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What is This?

Ordinary Cosmopolitanisms
Strategies for Bridging Racial Boundaries among Working-Class Men

Michèle Lamont and Sada Aksartova

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 it. For instance, Ulf Hannerz (1996) defines cosmopolitanism in terms of an upper middle-class occupational and experiential culture that implies an appreciation of varied lifestyles. In contrast, we move the discussion in a new direction by setting out to explore ordinary cosmopolitanisms, defined as the strategies used by ordinary people to bridge boundaries with people who are different from them.

Specifically, the article analyzes the types of evidence used by the non-college-educated white and black workers in the United States and white and North African workers in France to show that various racial groups are similar – what we call anti-racist rhetorics. We take these rhetorics to be one of the main forms that ordinary cosmopolitanism takes in contemporary societies. In his most recent book, Paul Gilroy (2000) argues for the need to overcome racialized differentiation by means of 'planetary humanism' and cosmopolitan imagination. What is missing from this account is a discussion of extant anti-racism and anti-racist practices.[1] Therefore we ask: what cultural resources do ordinary people draw on to counteract racism? What are the cultural building blocks of the cosmopolitan imagination? How do representatives of both the privileged and the disadvantaged groups bridge racial difference in everyday life?

The focus on workers is warranted because they tend to be overlooked in the literature on cosmopolitanism, the latter being largely concerned with

experiences that are deterritorialized, 'interstitial' and translocal (Bhabha, 1994). Their absence from this literature implies that cosmopolitanism is less likely to be encountered in their midst as compared to the elite strata of society where 'cosmopolitan travelers' are generally implicitly thought of as dwelling. Unlike the commonly envisaged cosmopolitans, the majority of people in the working class do not trade, work, love, marry or do research internationally, to paraphrase Beck (2002). Although their work situation may be fluctuating, their personal lives are often deeply embedded in very stable social networks and they tend to live within somewhat circumscribed communities (Lamont, 2000). However, this should not be taken to mean that they are bereft of cosmopolitan imagination – they engage with difference perhaps just as often as the paradigmatic cosmopolitans, albeit on a local, as opposed to a global, scale. They do so particularly when they confront racial boundaries in their daily lives – whether they be members of 'majority' or 'minority' groups. By providing an empirical examination of how they understand racial differences and commonalities, we seek to expand the scope of the debate on the actually existing cosmopolitan practices (Robbins, 1998; Pollock et al., 2000).

In the literature, cosmopolitanism is generally conceptualized in terms of allegiance to the world community of humankind and almost always defined in contrast to nationalism, because national boundaries remain the chief mechanism for separating 'us' from 'them', and for hierarchizing various people along some kind of moral scale. The opposition of nationalism to cosmopolitanism perhaps conveys most vividly the fundamental tension between moral obligations to one's local origins and group memberships, on the one hand, and to the rest of the world, on the other (Nussbaum, 1996). However, nationalism is but one expression of xenophobia and intolerance (Kymlicka, 2001). It is closely followed by race, another durable mechanism of division and exclusion within the borders of many contemporary nations as well as between them.[2] The main challenge of cosmopolitanism then, as Nussbaum puts it (1996: 138), 'is to work toward a state of things in which all of the differences will be nonhierarchically understood'. Advocating cosmopolitan education, she emphasizes the importance of cultural resources that would foster cosmopolitan imagination and that are widely available. She states emphatically that the language of universal morality is quite familiar to most of us, regardless of our national, ethnic or religious traditions, age or social status.

Following Nussbaum (1996), we take cosmopolitanism to refer to a moral commitment to universals.[3] However, unlike Ignatieff (1999) and Beck (1998), we do not discuss it in terms of abstract moral choices (in 'what one chooses to make oneself'), but ground it in 'particular universalisms' (Lamont et al., 2002), that is, in the cultural repertoires of universalism that are differentially available to individuals across race and national context. While the debate on patriotism and cosmopolitanism (Cohen, 1996) centers on whether the two are compatible or mutually exclusive, our goal is to analyze national differences in such cultural

repertoires by looking at how white and black workers in the United States and white and North African workers in France talk about human similarities.

Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour (1983) – who argued for the need to analyze evidence scientists use to construct 'facts' – we analyze in-depth interviews for the types of evidence used by the four groups under consideration to show that we are the same or that we should (as human beings, people with red blood, etc.) be construed as the same. Our explanation for the similarities and differences will emphasize the cultural repertoires these groups have access to. We will conclude with a discussion of the ways in which this approach broadens our understanding of cosmopolitanism.

Our analysis relies on the tools of cultural sociology: we interviewed 150 randomly chosen workers and asked them to describe the types of people they feel superior and inferior to, and the types 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). We 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, we 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. Note that our 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 interviewed men 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.[4] In so doing, they establish an equivalence between individuals who they believe belong to a same symbolic 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 group identities 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 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 cosmopolitanisms draw on very different cultural resources.[5] Let the discussion begin on the other side of the Atlantic.

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

The white American workers we 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,[6] 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 that has been central to the American workers' movement from its inception, and according to which individuals legitimized gaining social and political membership by being self-reliant and productive (Wilentz, 1984). A number of American workers take market performance to be a legitimate and efficient arbitrator of worth, by contrast to the social-democratic European (and French) model in which the market produces inequalities that must be remedied by the state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Having high-status occupations can make blacks equal to whites.

White American 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 differ-
ences among people.[7] A mechanic goes further by universalizing this prin-
ciple 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 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 American workers is
particularly striking in the light of the prominence of egalitarianism in US
political culture, starting with the first lines of the Declaration of Indepen-
dence. As we will see, the anti-racism of French workers is very different,
as it is articulated around arguments pertaining specifically to human soli-
darity and to the equal dignity of human beings, and market performance
arguments 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, multicultural-
ism or the celebration of racial differences, that are widely viewed in
academic circles as effective antidotes to racism, are absent from the world-
views of the workers with whom we spoke.[8] 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)[9] might appeal more to college graduates, who tend to be more tolerant and to appreciate a wide range of cultural tastes and practices as compared to high school graduates.[10]

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, to 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 opening 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.

Competence is a particularly legitimate piece of evidence of equality in a blue-collar world where co-workers 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 co-workers] 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'.[11] 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 the Jim Crow laws, 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, later, a car, a house). Working and consuming are individual strategies for coping with racism, in that they signal that one 'belongs'.[12] However, these modes of equalization perpetuate particularism, in the sense that they are unevenly spread across groups, even though they are in principle available to all.[13] In other words, it can be viewed as a classist mode of equalization as it correlates people's worth with their class position.[14]

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 out that, historically, the church played an important role in affirming equality and providing blacks with tools for spiritual empowerment (1935: 124, cited by Kelley, 1994: 42; see also Harding, 1981). The biblical notion that 'God created men equal' was also alluded to by Martin Luther King, Jr., and it rests on a notion of basic humanity for all, with love as a basis for similarity (Condit and Lucaites, 1993: 192). 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 creations 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 appeal 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 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 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 to his national identity and associates himself with the positive aspects of his national culture, which include openness to outsiders. In this, he follows 18th-century African-Americans who grounded their equality in territory instead of lineage (Condit and Lucaites, 1993: 6). 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'.

The last strategy of equalization consists in pointing 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 by saying 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 CEO 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 these 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 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.

French Workers' Anti-Racism I – Egalitarianism and Solidarity

As in the United States, French workers we interviewed establish racial equality in ways starkly different from 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 speak of the universality of human needs, as does an old mason when he says 'we are all there 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 this, 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 we talked to. None of them took socioeconomic success as a criterion of social membership and none argued that the market adjudicates the value of people. Instead, using somewhat different republican themes, workers affirm the existence of equality despite social differences, as opposed to conceiving it as resulting from such differences, that is from purchasing power.[15] 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'.

When discussing social differences, French workers persistently referred to the principles of solidarity and its natural complement, egalitarianism – principles ignored by American workers.[16] 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 (Lamont, 1992), these workers define themselves against a type of moral pragmatism that is advocated by some American workers. A few justify 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.

In proclaiming their obligation of solidarity toward the unfortunate, workers draw on a solidaristic discourse central to Catholicism,[17] which is reinforced by France's strong tradition of state interventionism advocated 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 has promoted solidarity between nationals and colonial workers, and later between French workers and immigrant workers.[18] 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-racist organizations such as the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (LDH) and the *Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples* (MRAP) with *SOS-racisme*, which in l985 organized an anti-racist concert that attracted 300,000 people. 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.

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 interviewees 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 that:

> . . . 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 50-year-old carpenter explains that 'we cannot be racist at work because we work with them, and they are people like others. 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 circumstances in which people find themselves.

By providing a structural explanation for social differences, these workers de-naturalize 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 the latter based their arguments on cultural resources different from those used by French workers (for instance, in the

African-American case the discourse of solidarity was produced by the Black church, while in the French case it was 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.

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.

'Following a straight path' is an important leitmotif 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 in the following words:

> 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 us 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 we 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.[19] Hence North African workers ground their equality in particular dimensions of morality that are central in their own religious tradition.

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.[20]

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 everywhere, independent of time and space. It is not because you are old or because it is the year 2000 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 ahistorical truth. This is in line with the Koran in which nature is often presented as evidence demonstrating the essence of things (Berque, 1979: 23). This 'naturalistic' anti-racism contrasts with the multicultural and relativistic approaches used by academics, as do ordinary theories of anti-racism in the United States.[21]

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 sociocultural 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.

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-quarters 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 (Rosen, 1984: 28).

The complement to – or justification for – 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 the 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.[22]

Conclusion

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 counterparts do, 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 call for multiculturalism. Instead, they all more readily point to the equalizing 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 affirm their equality with whites, North Africans refer to the universality of morality and emphasize the importance of following universal moral precepts, such as the rule of respect. The two minority groups also bring up the pervasiveness 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 article, we have pointed to a variety of 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 references to 'the straight path' emerge directly out of Koranic teachings just as African-American uses of biblical references are sustained by the cultural influence of the Black church. The location vis-à-vis the racial boundary shapes the breadth of evidence used: African-Americans and North Africans employ a more extensive toolkit of anti-racist strategies as compared to whites in both countries.[23]

What are the implications of this analysis for how we understand cosmopolitanism? The inductive approach used here reveals contrasted ways of conceiving how to build 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 interviewed in this study draw on a much wider range of evidence to demonstrate their belonging to the community of humankind. The interviews suggest that working-class men without college education think about their differences and similarities with others through frameworks that share little with those that are at the center of the existing literature on cosmopolitanism, that is, multicultural identities. One of the problems associated with this preoccupation, in Gilroy's cogent formulation, is that the concept of identity 'orients

thinking away from any engagement with the basic, anti-anthropological sameness', so that '[n]obody ever speaks of human identity' (2000: 98). Workers interviewed in this study prove him half-wrong: they do speak of fundamental human sameness in order to overcome racial difference in their lived experience, but they do not couch it in the language of identity. In so doing they behave as true cosmopolitans by going beyond their racial characteristics and stating their rejection of xenophobia and 'a commitment to tolerance' (Kymlicka, 2001).

This is why we suggest that in thinking about multiple cosmopolitanisms it might be more useful to shift theoretical attention from identity to boundary work. Researchers should focus not only on the construction but also on the transcending of boundaries, as well as on their strength and permeability (Lamont and Molnár, forthcoming). While important work is being done by scholars in several fields on how symbolic boundaries translate into social boundaries, it should be accompanied by parallel studies of the reverse process, where the elimination of social boundaries begins with the deconstruction of symbolic ones. (As one scholar puts it, '[t]he way we act toward "others" is shaped by the way we imagine them' [Scarry, 1996: 98].)

Cosmopolitan agendas should be extended to understanding how people do boundary work in everyday life across national and structural contexts. We need to get a better comparative grasp on how the elite and the non-elite members of different societies draw and overcome boundaries, because the mechanisms and mutual relationships are different and specific cultural repertoires are shaped by different structural conditions. Our study, we hope, demonstrates the merit of such an approach by revealing how different ordinary cosmopolitanisms, informed by more than one language of moral universalism, enable people to resist racism.

To conclude, we propose that we need to take these frameworks seriously in order to put forward a sociology of everyday practical cosmopolitanism that is less dependent on the frameworks predominant in our very distinct upper middle-class academic environments. Although we are not denying that these latter forms of cosmopolitanism do rely on the articulation of cultural difference and hybridity from the standpoint of 'awareness of the subject positions' (Bhabha, 1994), we are arguing for the need for the scholarship itself to open up new theoretical and empirical horizons and contemplate the existence of non-intellectual forms of inclusive thinking and acting. This is essential for understanding the process of bridging boundaries and for fighting more effectively against exclusion.

Methodological Appendix

The study draws on 150 two-hour-long interviews[24] 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.[25] The sample includes 30 African-American blue-collar workers and 30 North African immigrant blue-collar workers.[26] It also includes a French group and a Euro-American

group that each encompasses 30 blue-collar workers and 15 low-status white-collar workers.[27]

Respondents were randomly selected from phone books of 12 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).[28] 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.[29] Finally, if we are comparing French and American racism aimed at North African immigrants and African-Americans, respectively, 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.

Notes

1. As Nava (2002: 89) notes, 'the emphasis on the production of racism, however politically imperative, has led inevitably to the marginalisation of the complex . . . nature of everyday cosmopolitanism and . . . anti-racism'.

2. Gilroy (2000) calls racism 'belligerent nationalism'.

3. As we will show below, ordinary (local) cosmopolitanism is more often based on moral universalism than on the blurring and hybridization of identities.

4. 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 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: 209). In the French literature on racism, universalism is opposed not to particularism, but to differentialism. For instance, Taguieff (1988: 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 article, drawing in part on Walzer's (1994) notion of thick and thin morality, we 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.

5. Note that this article analyzes the material through the prism of cosmopolitanism discussed in Lamont (2000) and Lamont and Thévenot (2000).

6. All names are pseudonyms.

7. 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: 215) links rationalist universalism 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.

8. Along these lines, fully 65 percent of the respondents to the l993 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).

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

10. On tolerance and the broad range of taste of the college-educated, see Lamont (1992: 105) and Bryson (1996). Peterson and Kern (1996) coined the term 'cultural omnivorousness' to label this phenomenon.

11. On consumption and cultural membership, see Ong (1996) as well as Molnár and Lamont (in press). On the importance of consumption for cultural membership among poor black residents of Philadelphia, see Nightingale (1993).

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

13. Hochschild (1995: 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'.

14. 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.

15. 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 (1994) provides a particularly cogent description of this difference.

16. 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 de 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 race- and gender-based hierarchies that 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.

17. 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.

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

19. 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: 48) 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. See also Ahmed (1987).

20. 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.

21. Orientalist scholars such as Von Grunebaum (1962: 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.

22. At the same time, Islam is likely to limit the immigrants' claim concerning equality. In particular, experts on Islam have argued that the concept of equality between all human beings has traditionally not been a 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 Koran 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: 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: 66) suggests that, despite the non-egalitarianism of this latter period, Islam recognizes the fundamental equality of all believers *qua* believers.

23. The explanatory framework, which centers not only on available cultural repertoires, but also on the structural conditions that push workers to use some aspects of these repertoires over others – not discussed here – is fully developed in Lamont (2000).

24. All interviews were conducted by Michèle Lamont.

25. 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, we 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. We adopted this indirect approach because interviewees often present facework and downplay racial prejudice when explicitly questioned on racism. We acknowledge that they may produce several types of discourse on racism adapted to various audiences (close kin and friends, co-workers, outsiders, a white North-American female 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.

26. 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 20 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 8 percent of the French population (Arnaud, 1986: 16).

27. 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.

28. 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. Michèle Lamont 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.

29. By using in-depth interviews instead of ethnographic observation, we 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.

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