionary accounts, according to which blacks would be lower on the scale of human development. For instance, a photo technician combines God's creation ("we all come from Adam and Eve"), physiological evidence ("we all come out one way") and a

¹² Hochschild (1995a, p. 26) describes this as a tenet of the American dream: "people start the pursuit of success with varying advantages, but no one is barred from the pursuit."

¹³ Note that when using market performance as a criterion to establish equality, workers follow in the footsteps of black leaders who have promoted similar strategies to "uplift the race," sometimes to assert their own elite status, and sometimes to signify collective aspiration to citizenship and humanity.

¹⁴ DuBois (1935, p. 124). Cited by Kelley (1994, p. 42). See also Harding (1981).

¹⁵ Condit and Lucaites (1993, p. 192).

lineage account that stresses common descent (“we are part of a family of man”) to refute both evolutionism and Afrocentrist views.

Pointing to our common physiology also adds “incontestable” -- empirically grounded -- proof of the wrong-headedness of racism. Other black workers noted that “we all spend nine months in our mother’s womb,” that we all have the same red blood running in our veins, or that we all have ten fingers. This view was not expressed among whites and goes unmentioned in survey-based studies of anti-racism. We will see that North Africans share with African-Americans the use of such naturalistic pieces of evidence to counteract racism.

African-Americans also establish similarities across races by pointing to diversity in levels of intelligence among whites, as if they presume that they have to refute the widely-held notion of white intellectual superiority. A young painter from New York City who experienced other regional cultures when he was in the army for several years, explains his perspective thus: “White people who are from rural areas would be considered less [intelligent] than people from an urban metropolitan area . . . Same people, same color.” A phone technician also refers to his personal experience going to school with whites to contest the myth of their superior intelligence. He explains that when he was a kid “we were all led to believe that whites were always smarter . . . When I went to school, I found that there were dumb white people, you understand? There were poor white people . . . there was no differences in their learning ability. It made me proud.”

Another type of evidence used by blacks, but not by whites, to establish equality between the two groups is that of citizenship. Several black workers refer to their common membership in the American nation, the best nation of the world, to demonstrate their social membership, and implicitly, equality between the races. Abe Lind is compelled to justify his nationalism given the country’s history of racism. To do so, he focuses on the historical openness of American society to people of all nations and races:

I claim allegiance to America because this is the only country I know. Our title has been colored, blacks, African-Americans now. My name’s always been Abe. I served in the service, my father served in the service. I guess my forefathers were maybe somewhere down the line slaves, but I am not. We moved on . . . Evolution is going on. I’m a part of America, it’s a changing America. We accept more people from other countries than any other country in the world . . . This is my country, I’d fight for it, I’d die for it . . . America is built on opportunity for each and every different type of race that came through this place. It’s a young country, it’s growing, and we’re doing

a lot better than a lot of other countries to tell you the truth. You ask me where else in the world I would want to live, I'd tell you nowhere.

By defining himself as American, Abe links his racial identity with his national identity and identifies himself with the positive aspects of his national culture, which include openness to outsiders. In this, he follows eighteenth century African-Americans who grounded their equality in territory instead of lineage.¹⁶ Workers who stress their Americanness in demonstrating equality often have a military background, as does Abe. They define themselves as part of a “we” that assembles the “head honchos” of the world. Some also value the democratic tradition of the country, as does Tom Green, the hospital orderly, who says that he is proud of being American because he can talk about the president, curse him, “yet you are not going to be killed for that.”

A last strategy of equalization is to point not at racial equality, but at the fact that beliefs in racial inequality are found in all races. Indeed, some workers explain racism by referring to the view that “preferring and protecting your own kind” is ingrained in human nature. For instance, a sorter in a mailing company concurs says that for whites

Pure advantage is that you are white funded. That's why all the white people have all the money in this country. So the president of a company is white, the C.E.O. is white, so who gets the job? Bam! But that's good! I would never mock that because if the whites [are looking for workers], I'm not going to bring somebody I don't know even if they are qualified. I'll bring people I know, who happen to be black. If you were in the same shoes, you would do the same thing.

Within this culture of particularism, black workers think of racism as a universal and unavoidable phenomenon. At the same time, it is as if the discourse of universalism had not deeply penetrated the worlds inhabited by these workers, as if a number of them saw universal claims as merely rhetorical, given their own experience of America. Moreover, unlike professionals, their work is unlikely to require them to maintain a veneer of universalism in making decisions concerning promotion and the distribution of resources, which may contribute to the perception that universalism is mere fantasy. Universal human rights, the American Constitution, cultural relativism, and multiculturalism are not salient in their discourse, as if they were not common-sensical realities and as if they had great cultural distance from these languages. Arguments having to do with our common lineage as Children of God, the universality of our physiological needs and characteristics, and a shared American

¹⁶ Condit and Lucaites (1993, p. 6).

citizenship, are more readily used, perhaps because they emerge from everyday experience. These latter themes were not salient among white workers, perhaps because whites do not confront the task of disproving racial inequality in their daily lives and are not forced to (or concerned with) developing a large battery of arguments.

3A) French Workers' Anti-Racism I: Egalitarianism and Solidarity

As in the United States, French workers I interviewed establish racial equality in starkly different ways than those used by intellectuals and activists. But for one exception, they do not refer to cultural relativism or multiculturalism to demonstrate the equality of North Africans--to the notion that all cultures are equally valuable. Like their white American counterparts, they are more likely to justify their belief in racial equality by pointing to the fact that in their experience, there are good and bad people in all races--that human nature is universal. Others point to the universality of human needs, as does an old mason when he says "we are all here to work together and everyone has to eat." However, unlike American workers, French workers do not use money as a means of establishing racial equality. In doing so, they draw not only from Republicanism, but also from Socialism and Catholicism.

We saw that for white American anti-racists and for some African-Americans, class can trump racial inequality: money makes black people equal to white people. This argument is foreign to the French workers I talked to. None of them took socio-economic success as a criterion of social membership and none argued that the market adjudicates the value of people. Instead, drawing somewhat differently on Republicanism, workers affirm the existence of equality despite social differences, as opposed to conceiving it as resulting from such differences, that is from purchasing power.¹⁷ This appears in denunciations of inequality and injustice that are associated not only with racism, but also with ageism and sexism. A draftsman, for instance, says: "Wherever I go, the secretaries I see are always pretty and young. I ask myself where are the old ones now? It is a form of racism. There is not only the racism of color." Others affirm the principle of equality in the face of cultural diversity and suggest that all should be treated equally "whether they are Buddhist or Catholic".

¹⁷ In contrast to liberalism, Republicanism promotes solidarity against individualism by negating social and natural differences in the name of equal dignity, non-differentiation of roles, and the sharing of universal capacities. Taylor (1992) provides a particularly cogent description of this difference.

When discussing social differences, French workers persistently referred to the principles of solidarity and its natural complement, egalitarianism--principles ignored by American workers.¹⁸ For instance, Henri Belliveau, a draftsman who is a long-term militant in the French Communist Party, explains that we cannot be racists if only because we are all workers and should stand by one another. A railway technician, Marc Bataille, says that racism is a disposition that he does not like because “it is the lack of respect for the other, and the person who is racist against black people or Arab people, can also be racist against the butcher or the sweeper, against anyone.” Marc affirms the importance of recognizing the dignity of people regardless of their labor market positions. He inverts one of the main principles of equality used by American workers.

Equality and solidarity are held sacred by some of the workers, especially in the face of practical considerations. Like their upper-middle class counterparts who value intellectual honesty,¹⁹ these workers define themselves against a type of moral pragmatism that is advocated by some American workers. A few justify such their principled positions by past experiences of injustice. For instance, Laurent Larue, the automobile technician, reaffirmed the importance of humanism as a way to fight against “the dark side of human nature” that is represented by racism and that inevitably leads to oppression. He described his sensitivity to the misery of others as overpowering and recalls that, as a child, he attacked an adult who was hitting his North African friend. He believes this reaction to be deeply ingrained and to reveal how he understands his place in the world. In fighting injustice, he affirms that personal dignity and personal integrity (his and that of others) are to be placed above selfish interests, including improving one’s social position.

¹⁸ When asked to choose, from a list of traits, five qualities that they find particularly important in others, a third of the French workers chose *egalitarian* in contrast to less than a fifth of their American counterparts. Paradoxically, none of the American anti-racists defended egalitarianism as a general principle, although it is a founding principle of American liberal Republicanism. Smith (1997) points out that the American liberal democratic tradition, as described in Tocqueville (1969) stresses the absence of one type of ascriptive hierarchy in American society--that based on monarchical and aristocratic lineage. It makes the United States appear egalitarian in comparison with Europe. However, Smith argues that American political culture is also shaped by other political traditions, such as racism, nativism, and patriarchy, which justify the ascriptive hierarchies, such as that based on race and gender, have remained a mainstay of American society until recently. Smith neglects the place given to class differences in this egalitarian worldview, as if they were taken to be natural.

¹⁹ Lamont (1992, chapter 2).

In proclaiming their obligation of solidarity toward the unfortunate, workers draw on a solidaristic discourse central to Catholicism,²⁰ which is reinforced by France's strong tradition of state interventionism by the right as well as the left. Some appeal to the principle of international solidarity among workers, which is central to the Socialist tradition, to justify their anti-racism. The French labor movement sustains these solidaristic attitudes, with its historically internationalist and anti-colonialist orientations. It promoted solidarity between nationals and colonial workers, and later between French workers and immigrant workers.²¹ These forms of anti-racism are also shaped by the anti-racist social movement that emerged in response to the *Front National* and which put solidarity at the center of its agenda. It brings together traditional left anti-racists organizations such as the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH), and the *Movement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples* (MRAP) with *SOS-racisme*, which in 1985 organized an anti-racist concert that attracted 300,000. In recent years this movement lost much of its influence and came to adopt a more conciliatory tone in line with the dominant republican themes of French political culture.

3B) French Workers' Anti-Racism II: Work Ethic and the Structural Explanation of Differences

Work is what brings the French and immigrants together -- what they share in common, and where they have the opportunity to learn to know and appreciate one another. Anti-racist workers extend the logic of the universality of human nature to the realm of work, affirming that there are good and bad workers in all races, just as there are good and bad people in all races. Richard Marois, a locksmith, exemplifies this. After explaining that the day before our interview, he had watched from his window as *Beurs* set a car on fire, he says that he likes the *Maghrebins* he knows: "they are people who work and who are serious. These are people that I like and have respect for. There are French kids who are into delinquency, who steal, who attack old ladies, and who break things. And for me, whether they are black or yellow or red, it is the same thing." Similarly, concerning North Africans, a fifty-year-old carpenter explains that "we cannot be racist at work because we work with them, and they are people like others.

²⁰ The distinctive Catholic doctrine of the "Communion of Saints" and "Communion of Sin" brings forth a special obligation to the poor as members of the community who are marginalized. By uplifting the poor, Catholics uplift themselves and their own community.

There are some good ones and some bad ones. They work.” From this observation, he attempts to understand their distinctive characteristics in sociological terms. He says: “There are some cultural differences. North African are from countries that are underdeveloped . . . They have not been to school, but those who are my age, you can see that they are not able to make it. A lot of them don't know how to write.” The locksmith also sociologizes criminality and deviance when he says of North Africans that “these people often are unskilled and unemployed. They don't have money. They are depressed and end up taking drugs.” Finally, after praising the merits of tolerance, a warehouse attendant who works in a multiracial milieu at the Charles-de-Gaulle Airport explains that it is important to try to understand the position in which people find themselves.

By providing a structural explanation for social differences, these workers denaturalize differences and offer a powerful counter-argument to the notion that Muslims are fundamentally “other.” They are less likely to blame minority group members for their plight, in line with the discourse of solidarity discussed above. Such structural explanations were absent from the discourse of white American anti-racists. They were common among African-Americans, although they have access to different cultural resources than French workers (for instance, the discourse of solidarity produced by the Black church vs. those produced by left parties). The French may more readily adopt structural explanations because of the socialist tradition, which popularized a materialist understanding of the world as a means to raising class consciousness. Coupled with highly influential and visible anti-racist organizations, this tradition plays an important role in sustaining the diffusion of anti-racist ideas.

4A) North African Responses to Racism I: “The Straight Path” of the “Good Arab”

North Africans build bridges toward the French by providing evidence of personal goodness. In interviews, they demonstrate that they personally conform to what they perceive to be moral criteria highly valued by the host society. This strategy involves abstracting oneself from one's race/nation/religion in order to show that a member is not necessarily defined by the group to which s/he belongs or that judgments about a group cannot be extended to each of its representatives.

²¹ The complex relationship between French unions and immigrants is described in Mouriaux and Wihitol de Wenden (1987).

“Following a straight path” is an important leitmotiv in how workers demonstrate their personal goodness. This is illustrated by Kaibi El Jouhari, a mason from Kabylia who came to France in 1953 to work with his father, and who was joined by his family in 1972. He says he has done all he could to become part of French society. He explains his attitude thus:

I tell you the truth, I am like Switzerland: I go one way. I don't go here and there. I am straight, neither left nor right. The only thing I look for is my bread, that's it . . . I only do my work and take care of my children, that's it . . . I have been in France for many years and I don't pay attention to politics . . . I don't go to bars, I don't walk around. Before my family came, I used to go to movies, but since they are here, I don't anymore.

Similarly, a warehouse worker, a gold-plating craftsman, an electrician and a dressmaker explain that they have no dealings with racist people because they go directly from work to home and see no one. They attribute the fact that they have always worked and have never experienced problems with the police to their seriousness and commitment to “following the straight path.”

Work is central in the way workers demonstrate their moral character: one belongs because one is a hard worker. To counter the French perceptions that immigrants are parasites, several reminded me that, after all, French entrepreneurs came to North Africa to find immigrants to work in the plants when there was a labor shortage. For Ayadi Matoub, an electrician, working also goes hand in hand with “seriousness” which he defines as follows: “It means not hanging out with just anybody, with people who drink too much. I never smoked or drank, and I think it has helped me a lot because I never had any problems. I have always found work [because] I make a good impression on people. I have never done anything bad to anyone.” Indeed, seriousness has high moral standing for him. It is an orienting feature of his life.

The North African workers I talked to were quick to point out that the moral traits they value are emphasized in the Koran, which provides guidelines for all aspects of everyday life. “Tranquillity” and “following the straight path” are not especially valued in the Christian tradition, but they are prized in the Koranic tradition--for instance, “following the straight path” is mentioned in the first *surah* of the Koran.²² Hence, North African workers ground

²² These qualities rest on the view that middle positions are preferable in a range of areas. Sociologists have written about the cardinal virtues of Islam. For instance, Ahmed (1992) mentions the importance of *adl* and *ahsan* (balance and compassion) in Islam and indicates that this religion is often described as the middle way--the bridge between different systems (p. 48). See also Ahmed (1987).

their equality in particular dimensions of morality that a central in their own religious tradition.

4B) North African Responses to Racism II: Human Commonalties: Physiology, Human Needs, Intellectual Differences, Cosmic Destiny, and Moral Rules

North Africans also demonstrate human equality by demonstrating that all human beings share something essential. They point to the universality of our physiological characteristics (“We are all nine-month babies;” “we all have ten fingers”) and to the universality of human needs. This is true for Mohamed Aboul, a forklift operator who says that “everyone goes to get bread at the bakery for dinner, and everyone has to put their coat on to go to work in the morning, whether you are Arab or French. Everyone is the same, it is the same thing.”

Similarly, a plumber, Said Ben Massoul, says “we all have to work, Algerians or French, we all work the same, there is no difference.”

However, North Africans point to a broader range of universal characteristics than do whites in the study. Some focus on the universality of human destiny: an auto factory worker stresses our fragility and relative insignificance in the universe when he mentions that we all “pass like clouds” over the earth. Others ground equality in the fact that there is the same distribution of intelligence across all groups. Indeed, Kaibi El Jouhari the mason, believes that “there are intelligent people in all [groups], whether it is in the police, in society, in all races.” Moreover, Abdelaziz Bouabdallah, a mechanic, explains that “The Canadian who is an idiot will be viewed as a Canadian imbecile because there is this symbol of the flag. And the Algerian idiot will be viewed as Algerian because there are other symbols. But stupidity is the same when we take everything else away.” Yet others use arguments having to do with universal moral rules of behavior that should guide everyone, independently of race, nationality, or religion.²³ In doing so, however, they refer implicitly or explicitly to the Koran. For instance, after explaining that he is very concerned about having his children likened to young North African deviants, Abdelaziz Bouabdallah, the mechanic, refers to Koranic rules to say that for all races, it is important to

play the card of respect . . . Whether you are Algerian or French has no importance, because people will judge you on the basis of your behavior. We find this rule

²³ Being questioned by a white Canadian is likely to make race, nation, country of origin, or religion particularly salient categories to respondents in the context of the interview.

everywhere, independent of time and space. It is not because you are old or because it is the year 2,000 that this rule does not apply. Respect is an immutable rule.

This type of argument was frequently made by North African workers to rebut the notion of racial inequality. In contrast, black Americans do not refer to this kind of universal theme, for example that the Golden Rule applies to all, independently of color.

North African workers are often less concerned with demonstrating equality *per se* than with establishing equivalence, similarity, or compatibility between themselves and the French. To achieve this, they point to constant “facts”, which are frequently drawn from concrete naturalistic images (for instance, ‘we all pass like clouds’), as if naturalistic metaphors carried a-historical truth. This is in line with the Koran in which nature is often presented as evidence demonstrating the essence of things.²⁴ This “naturalistic” anti-racism contrasts with the multicultural and relativistic approaches used by academics, as did ordinary theories of anti-racism in the United States.²⁵

5C) North African Responses to Racism III: Particularistic Ties and the Myth of Republicanism

We saw that although African-Americans often use universalistic arguments to establish their equality with whites – based on money and human nature for instance – some also believe that particularism is how the world works: their confrontations with discrimination are living proof that people try to help people like themselves. A number of North African immigrants appear to share these assumptions concerning the prevalence of cultures of particularism, but in a different manner than African-Americans. They attempt to rebut racism by pointing to concrete historical and socio-cultural ties between the French and their own groups (Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, or Kabyles). In doing so, they establish that they engage in a privileged relationships with the French. None of the African-Americans attempted to show that they had a privileged relationship with whites. Their strong notions of racial solidarity may have worked against it.

²⁴ Berque (1979, p. 23).

²⁵ Orientalist scholars such as Von Grunebaum (1962, pp. 55-63) have argued that the prophetic tradition is incompatible with cultural relativism. Because the truth given by the Koran is taken for granted, Muslims refuse to take human beings as arbiters of the value of things and relativism is literally unthinkable.

An Algerian laborer provides a prime illustration of how this process operates among North Africans. He explains that Moroccans are close to the French because “when there were French people in my country, Moroccans would give them gifts, so the French came to like the Moroccans.” Similarly, a Moroccan painter says, “Moroccans say that the French are good, France is good, there is no problem. For us immigrants, we would say that they are like brothers. There is no problem between the two governments and when the French went there, Moroccans protected the French. It was normal.” A third worker, who is employed as a phone booth cleaner, argues that “Algerians are used to the French because almost three quarter of us have learned French. Whether you are French or Algerian, it is the same thing.” Kaibi El Jouhari, the mason, explains that Kabyles are closer to the French than Algerians are because, like the French, they eat pork and drink alcohol. Here again, evidence of similarity is taken not from formal political ideologies like Republicanism, but from daily experience. This is consistent with findings from a study of the Moroccan self that shows that the cultivation of particularistic ties and the resources these give access to are key to how Moroccans define their own identity, and how they are defined by others.²⁶

The complement to – or justification of - this culture of particularism is that some workers believe that the Republican view of French society is a fantastic ideal with little connection with reality. For instance, Abdelmajid Lahou, a civil servant explains: “We say that [in France] segregation does not exist, but it is not true. That it is the country of universal human rights, but it is false, completely false. Nothing is respected, there is no country that can criticize the other without seeing its own wrong-doing.” Abdelaziz Bouabdallah, the mechanic observes: “They said that France equals liberty, equality, fraternity. They used to tell us that when they needed soldiers to fight for France all over the world. But when it was time to share the cake--to create schools for us in Algeria - they were not saying it anymore.” Because they are skeptical of the ability of Republicanism to foster solidarity and humanitarianism, these workers celebrate particularism as a more effective anti-racism.

The anti-racism of North Africans is shaped by the cultural repertoires that are readily available to them. Islam provides them with the main cultural tools they use to think about the value of human beings. This is suggested by their salience of themes such as “following a straight path” and altruism in the interviews, and by the fact that some mention that wisdom and knowledge are the only principle of inequality recognized by the Koran.²⁷

²⁶ Rosen (1984, p. 28).

²⁷ At the same time, Islam is likely to limit the immigrants’ claim concerning equality. In particular, Muslim specialists have argued that the concept of equality between all human beings has traditionally not been a

6) Discussion

This broad overview of how non-college educated workers in France and the United States establish racial equality suggests several important differences and similarities. First, market-based arguments are salient among whites and blacks in the United States, but absent in France. Second, arguments based on solidarity and egalitarianism are used by French workers, but not by American workers. Third, minority workers in both countries use a much broader range of arguments than their majority counterpart, certainly because the task of rebutting racism is more central to their daily lives. Fourth, none of the four groups ground human equality in cultural relativism or in a call for multiculturalism. Instead, they all more readily point to the equalization power of work and competence, or to the universality of human nature. Fifth, African-Americans and North Africans also point to our common physiology and universal differences in level of intelligence within groups to show human similarities, privileging types of evidence that are grounded in everyday experiences. Finally, while African Americans use citizenship to ground their equality with whites, North Africans point to the universality of morality, and on the importance of following universal moral precepts such as the rule of respect. The two minority groups also mention the universality of particularism. Interviews suggest that they view universalistic principles as meaningless ideals that do not mesh with their own everyday experience with racism.

Throughout the paper, I have pointed to the various cultural repertoires that reinforce the use of some types of arguments over others across the four groups under consideration. For instance, in France, Republicanism, Socialism, and Catholicism all sustain an investment in the notion of solidarity that is absent among white American workers. Also, North African

point of reference within this culture. This may explain why interviewees often appear to be more concerned with establishing equivalence and similarity than equality. Muslim theologians have argued that the *Shari'a*—the Islamic law based on the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*--is not egalitarian in that it does not recognize the formal equality of all citizens. Most importantly, it subordinates women to men through the marriage laws. It also attributes to non-Muslims a status of second class guests within Muslim society--non-Muslims are excluded from a number of public offices and required to pay a special tax. According to An-Na'im (1987, p. 21), in the Koranic text and the Sunnah, dating from the period when he lived in Mecca, "the Prophet preached equality and individual responsibility between men and women without distinction on grounds of race, sex, and social origin." He changed this message in response to socioeconomic and political realities when he was forced to migrate to Medina following dissent and external attacks. The historical Islamic law known to Muslims today is based on texts from the second period, which are less universalistic than those of the first period. On this point, see Bilgram (1995). Von Grunebaum (1962, p. 66) suggests that despite the non-egalitarianism of this latter period, Islam recognizes the fundamental equality of all believers *qua* believers.

references to “the straight path” emerges directly out of Koranic teachings just as, as African-American uses of Biblical references are also sustained by the cultural influence of the Black Church. My explanatory framework, which centers not only on available cultural repertoires, but also on the structural conditions that pushes workers to use some aspects of these repertoires over others – not discussed here, is fully developed in my forthcoming book.

What are the implications of this analysis for how we understand cosmopolitanism? The inductive approach used here revealed contrasted ways of conceiving the building of bridges between “us” and “them”. Whereas the Enlightenment and the *République des Lettres* grounded universalism in reason and the sharing of a universal culture, the workers I talked to draw on a much wider range of evidence to demonstrate the community of mankind. The interviews suggest that the non-college educated think about this issue through frameworks that share little with those that are at the center of the existing literature on cosmopolitanism. I would propose that we need to take these frameworks seriously in order to propose a sociology of everyday practical cosmopolitanism that is less dependent on the frameworks that predominate in our very distinct upper middle class academic environments. This is essential for understanding the process of bridging boundaries and for fighting more effectively against closure and exclusion.

Methodological Appendix

The study draws on one hundred fifty two-hour long interviews with male workers who have a high-school degree but not a college degree and who have been working full-time and steadily for at least five years.²⁸ The sample includes thirty African-American blue-collar workers and thirty North-African immigrant blue collar workers.²⁹ It also includes a French group and a Euro-American group that each encompasses thirty blue collar workers and fifteen low-status white collar workers.³⁰

Respondents were randomly selected from phone books of twelve working class towns located in the New York suburbs (such as Elizabeth, Rahway, and Linden) and in the Paris suburbs (such as Ivry, Nanterre, and Aubervilliers).³¹ This random selection and the relatively large number of respondents are aimed not at building a representative sample, but at tapping a wide range of perspectives within a community of workers, thereby going beyond the unavoidable limitations of site-specific research.³² Finally, if I am comparing French and American racism aimed at North African immigrants and African Americans respectively,

²⁸ Respondents were encouraged to answer these questions in reference to people in general, and to concrete individuals they know, at work and elsewhere. Discussions of racism generally emerged while exploring these issues. In the rare cases where race was not salient, I probed respondents at the very end of the interview on whether they perceived similarities and differences between whites and blacks in the American case, and North Africans and the French in the French case. I adopt this indirect approach because interviewees often present facework and downplay racial prejudice when explicitly questioned on racism. I acknowledge that they may produce several types of discourse on racism adapted to various audiences (close kin and friends, coworkers, outsiders, a white North-American female like me, and so forth). Each of these discourses can be tapped for what it tells us about the social representations that respondents have of the other and of themselves. None of these discourses exhausts the reality of racism, yet each enriches our understanding of it.

²⁹ North-African interviewees identified themselves as North African, Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian, or as Kabyle or Berber originating from Morocco, Tunisia, or Algeria. Similarly, African-American interviewees include only individuals who identified themselves as such. All North-African respondents are legal immigrants and all but a few have been in France for more than twenty years. None have taken French citizenship although several have children who are French or who plan to claim French citizenship when they turn 21. North-African immigrants make up eight percent of the French population (Arnaud 1986, p. 16).

³⁰ None of the French respondents described themselves as immigrants, and all non-black American respondents were Caucasian and born in the United States. All respondents are between 25 and 65 years of age.

³¹ In most cases, respondents were first sent a letter that described the project and asked for their participation. These letters were followed by a phone call to screen potential participants for the various criteria described above. I would then conduct the interview with qualified respondents in their home or at a location of their choice. All interviews were recorded with the respondent's permission.

³² By using in-depth interviews instead of ethnographic observation, I sacrifice depth to breadth. Furthermore, while interviews cannot tap racism "in action," they can tap broader cultural frameworks that are transportable from one context of action to another.

and the anti-racism of African Americans and that of North African immigrants, it is because these latter groups are the prime victims of racism in the United States and France.

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