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Symbolic Violence**

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‘Sometimes there’s racism towards the French here’: Xenophobic Microaggressions in Pre-2016 London as Articulations of Symbolic Violence

This article discusses xenophobic microaggressions (Pierce, 1970) experienced by members of the French community in London prior to the EU-Membership Referendum in 2016. Acting at the interface of agency and passivity, implicitness and complicity, they go unseen in the social space despite their omnipresence. Through a close reading of empirical data collected as part of an ethnographic study, the article posits that these microaggressions are articulations of historically embedded anti-French ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993). The three main areas addressed are humour, intersectionality and the reproductive nature of the phenomenon (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970; Bourdieu, 1972).

Key words: symbolic violence, xenophobic microaggressions, intersectionality, reproduction, French community

‘Eau no! Four in ten French people don’t take a soak in the shower every day according to survey revealing shocking personal hygiene across the Channel’ – *Mail Online*, 2015

‘One in 29 French people don’t take a shower even once a WEEK - while 13% do not wash their hands after using the toilet’ – *Mail Online*, 2012

‘The English horses being sent to France to be eaten’ – *Mail Online*, 2007

‘French do not wash: official. [...]’ – *Independent*, 1998

‘Up Yours Delors’ – *The Sun*, 1990

‘Ooh ha ha! Readers tell their froggie jokes’ – *The Sun*, 1984¹

Setting the scene

The 2016 EU-Membership Referendum ignited explicit anti-EU rhetoric. Yet this is by no means a recent phenomenon regarding the French, as the above newspaper headlines demonstrate. While not proposing a discourse analysis of British media narratives, this paper does aim to put recent animosity into perspective by revealing acts of anti-French symbolic violence which predate the Referendum. Based on a close, linguistically sensitive reading of views expressed by members of the French community in London prior to the Referendum, the paper will investigate the insidious

¹ The prize for readers’ anti-French jokes was a badge reading ‘Hop off you Frogs’ (<https://www.upi.com/Archives/1984/06/18/Anti-French-jokes-printed-in-a-London-tabloid-newspaper-were/2877456379200/>).

nature of these xenophobic ‘microaggressions’ (Pierce, 1970; Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010) and their societal embeddedness.

In so doing, the paper makes a unique contribution to the growing body of microaggressions’ literature (see Abutbul-Selinger, 2018; Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Lilienfeld, 2017; Shoshana 2016) on both theoretical and empirical levels, by conceiving of it *within* the framework of symbolic violence and by scrutinising an a-typical population, namely the French community in London. Despite the clear links between the concepts of xenophobic microaggressions on the one hand and symbolic violence on the other – significantly also referred to by Bourdieu as ‘violence inerte’ (1993, p.1453), ‘petites misères’ and ‘violences douces’ [soft violence] (*ibid.*) – this theoretical connection appears to have been overlooked in existing studies. Recent work addresses the erection of symbolic, invisible (Abutbul-Selinger, 2018) and ethnicised boundaries (Escafré-Dublet, 2019) and the harmful role seemingly innocuous language can play in everyday interactions (Shoshana, 2016), but no link is made between these microaggressions as articulations of symbolic violence, nor have intersectional practices of microaggressions been investigated. This paper therefore builds on current thought by considering intersectional anti-French microaggressions within a broader and more complex theoretical framework of Bourdieusian symbolic violence.

It contends that in the same way that ‘invisible boundaries’ are erected to inhibit ethnic minority entry to the middle class (Abutbul-Selinger, 2018, p.1), so too are they erected to prevent culturo-linguistic migrant minorities from feeling part of wider society. Through the repeated and often supposedly light-hearted operationalisation of microaggressions, they divide up space and ‘tacitly shape ethnic [and diasporic] consciousness’ (Abutbul-Selinger 2018, p.3). This denies French migrants the status of full belonging and thus contributes to a process of systematic othering, compounded by the community’s comparative invisibility. Drawing an incongruous parallel with the (colour-)blindness alluded to by Beaman (2018) and Wolfreys (2018) regarding France’s ethnic minorities, such invisibilisation can be interpreted as a form of microinvalidation

(Sue 2010) and is largely attributable to ‘a hierarchy of suffering that distinguishes between migrants defined as *at risk* [...] or *a risk*’ (Tsagarousianou & Retis, 2019, p.7), neither of which typically corresponds to London’s French migrants. The community is therefore erased from the picture, which invalidates their presence while simultaneously validating “victimless” anti-French behaviours. In bringing to light these unseen power relations between host society and a purportedly “unproblematic” migrant group, generally known for their cultural capital and rarely apprehended as objects of microaggressions, the paper is both timely and original.

Although verbal and occasionally physical abuse aimed at EU-nationals has gained considerable media attention since the so-called ‘Brexit’ vote,² its existence *prior* to 2016 and in the literature on microaggressions has been largely overlooked. There are some exceptions, including Looney’s 2017 article on the ‘politics of othering [...] in both pre and post-Brexit Britain’ (p.2), Grill’s 2018 paper on ‘migrating racialisation’ and symbolic violence among Britain’s Slovak Roma community, and Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy’s 2012 study on different forms of racialisation of (White) EU migrants.³ However, these exceptions tend to disregard *Western* European migrants, and French nationals in particular, owing to their epitomising ‘worthy’ migration (Looney, 2017, p.9), as seen above. This article addresses the lacuna, drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence, which, I argue, encompasses everyday microaggressions in a way that transcends their predominantly racialised (Pierce, 1970; Sue et al. 2007) or, more recently, gendered (Owen, Tao, & Rodolfa, 2010; Nadal, 2013; Lilienfeld, 2017) denotation, potentially including cultural and/or ‘national’ dimensions (Shoshana, 2016, p.1055), as well as combinations thereof in an intersectional turn, while accounting for their inherently ambiguous nature (Lilienfeld, 2017).

In particular, the article builds on concerns raised by Block (2006), who appears to be the only other scholar to have acknowledged the subtle prejudice faced by contemporary French

² See, for example, *Business Insider UK*, December 03, 2017; *French Morning London*, May 22 and August 29, 2018; *Guardian*, September 19, 2016; *Independent*, October 17, 2017, and April 13, 2018; or the *New Statesman*, October 17, 2017.

³ This reductionist terminology is not representative of London’s French community overall, which is ethnically heterogeneous (unlike British migrants in the Lot; Benson, 2011).

migrants in London, over a decade before the EU Referendum surge in hate crime.⁴ While not featuring in the wider scholarly conversation on discrimination against White minorities, notably Irish, Central and Eastern European migrants (Fox et al., 2012, 2015; Lulle, Moroşanu, & King, 2018; Mac an Ghaill, 2000; Mc Dowell, 2007), Block recognised – albeit fleetingly – that despite being ‘phenotypically White European, and not in any sense visible minorities in London’, his participants (French teachers) had all, ‘at one time or another, been subjected to nationalistic and xenophobic comments [...] from pupils, [...] parents and even acquaintances encountered away from the workplace’ (2006, p.133). Although possibly surprising for British readers, blind to their omnipresence through their own nationally and linguistically dominant positioning in the UK context, these everyday anti-French ‘microinsults’ (Sue et al., 2007, p.277) are commonplace. However, it is important to underline that these microaggressions distinguish themselves from racism *per se*, since they bypass “colour” and do not stem from a hegemonistic historical context like that of the White supremacy framing traditional or ‘old racism’ (Shoshana, 2016), with considerably fewer structural and individuated repercussions.⁵ Indeed, the long tradition of simultaneous animosity and admiration which underpins contemporary Anglo-French relations (R. Tombs & Tombs, 2007) undoubtedly awards this type of xenophobic microaggression a uniqueness whose in-depth discussion goes beyond the scope of this article, but which is nevertheless relevant to the contemporary phenomenon, as touched upon in the final section. Therefore, far from wishing to overshadow or minimise the particularities of racialised experiences, the purpose of this article is to highlight the seriousness of hitherto largely ignored – despite its pervasiveness – current-day anti-French xenophobia, by acknowledging that ‘[w]hile race continues to be significant, it is in no way the only determinant of one’s symbolic and material positioning and it articulates itself in different blended modalities at the intersection of class, gender, or ethno-national markers of

⁴ See the *Home Office Statistical Bulletin* (October 17, 2017) for concrete evidence of the rise.

⁵ My participants and other French community members nevertheless refer to anti-French microaggressions as acts of ‘racism’, as the title of this article evidences. See also Leila Lamnaouer’s article (*French Morning London*, August 29, 2018), where the term is used by a 10-year-old French national living in Essex, to describe her schoolfriends’ parents, who have excluded her from birthday-party guestlists since the 2016 Referendum.

difference' (Grill, 2018, p.1151). Bourdieusian symbolic violence is a conceptual framework – rarely used in migration studies⁶ – which accommodates precisely these subtler, culturo-national forms of prejudice.

Through its focus on 'hidden injuries' (Lehmann, 2013, p.9), everydayness and – crucially – how societal acceptance of these barely perceptible enactments of discriminatory mentalities encourages their perpetuation, the concept of symbolic violence necessarily shifts the debate from phenotype to function. The theoretical framework therefore makes a singular contribution to the literature on non-racialised microaggressions in migration studies and the social sciences more broadly.⁷ Using empirical evidence, the article demonstrates that trivialising xenophobic attitudes, or disguising them beneath a veneer of light-heartedness, is itself a contributory factor to the injury sustained on both individual and collective levels. What is at stake here, as Fox et al. contend, is the insidious xenophobia of 'innuendo and inference', rather than explicit 'epithets and insults' (2012, p.689). The paper therefore asks whether humour, when targeting a collective national identity, is simply the innocuous result of long-standing affective Franco-English relations, that is, an indication of the underlying mutual respect of each nation, or a harmful mechanism to disguise deep-seated antagonism – or potentially both. It investigates whether respondents' experiences of 'brief and commonplace [...], whether intentional or unintentional, slights and insults' (Sue et al. 2007, p.273), point to societal blinkeredness in relation to anti-French discourses that might be less accepted, and hence more visible, vis-à-vis other nationalities. It is this public unconsciousness, this legitimated permissiveness and societal inertia that the theoretical lens of symbolic violence brings to the fore, in a manner that the notions of 'cultural racism' or 'xenophobic microaggressions' in isolation achieve less forcefully.

Another aspect of microaggressions as practices of symbolic violence to be examined is sexual objectification and the intersectional nature of some respondents' experiences of xenophobia

⁶ Grill's 2018 paper is a noteworthy exception.

⁷ See, for example, Owen, 2012 on microaggressions against the overweight; Weber et al., 2017 on microaggressions against racially diverse sexual minorities; together with Nadal et al., 2012, or Shoshana, 2016, on Islamophobic articulations thereof.

in London. Arguably the result of the sensual *femme-fatale*, object/icon mythologised through French media over decades of filmic prominence in the London social space (from Brigitte Bardot to Audrey Tautou) and eternally captured in the “host” imagination, sexualised/nationalised stereotyping persists and finds articulation through (in)offensive comments. As Phillips points out, ‘the naturalising of socially and historically generated difference is not restricted to those categories most open to biological or genetic determinism, but can also figure in relation to ones that are self-evidently social and historical’ (2010, p.13), together with those that are – significantly – cultural (Looney, 2017), national and mediated (Sprio, 2013). Thus, however glib or “well-intended”, sexually inflected remarks and attitudes towards individuals based on their national heritage are fundamentally at odds with the supposed gender equality of our times, as well as with the perceived openness of the London social space; as such, they are considered forms of symbolic violence worthy of analysis.

Although London is often considered a space comparatively free from the closed-mindedness and discrimination encountered in France, both historically (Janvrin & Rawlinson, 2013; Randall, 2013) and contemporarily (Blanchard, Bancel, & Thomas, 2017; Huc-Hepher & Drake, 2013; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014), the personal accounts explored here testify to widespread xenophobic microaggressions. Arguably rooted in centuries of anti-French hostility, the attitudes are so engrained they have become unnoticeable, unnoticed, part of local ‘habitus’ even. The testimonies I have collected bear witness to the implicit, yet omnipresent, ‘violence’⁸ pervading the social space today – just below the surface – but also to the role history has played in forging such a *status quo*, and therefore to the powerful notion of ‘reproduction’ posited by Bourdieu & Passeron (1970). Looney posits that ‘Othering has now become entrenched in mainstream policies and rhetoric, and no longer lurks in the shadows’ (Looney 2017, p.6); however, it is precisely the

⁸ Although intangible, cognitive-science research shows the same brain areas are activated when experiencing social rejection as with physical pain (Kross et al., 2011). Similarly, one of the five core premises on which the Microaggression Research Program (MRP) lies is its potential to ‘exert an adverse impact on recipients’ mental health’ (Lilienfeld, 2017, p.140). Whilst testing such effects falls beyond the scope of this research, the psychological impact is nevertheless significant and validates Bourdieu’s terminology (i.e. *symbolic violence*).

shadowy, everyday manifestations that this article proposes to bring to light, and in so doing give greater clarity and meaning to post-2016 explicit iterations of the same phenomenon.⁹

Theorising the unsaid

Symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993) refers to a form of hostility which, although not physically inflicted, can result in a tangible sense of injury (Schubert, 2012, p.180). Integral to the concept is that it necessarily extends beyond the non-physicality of the violence, encompassing a subtle, dynamic process of implicitness and complicity. Bourdieu postulates that ‘symbolic violence takes place through an act of awareness and unawareness which lies beneath the controls of consciousness and volition, in the darkness of the workings of habitus’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.146).¹⁰ He also cautions against its potential to implicate victims in their own oppression (p.142). Entrenched forms of symbolic violence are therefore conceptualised as processes that function at the interface of agency and passivity, in keeping with Ricœur’s tensive philosophy (1969; 1995), with neither perpetrator nor victim necessarily conscious of any wrongdoing.¹¹ It is precisely these evasive characteristics that allow quotidian anti-French microaggressions to take place with ubiquity, impunity and, at times, apparent legitimacy.

Bourdieu’s construct has much in keeping with the contemporary notion of ‘implicit bias’ (see Maddox & Perry, 2017, or Saul, 2013) and also incorporates the ambiguity intrinsic to present understandings of microaggressions, which, according to Sue et al. (2007), serves to compound their perniciousness, trapping victims in a perpetual paradox. As Lilienfeld explains, due to the subtlety of the microaggressions, identifying and reacting to them can be problematic: if victims ‘say nothing, they risk becoming resentful [... and] may inadvertently encourage further microaggressions from the same person. In contrast, if they say something, the deliverer may deny

⁹ See Remigi & Martin (2017) for multiple examples.

¹⁰ All quotations originally expressed in French have been translated into English by Huc-Hepher, whether from primary or secondary sources.

¹¹ It is noteworthy that Lilienfeld refers to “‘deliverers” in lieu of the pejorative term “perpetrators” to avoid any connotation of intentionality or malevolence’ (2017, p.141).

having engaged in prejudice and accuse them of being hypersensitive or paranoid' (2017, p.141-2). While this self-contradictory situation corresponds in part to Bourdieu's implicitness/complicity paradigm, there is nevertheless a fundamental distinction: symbolic violence not only recognises the potentially unwitting nature of the prejudice on the part of the 'deliverer', as in the case of implicit or '(un)conscious bias' (Tate & Page, 2018, p.143),¹² but also the possibility of unconscious collusion from the *recipients*, who often downplay the microaggression or fail to recognise it altogether. This process, described elsewhere as 'victim complicity' (Landry, 2006, p.85) or 'voluntary servitude' (Dubet, 2014, p.19), is perhaps the inevitable consequence of the catch-22 situation defined above, with uncertainty over the existence of a micro-offence and a tacit unwillingness to generate yet more ill-will by drawing attention to it, resulting in pre-reflexive negation. Power dynamics therefore remain unchallenged and symbolically violent acts prosper. The negative external forces are subsequently internalised and taken for granted (Grill, 2018), which inevitability ensures their self-perpetuation. This fatalistic model thus leads to the social reproduction so vehemently condemned by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970).

Although the validity of the symbolic violence hypothesis could be challenged due to the non-existence of a power imbalance between French and English nationals, given the politico-economic prominence of both nations on the world stage and the positive impact of France in British intellectual, diplomatic, gastronomic and *haute couture* fields, historically and contemporarily, the argument put forward here is that both the migrants' positioning as a *minority* group – necessarily dominated in number by the "host" majority – and misrecognition of the symbolic harm as ordinary or harmless, instead of the 'products of wider social [and cultural] structures' (Grill, 2018, p.1142), qualify them as legitimate victims of symbolic violence, articulated through xenophobic microaggressions. Indeed, questioning the legitimacy of ascribing symbolic violence to this migrant group typifies the phenomenon itself, minimising any injury

¹² Tate & Page (2018) propose a new inscription of the term 'unconscious bias', as '(un)conscious bias', in order to draw attention 'to its very conscious basis and the fact that 'un' as prefix is an alibi for continuing white supremacy' (p.143).

caused owing to an incapacity to conceive of its presence. Thus, rather than being apprehended simply as a synonym for violence without physical harm, symbolic violence should be understood as a subtle complex whose effects reach beyond the level of the individuals involved to that of society. In other words, it is a question of the “host” society’s tacit tolerance of the violence inflicted (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), which Tate & Page condemn as a ‘wilful silencing’ (2018, p.143), whether in the form of the newspaper headlines opening this article or other types of microaggressions uncovered empirically and presented below. Both sets of examples show how pertinent the concept of symbolic violence, materialised through xenophobic microaggressions, is to the study of the French in London, who defy typical categorisation and hence scholarly attention. That is, arguably being in a ‘class’ of their own as a minority migrant group in London, occupying a position of ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1979) due to the symbolic cultural capital they represent, for example in the field of gastronomy (Kelly, 2016), as mentioned above, they have been “whitewashed” out of the debate in both the social space and migration studies’ discourses, which further deepens the process of symbolic violence.¹³

Mac an Ghaill highlights the ‘exclusive and exclusionary’ (2000, p.138-9) constructions of ethnicity and anti-Irish ‘racism’ in Britain, but they are equally relevant to the discussion of anti-French microaggressions. The façade of humour conceals the xenophobia, unacknowledged as offensive because of the symbolic *exclusivity* of Frenchness in the London field and because of the *exclusionary* compartmentalisation of “valid(ated)” discrimination. Consequently, as Ricœur (1969) contends, we need to approach humour and tropes – normalised to the extent of becoming invisible and accepted – with mindful suspicion, asking what lies behind them and what they tell us about the utterers. For the specific variety of symbolic violence experienced by French migrants in London in the form of supposedly light-hearted slights, results in an elusive operationalisation of othering, the effects of which are very tangible for those concerned. In addition to the personal offence

¹³ Other studies focus on highly skilled (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014) French ‘Eurostars’ (Favell, 2008), which reflects the (mis)conception of the community as a homogenous elite based in South Kensington and/or working in the City (Huc-Hepher & Drake, 2013).

experienced, these “good-humoured” microaggressions can also inhibit penetration into the social and friendship networks of the host population (Thatcher & Halvorsrud, 2016; Huc-Hepher & Drake, 2013) and ‘awaken a particular kind of lucidness; the fact of being constantly reminded of one’s foreignness causes one to perceive things that others may not see or feel’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.181). In this way, the trivialisation itself contributes to the erasure and, in turn, to the injury suffered.

The process of activating microaggressions therefore produces a distinctive variety of symbolic violence; not that associated with structural domination *per se*, rather of internalised cultural marginalisation and belittlement among a community traditionally associated with cultural capital. Whereas Bourdieu’s work focuses on social distinction and socially conceived hierarchical models of domination (Bourdieu, 1982, p.206-207; Weininger, 2005), this paper is conceptually geared towards ‘an imagined “hierarchy of nations”’ (Thatcher & Halvorsrud, 2016, p.99), or, more specifically, a nationally framed diaspora and its individuated identities. Deploying Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence hence enables a more nuanced understanding of culturally rooted xenophobic microaggressions. First, it sets these otherwise isolated acts within a broader sociocultural framework, which sheds light on sub-surface power dynamics. Second, it recognises the centrality of history, or reproductive habitus, in the installation of profoundly xenophobic yet profoundly ignored attitudes (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.143) (as one sexagenarian participant claimed ‘anti-French sentiment has existed here forever’). Third, symbolic violence unequivocally acknowledges the complicit ambiguity at play in normalised xenophobic microaggressions, which gives rise to the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1969) produced within the subject in the form of ‘internal conversations’ (Shoshana, 2016, p.1063) and self-questioning (Sue et al., 2007). Through the superficially undetectable nature of the symbolic or microscopic assaults, doubt is cast over their very existence, which diminishes their significance, ensures their durability and blurs the boundary between agency and passivity. This inherent ambivalence (Robinson, 1995) is central to Bourdieu’s concept, since ‘symbolic violence cannot be understood unless the opposition between

coercion and consent, external imposition and internal urges, is rejected' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 146). It is important to emphasise this because it is one of the expressions of symbolic violence that has been insufficiently discussed in the research literature and one that leads to the perpetuation of xenophobic microaggressions.

Further, given that most French migrants in London, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, do not undergo materialised manifestations of symbolic violence, such as exclusion from employment or housing, I bring the concept of 'symbolic violence' together with 'microaggressions' to draw attention to more tacit practices, which nevertheless cause harm. In this way, semantic connections are made between the 'symbolic' and the 'micro' – i.e. the non-physical, intangible and hence "insignificant" – and between 'violence' and 'aggression', which can be briefly defined as an act or attitude of hostility.¹⁴ But by integrating microaggressions within the theoretical framework of symbolic violence, they are afforded the gravitas they warrant, for as Rippon conjectures, violence needs to be used as a substitute for aggression to account for the extent to which society has become desensitised (scholars included) to the term 'aggression'. In a 'society where the abuse of superlatives in the English language is becoming a more common occurrence, [... and where] aggression no longer engenders strong emotions that attract media attention' (Rippon, 2000, p.456), it is only by using this more explicit language that the 'true causes of this unease which are only ever publicly expressed through social signs that are difficult to interpret' (Bourdieu et al., 1993, p.1452) can be afforded the recognition they deserve. There is consequently a pressing need to conceptualise microaggressions as *constituent* practices of symbolic *violence* and to demonstrate how they can be extended from the micro to the macro through their conceptualisation as articulations thereof.

¹⁴ However, there are multiple interpretations of both 'aggression' and 'violence', both of which are explored at length by Rippon, who concludes that "aggression is behaviour with intent that is directed at doing harm to a living being whether harm results or not, or with wilful blindness as to whether harm would result ... [it] can be physical or verbal, active or passive, and be focused on the victim(s) directly or indirectly ... [and] can also occur in the absence of anger" (Rippon, 2000: 456).

Collecting the Data

Falling within the framework of an ethnographic project, which began in 2010 with a pilot questionnaire and concluded in 2015 after a sustained period of immersion among members of the London-French community (for example, at mother-and-toddler groups, supplementary schools, community events, social gatherings, etc.), the findings presented are based predominantly on first-hand accounts provided during interviews. These semi-structured conversations were held with a diverse sample of 20 French Londoners, ranging in age from 20 to 80, and in location of London residency from Bethnal Green (E2) to Richmond (TW9) and Archway to Beckenham (BR3). The participants were from varied socio-professional backgrounds, some having accumulated years of tertiary education and holding influential positions in London's medical, educational and commercial sectors, and others having migrated to the capital on completion of their secondary education and occupying low-skilled positions. Similarly, the interviewees covered a broad spectrum of ethnic and originary geographic provenance, with heritage ranging from Algeria, Benin and Senegal, through to Reunion Island and Canada, in addition to France; domicile in France included conurbations such as Paris, Bordeaux and Lyon, together with smaller towns and villages, from Provence to Normandy.¹⁵ Not all the conversations involved discussions of anti-French xenophobic microaggressions, but it is useful to note that among the eight interviews that did turn towards such themes (all alluded to below), three of the participants were White females, two were females with BME heritage, two were White males and one was a Black male.

The majority of the interviews took place in person, in local cafés of the participants' choosing, or in their workplaces or homes, with a minority being conducted on the author's university premises or by telephone. Two of the interviewees cited below were return migrants, for whom telephone exchanges were more practical than face-to-face conversations, and whose London experiences were retrospective, but no less telling for it. Lasting between 1.5 and 2 hours on average, our conversations – all in French bar one – were rich, in-depth and varied. The interview

¹⁵ See Huc-Hepher & Drake (2013) for further details.

schedule included questions of a general nature, such as those pertaining to media consumption, eating habits and language use, together with more personal ones on participants' migratory motivations, sense of belonging in London and experiences of prejudice (in France and/or in the UK). Misogynistic and derisive attitudes were not addressed directly; rather, they emerged organically from the respondents' individual reflections. It is precisely this unprompted spontaneity that adds potency to the accounts, and it is precisely these typically unsaid truths to which this article gives voice.

Trivialising xenophobic attitudes: the everyday violence of humour

This section will examine how supposedly insignificant, light-hearted mockery serves as a mechanism to legitimise articulations of anti-French xenophobia in the diasporic space. Noiriel (1990), Huc-Hepher & Drake (2013) and Beaman (2018) posit that France, through its ostensibly laudable egalitarian Republican ideologies and universality discourse effectively minimises ethnic, regional and other types of difference, and in so doing paradoxically obfuscates underlying social prejudice and inequality, a process which is intensified because the State 'is the monopoly-holder of legitimate symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.1425). In parallel, I argue that the key to the collective tolerance of anti-French microaggressions in London, is often their *humoristic* pretence. Whilst it is largely recognised that prejudice on the grounds of ethnicity, sexuality, gender and so forth is both socially and legally reprehensible in the migratory London field, there appear to be no such moral parameters when ridiculing the French, a point seconded by Fox et al., 2012 (albeit regarding a different EU migrant population). The aforementioned authors recognise the British tabloid press's responsibility, stating that 'innuendo and inference extend them to a larger and growing narrative that attributes the problems of migration to the essential characteristics of the migrants' (p.689). Indeed, years before the 2016 Referendum, Britain's right-wing media were already shaping harmful xenophobic attitudes in the collective consciousness through seemingly "jovial" representations of EU migrant communities. Such essentialisation was mentioned by

several research participants, who underlined the unspoken distinction that appears to render this minority group an ostensibly legitimate target for comedians, national media, office colleagues and even strangers in the British social space.

Beaman argues persuasively that ‘all racial and ethnic categories are social constructions’, including Whiteness, and that in Europe they are ‘based upon colonial domination of other countries’ (Beaman, 2018, p.6), and although our focus here is on cultural discrimination, the colonial narrative nevertheless rings true. Concealed behind a camouflage of amicable japey, an underlying message of former imperial dominance – arrogance even – is identifiable empirically and attests to the (re)establishment of invisible boundaries. Indeed, one testimony collected in the field compared the exclusion felt when working as a Frenchwoman in a well-known British bank, where penetration into the impervious, “banter-loaded” British circles proved impossible, to being ‘a colonial subject’. Such an analogy supports the contention that light-hearted microaggressions camouflage entrenched prejudice and sit within a wider framework of symbolic violence. They also demonstrate the noxious power humour has in a diasporic setting to ‘result in a loss of face, which can cause negative emotions that make the migrant feel excluded from friendships with locals’ (Westcott & Vazquez Maggio, 2016, p.504).

The way in which humour functions around a dialectic between disclosure and concealment, superficial lightness and underlying weight, is also conveyed by Bruno,¹⁶ a White, male chef from Bordeaux. He first migrated to London in 1991, aged 19, initially for a year or two, to improve his English and experience the dynamic youth culture, but now considers London to be his home – most of the time. He denoted two situations, however, where he has been repeatedly made aware of his otherness and consequent feeling of marginalisation. First, as a spectator of stand-up comedy, the French being deemed justifiable objects of mockery; and, second, as a spectator of international football matches. During these incidents, for example in London pubs, Bruno has felt from the reactions of other viewers that ‘they’re all against France – always’, supporting the opposing team

¹⁶ Pseudonyms are used throughout.

by default. Bruno's narrative unfurled to show that he endures this unified opposition to the French team, regardless of the nationality of the adversary and the supposed light-heartedness of the context, as a personal injury, the collective displays heightening his sense of isolation. As a short, dark-haired and thick-accented (De Roquemaurel, 2014) individual, the intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) nature of the microaggressions compounded his sense of otherness, causing him not only to feel excluded for his French nationality, but ridiculed for his supposed physical embodiment thereof. In his own words, he felt 'hurt, humiliated and vengeful', explaining that 'it's deeper than you think; you can't explain it unless you've experienced it yourself. It creates an unsavoury atmosphere'. His account evidences the extent of injury sustained and the ensuing acrimony created. This situation thus corresponds to a form of xenophobia which is 'implicitly embedded and reproduced in exclusionary [...] practices' (Fox et al. 2012, p.684), stemming from a logic of culturalised difference (Grill 2018), linked to Bruno's incorporated Frenchness and obscuring deep-rooted national rivalries, resentment and repugnance. Séverine, a 50-year-old, non-White female lawyer, resident in London for the last 26 years, also alluded to sport as a type of entertainment with a potential for symbolic injury:

Play at Wimbledon was between a Frenchman and an Englishman today, and I didn't hear any negative comments from the commentators or the crowd. There was no whistling or booing, and I think there would have been 20 years ago. The commentator was professional; he just said one thing: that the French weren't royalists. But it wasn't said in a hostile way, I didn't feel uncomfortable.

Although Séverine noted a positive development in "host" attitudes, with growing political correctness appearing to have restrained the formerly accepted xenophobic "microinsults" (Sue et al., 2007), she did allude to one prejudiced remark escaping the commentator with undoubted impunity and naturalness. Owing to the inoffensive tone of the utterance ('wasn't said in a hostile way'), Séverine claimed not to have been offended by the comment that reduced the constitutional beliefs of a nation to a single, essentialising stance (Grill, 2018; Phillips, 2010). Yet, by alluding to a remark which, through its singular recollection could belie deeper significance, and subsequently condoning it, relieving it of any hidden injuriousness, Séverine was in effect unwittingly complicit

in the essentialisation of French people. Her own exoneration of the reductionist comment was both symptomatic of the phenomenon and reinforced it. Since even when individuals ‘are subjected to determinisms, [they] contribute to the effectiveness of that which determines them in that they themselves structure that which determines them’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.142). In the same way that Shoshana’s Palestinian professionals in Israeli workplaces endured everyday ‘national microaggressions’ (2016, p.1055) silently, without challenging the perpetrators or externalising the harm experienced, so Séverine, through her subjective mental reconfiguration and qualification of the commentary as unhostile, was unknowingly normalising and nourishing the prejudice. This, as Shoshana contends, ‘raises important questions about the classic, but always relevant, relationships between structure and agency’ (2016, p.1065, citing Archer 2003) and evidences the bi-polar nature of Ricœur’s hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricœur, 1990; Robinson, 1995), with the subject expressing simultaneous reproach and reconciliation, and thus entering into a cycle of perpetually unresolved reflexivity. Furthermore, the very geniality of the comment, serving to *amuse* the primarily British audience – perceived by Séverine to constitute its inoffensiveness – instead increased its pernicious potency.

Sarah, on the other hand, criticised the societal and administrative estrangement she experienced as a highly-skilled, White Frenchwoman in London:

Of course, I didn’t experience discrimination in France, if anything it’s actually here, well, that there can be little jokes and little comments. I feel at home here, but sometimes I’m made to feel like an outsider, a foreigner. For example, I wasn’t able to vote in the recent general election and choose my prime minister. That shocked me.

The lexical proximity between Sarah’s, ‘I feel at home here, but sometimes I’m made to feel like an outsider, a foreigner’, and a remark made by 24-year-old Moses – a French-born, Black, male participant with Senegalese heritage – on his marginalised positioning within the *French* social field, is striking: ‘I feel at home here [in Paris], but sometimes you realise people want to make us understand we’re not’. Although the racial discrimination experienced by Moses in Paris undoubtedly gave rise to a sharper sense of symbolic pain, not least because of the structural, institutionalised and historically embedded White-supremacist injustices that accompanied it, the

lexical similarity of the two testimonies suggests the degree of alienation perceived by Sarah in the London social space. The imprecise language use ('I'm made to feel', 'make us understand') is indicative of the implicitness of the hostility, preventing victims from protesting explicitly or formally owing to the difficulty in identifying the precise nature of the microaggression (Bourdieu, 1998; Sue et al., 2007; Lilienfeld, 2017). Moreover, the grammatically passive phrasing places the emphasis on the interviewees, rather than the deliverers of the symbolic violence, which lessens their culpability and in so doing illustrates the victims' involuntary complicity (Dubet, 2014; Grill, 2018). Similarly, in the phrase 'there can be little jokes and little comments', the absence of a defined subject governing the 'jokes' removes the utterers of the microinsults from the narrative and, in turn, any sense of accountability. Lexically, the repetition of 'little' unambiguously belittles the inherent violence of the comments. Such unconscious trivialisation from both original utterer(s) and addressee, operating, as seen above, 'in the darkness of the workings of habitus' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.146) captures symbolic violence's pernicious duality, and contributes to its societal acceptance and reproduction. Equally insidious is the light-hearted semblance of these 'little jokes', as their perceived inconsequentiality disguise their underlying seriousness.

The outsidership experienced by Sarah was also conveyed by two questionnaire respondents. The first stated not feeling like a Londoner 'because the social and media climate of the country constantly reminds me that I'm foreign'. Whereas the second declared, in answer to whether she felt like a migrant or an immigrant, that she 'often forget[s] it, but the English remind me of it'. These written testimonies – collected several years before the EU Referendum – reveal how an estranging and pervasive media narrative has steadily entered the everyday social space, as Fox et al. profess, with 'cultural difference operating as a criterion for exclusion' (2012, p.691) and a legitimised 'politics of othering' convincing people that 'the source of all ills is the migrant' (Looney, 2017, p.23). Through 'trivial', yet ubiquitous and therefore *trivialised*, anti-French microinsults regularly featuring in dominant discourses in the migratory social space, and hence in "host" imaginations, the respondents are relentlessly informed of their marginalised positioning,

irrespective of how accustomed they have personally grown to their adopted “home”.

French-born Paulette, a 35-year-old, Black, female logistics manager of Beninese parentage, also alluded to light-hearted xenophobic microaggressions in the migratory field, despite them being at odds with the general lack of racism she had encountered in London as a Black woman (Huc-Hepher & Drake, 2013; Duguet et al., 2010). In London, she explained, ‘people don’t see my colour’, whereas in Paris she was repeatedly reminded of, and excluded for, it. In fact, her difficulty in finding work commensurate with her qualifications was a key migratory motivation. This ‘color-blindness’ (Lilienfeld, 2017, p.146) in London, however, was not perceived in the negative manner referred to by Beaman (2018) and Mercer et al. (2011), nor was it reported as the articulation of a ‘microinvalidation’ (Sue et al, 2007, p.274); rather, it came as a refreshing change from the attitudes to which Paulette had been accustomed in France. She is therefore in the paradoxical position of feeling ‘welcome here’ as a Black woman, but at times alienated through her Frenchness, referring to ‘little office jokes, but really very rarely, like people say “the English are roast-beefs” and “the French are frogs”’. These remarks chime with those of Block’s informants, which underlines their credibility and commonplaceness. However, by comparison, the offensiveness is underplayed by Paulette. Block’s participants found ‘it *wearisome* to have to listen to stereotypes about French people eating frog legs and horsemeat’ (Block, 2006, p.133; my italics), while Paulette emphasised the scarcity and inconsequentiality of such remarks. This trivialisation could relate to their perceived light-heartedness compared to the racism she suffered in France, as well as testifying to her sub-conscious *complicity* in the process, with Paulette’s discrediting of the severity of such “witticisms” serving to fuel them. Her understatement could also be a corollary of the very *Frenchness* of the ‘jokes’, which, their prejudice notwithstanding, plainly qualifies her as a *bona fide* Frenchwoman, a status she was perpetually and painfully denied in France (Huc-Hepher & Drake, 2013). The final reason for her downplaying, particularly in comparison to Sarah, who used precisely the same terms (‘little jokes’) but evidently considered the acts more injurious than Paulette, referring to ‘discrimination’ and being ‘shocked’ at the institutional operationalisation of

equally prejudicial treatment (i.e. her exclusion from general elections),¹⁷ could be Paulette's counterbalancing of these normalised anti-French remarks ('frogs') with *parallel* tropes in France ('roast-beefs'). It is plausible to conjecture that the unique reciprocity of Anglo-French japey at which Paulette hints, demotes such derision from the offensive to the inconsequential. Just as sibling pettifoggery generally conceals intense mutual affection, so the familiar wrangling observed in both French and London social spaces could be little more than a sign of mutual respect, each nation – and its citizens – deeming the other 'sweet enemy' (R. Tombs & Tombs, 2007) sufficiently secure in its own national identity to withstand the 'light-hearted' symbolic blows (Kelly, 2016). Yet, when such comments are uttered – and heard – in a *diasporic* context where there is necessarily an imbalance of power, with French nationals numerically inferior, the innocuity of the remarks is undermined and the potential for injuriousness increased.

A priori, Charles, a 34-year-old, White, male interviewee originally from Brittany, but working in London as a UK correspondent, could be deemed to substantiate this 'mutual affection' hypothesis, by initially apprehending French stereotypes encountered in the migratory field in a positive light:

Except for the 'French bashing' tabloids, the stereotypes are usually rather nice, rather flattering, like France is the country of the art of living, beautiful women and Latin lovers. But in working-class areas, where people are quick to mock the French, I've experienced discrimination. I think it's ignorance talking.

Charles's reference to tabloid 'French-bashing' supports the assertion that the British tabloids have contributed to the societal generation and reproduction of xenophobic attitudes, whereby EU migrants, including the French, are pathologised according to a pattern of cultural Othering (Fox et al., 2012). Indeed, the normalisation of anti-French microaggressions was clearly exemplified in the newspaper headlines opening this article. Furthermore, the entry of 'French-bashing' into the French lexicon is material recognition of the phenomenon's ubiquity, for there is only need for a term if the practice exists.¹⁸ 'Big data' support this, in that a Google search generated 16,700 results

¹⁷ Exacerbated in 2016, when the UK's 3 million EU citizens were denied a vote in the Referendum.

¹⁸ Mainstream French media, including *Le Figaro*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Libération* demonstrate this.

from the terms 'le French-bashing', whereas one for 'English-bashing' produced only a handful of exact matches. This linguistic imbalance confirms the author's observation that anti-English microinsults are less widespread in public French discourses, which could in turn reflect reduced incidence in the social space.

Despite offsetting the 'French-bashing' popularised and normalised by the British press with purportedly 'flattering' national clichés, the potential harm of the national stereotyping described by Charles should not be underestimated, because not only do 'overgeneralisation, stereotyping, and a resulting inability even to 'see' characteristics that do not fit your preconceptions [... lead] to discrimination' (Phillips, 2010, p.7), but 'once in existence, they become part of our social reality' (p.3), as illustrated above. This therefore casts doubt over the supposed positivity of the 'French' stereotypes, whose rose-coloured tint pales further when juxtaposed with Charles's lived experience, his personal memories of having been the victim of anti-French ridicule in 'working-class' neighbourhoods superseding the culturally mythologised national representations. Moreover, the genuine positivity of these xenophobic microaggressions is debatable, owing to their highly sexualised nature, as shall be examined in the following section.

Gendered xenophobic microaggressions: intersectionality and the violence of the 'sex bomb'

It could be argued that precisely because of Charles's habitus, defined by Bourdieu as 'a system of lasting and transferable characteristics which, integrating all past experiences, constantly operates as a *matrix of perceptions, judgments and actions*' (2000, p.261 – original italics), he perceives the cultural stereotypes of 'belles femmes' and 'Latin lovers' to be flattering. That is, his intrinsically gendered perspective and formative years in France, deemed more sexist than London (Huc-Hepher & Drake, 2013), have moulded Charles's outlook, which might explain his positive interpretation of reductionist and potentially offensive attitudes. Additionally, because this sexual objectification of the French has entered the collective imagination through the objectifying masculine gaze traditionally operationalised in cinematography and advertising, but also through the mores of the

social field, it is commonly considered 'natural', if considered at all. As Bourdieu (1998, p.58-9)

posits:

symbolic domination (whether of ethnicity, gender, culture, language, etc.) does not function according to the pure logic of knowing consciousness, but through patterns of perception, judgment and action which are constituents of habitus and establish, within conscious decision-making and the confines of willpower, a relationship of awareness profoundly unknown to itself.

Thus, Charles's sympathetic framing of the demeaning microaggressions encountered in the diasporic field corresponds to the unknowingness fundamental to symbolic dominance and violence, as well as to larger-scale societal blindness engendered by cultural standardisation, itself driven by the latent power of everyday media (Shields, p.1990). Indeed, filmic images 'imbued with excess often associated with "Mediterranean sensuality"' (Sprio, 2013, p.5) have passively contributed to the current positioning of French women as sexual objects, with mediatised history therefore shaping contemporary struggles and further entrenching profoundly discriminatory, yet taken-for-granted, homogenising classifications in the diasporic space (Sprio, 2013, p.105-6). Moreover, this conflation of the national with the gendered demonstrates the relevance of intersectionality to the problematisation of anti-French microaggressions.

This was corroborated first-hand by sixty-three-year-old, White Marie. During her time in London in the 1960s, 70s and early 80s, she was the embodiment of the gendered clichés described by Charles above, and, being the object of the masculine gaze rather than the subject, the tone of her narrative differed significantly from his:

Forty years ago, London was just like France [today], and the English would call anyone who wasn't English 'wogs'. I felt it myself. I felt it because it was insinuated. During conversations in pubs, stuff like that, you see. Back then, there were things that shocked me a lot. [...] The French had a reputation of being a bit..., people we'd meet or my husband's mates would often say 'oh, so you've married a little Frenchwoman', and they'd heard I was a 'sex bomb'. That's what it was like. A 'racy little French bird', 'she must be a good cook', stuff like that. It wasn't nasty, but it was the little French female stereotype; it did make me a bit uncomfortable though.

Like Sarah, Marie's memories of victimisation in the migratory field were rekindled within a framework of racism. It nevertheless remains unsaid in Marie's account, with the pronoun replacing the unambiguous noun: 'I felt *it* because *it* was insinuated', although the preceding, highly offensive term leaves little doubt as to what she was referencing. This unprompted racialisation supports other

scholarly assertions over the need for increasingly nuanced cultural breakdowns of Whiteness in the UK diasporic context (Fox et al., 2012; Garner, 2006; Hickman et al., 2005; Lulle et al., 2018; McDowell, 2007; Parutis, 2011; and, fleetingly, Ryan, 2018), but the appositeness of the term ‘racism’ remains questionable in this context. On the one hand, the physicality of the injury suffered through acts of xenophobic microaggressions could be seen as akin to the painful othering of racism, but, on the other, the use of such terminology negates the very specific nature, historicity and effects of anti-Black and Brown racism and the continued dominance of ‘whiteness’ in contemporary society (Tate & Page, 2018, p.142). Whilst the sharp sense of rejection and exclusion triggered by the 2016 Referendum result was experienced by London’s EU migrants as a “‘punch,” a “hit,” an “earthquake,” or a “shock’” (Lulle et al., 2018, p.9) and testimonials refer to ‘racism’ in Remigi and Martin’s collection (2017, p.40), it is likely that the participants resort to this terminology precisely because of the underrepresentation of xenophobic microaggressions in public discourse and lack of recognition of its very existence, particularly prior to 2016. They therefore spontaneously conceptualise others’ xenophobic attitudes to their Frenchness in terms of ‘racialised self-identification’ (Lulle et al., 2018, p.3), despite the inadequacy of the term in this context. Conceptualising these acts as xenophobic microaggressions within a broader framework of symbolic violence is hence justified, especially given the *complicity* also manifested in participants’ accounts. It is demonstrated here through the implicit negation (the repeated use of pronouns), trivialisation (through diminutives, ‘petites’, ‘petit’, ‘peu’) and vindication (‘it wasn’t nasty’) of the xenophobic microaggressions encountered. As stated above, this is entirely symptomatic of the unwitting connivance inherent in the functioning of symbolic violence (Moore 2012, p.101), but not one that should be understood as an ‘alibi’ to exonerate those holding biased views from their inherent culpability (Tate & Page 2018, p.143).¹⁹ For as Ricœur’s hermeneutics of suspicion proposes, although Marie’s reflective narrative casts doubt over the intrinsic aggression and

¹⁹ See also Cederberg (2017), or Fox et al. (2015), who demonstrate such downplaying as a means of status (re)assertion.

significance of the misogynistic comments, the fact that the precise words remain imprinted on her memory several decades' later effectively casts doubt over their purported *insignificance*. Thus, this doubling of doubt reveals how the underlying meaning of Marie's utterance lies in the space between the words and the interpreting subjects, rather than exclusively in the words themselves (Ricoeur, 1969), and in so doing corroborates the dichotomy at the heart of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence.

Of equal relevance is the unravelling of Marie's depiction of anti-French attitudes into her humiliation at being perceived in purely *sexualised* and sexist terms. The concept of intersectionality is thus pertinent (Crenshaw, 1989), with the xenophobic microaggressions undergone by Marie occurring at the intersection of her nationality and gender, rather than the race-gender intersection more commonly problematised (Nash, 2008). In fact, Marie's account demonstrates threefold objectification: firstly, as a domestic trophy, existing exclusively as the wife of her husband; secondly, by virtue of her Frenchness alone, she is rendered a sexualised object ('sex bomb'); and, thirdly, given her originary nation's long-standing reputation for gastronomic cultural capital, she is objectified as a producer of fine food ('she must be a good cook'), regardless of her talents for, or interest in, such culinary pursuits (Bourdieu, 1998).²⁰ Here, therefore, Marie's experience is the incarnation of 'masculine domination which constructs women as symbolic objects', existing 'primarily through and for the gaze of others' (p.94), but heightened through her positioning as a *French* migrant in the diasporic space. Crucially, as regards symbolic violence, there is also a fourth, more *implicit* form of objectification identifiable through Marie's use of grammar. On this occasion, using the pronoun 'she' to refer to herself suggests her husband's acquaintances were speaking *of*, rather than *to* her, manifesting Marie's apparent unworthiness to warrant direct address, despite her presence during the conversations. The intersectionality of Marie's account thus places her experience of gendered French stereotyping in diametric opposition

²⁰ Such objectification and exoticisation by White British men is not unique to French migrants, as Sprio (2013) and Civile et al. (2016) illustrate in relation to Italian and Asian women respectively. However, Marie's reference to 'reputation' is telling.

to Charles's 'flattering' and 'affectionate' interpretation, perhaps partly due to his acknowledgment of the mutual national raillery identified above.²¹

However, given the majority-minority power imbalance of the diasporic space, coupled with the taken-for-granted tabloid and comedic othering prevalent in the UK but not in France, the potentiality for harm remains. Forty-eight-year-old, White, Kensington housewife, Chantal, reiterated this when recalling injurious remarks made by her former marketing director. Intersectionally, her example involved national and gendered dimensions, but added a physical layer reminiscent of the xenophobic microaggressions described by Bruno: "it must be really hard for you because you're so small, you're a woman and you're French." Here, the dominant player – taking advantage of his professional supremacy – blatantly illustrates the 'construction of nation or culture as entity' (Phillips, 2010, p.13) and 'the naturalising of [...] those categories most open to biological or genetic determinism' (p.13). The succession of microinsults thus places a sociocultural construction of Frenchness on a par with innate somatic features, notably femininity and stature.²² They are all apprehended as an irrevocable, embodied 'handicap' (de Roquemaurel, 2014, p.88), prompting a patronising and humiliating expression of "sympathy". This therefore evidences 'the countless, often subliminal, injuries inflicted by the male order' on women (Bourdieu, 1998, p.128), but also – and importantly – the degree to which societal 'complacency in relation to real or assumed masculine expectations' (p.94) acts intersectionally, being instinctively merged with 'logics of colour and culture' (Fox et al., 2012, p.691), or, in this case, nationality and physiognomy. Gender and heritage are not mutually exclusive experiential categories, as Crenshaw (1989) asserts, rather they act and are experienced inter-relationally. Thus, the violence of the remarks made by Chantal's manager was intensified not only by their amalgamation of sexual, biological and cultural elements, but by the dynamics of their relationship with(in) the broader

²¹ Indeed, phrases with subtly misogynistic undertones, such as 'a little Frenchwoman', were as routine in 1970s' France as in the UK, as exemplified by the 1976 romantic comedy entitled *Let's Get Those English Girls (A nous les petites anglaises)*.

²² Often used to denigrate French public figures, historically (Napoleon) and recently (Sarkozy).

narrative of the social field, each feeding into the other and reinforcing the process of normalisation. In other words, each ‘extends from the individual to the social and back again in a feedback loop’ (Tate & Page, 2018, p.153), which heightens the complicity and favours the preservation of the ‘non-knowing’ (Mills 2017, p.57) anti-French xenophobic *status quo*.

Such dynamics were made explicit by Charles later in our conversation, despite his initial trivialisation of the gendered xenophobic microaggressions. Deeper sentiments came to the fore, as did an acknowledgment of the media’s role in societal legitimisation of anti-French symbolic violence. His opinions began to converge in both force and tone with those of Marie, Sarah and Chantal, despite his masculine standpoint. In fact, his earlier portrayal of genteel Anglo-French japery and adulatory national stereotyping shifted to a decidedly more denunciatory tenor, with Charles now casting doubt over the affectionate intent of the mockery in the diasporic space, while accounting for it in the same racialised terms as those evoked by Marie and Sarah:

In France, the clichés are quite affectionate: when we speak about the English, it’s always with the hint of a smile. They intrigue us with their ‘very British’ side. In England, the clichés [...] are a lot more aggressive, and nastier too. And, well, you read it in the tabloids, people don’t always take it seriously, but the influence of the tabloid press shouldn’t be underestimated, nor its impact on ethnic minorities. When I think about the violence of the terms: if you were to replace the word ‘French’ with the word ‘Black’ or ‘Jewish’ you’d be charged for racist or anti-Semitic hate speech, because they say the French smell bad, never wash, are sex mad or cowards. There’s still a bone of contention from the Second World War, about the French not resisting, that they collaborated... So, sometimes the comments are really unpleasant.

Perhaps because Charles sees the stereotypes of the English through the prism of the objectifying subject, but undergoes the French clichés from the perspective of the discriminated object, just as Marie experienced the gendered stereotyping above, he distinguished varying degrees of malice in both social spaces. His lexis speaks for itself: collective French (mis)conceptions of the English are captured in ‘affectionate’ and ‘with a smile’, whilst those concerning the French, masquerading as jocose in the tabloid media, are linked to negative words: ‘nasty’, ‘violence’ ‘insults’, ‘bad’, ‘obsessed’, ‘cowards’, ‘unpleasant’ and ‘aggressive’.²³ It is meaningful that Charles spontaneously referred to the ‘*violence* of the terms’ circulating in the everyday mediated social space, suggesting

²³ One of Benson’s participants also described finding ‘Britain ... a very aggressive place’ (2011, p.34).

he has endured them as an act of symbolic harm. Likewise, the vocabulary's iterative force could be a reflection of the repetitive hostility encountered in London. The hypocrisy he observed is also compelling, anti-Semitic or overtly racist words being formally condemned, but declaring the French 'never wash' or are 'sex mad' 'cowards' goes unpunished, unnoticed even. If newspapers indeed printed 'Black people never wash', 'Jews are all cowards' or 'Muslims smell bad' there would justifiably be public condemnation. Yet, such reductionist, offensive comments are freely passed vis-à-vis the French. Whilst it is not the intention of this article – or undoubtedly the participants it cites – to flatten racism or to claim that xenophobic microaggressions such as these have the same impact as structural or systemic racism towards BME communities, the double-standards to which Charles alluded make for persuasive, if uncomfortable reading. The culture-specific licence to express preconceived ideas about the French, whether by tabloid newspapers, comedians, private individuals, professionals, public figures or politicians,²⁴ is indicative of a collective tolerance of anti-French sentiment that is socially unacceptable regarding other minorities. So, although Looney contends that '[s]trong and vocal anti-immigrant sentiment, particularly in relation to EU migrants, was for a long time the territory of fringe political groups and parties such as the British National Party and the UK Independence Party [... and that] [t]his is no longer the case' (2017, p.4), I would argue that anti-*French* xenophobia has existed for an equally 'long time', albeit in less explicit, less ostensibly extremist terms, and is consequently all the more pernicious for it (Sue et al., 2007).

Compounding the symbolic violence is the *legitimisation* of such discourses through the State's inertia, since 'violence is [...] constructed at the core of the institution itself' (Bourdieu, 1982, p.40), and the public and legal authorities appear entirely blind to their existence, or willing to turn a blind eye, which again is symptomatic of the condition. Furthermore, like Fox et al.'s Hungarian and Romanian participants (2015), French migrants rarely complain of such behaviour, seemingly finding ignorance easier to manage than confrontation, which, by extension, increases

²⁴ All noted during my field research.

their invisibility and status as a minority of ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1979). This creates an *impression* of integration, akin to London’s Italian (Sprio, 2013), Turkish (King et al., 2008) and Irish (Mac an Ghail, 2000) communities, yet concurrently results in non-recognition as a cultural minority with the same rights as other minority groups (Looney, 2017). Indeed, many interviewees responded to the question ‘Do you feel welcome in London?’ affirmatively, either unaware of, or unaffected by, the enmity defined by others, or, as symbolic violence dictates, complicit to it through their very denial, echoing therewith the denial of the public authorities (Lulle et al., 2018).

Thus, through a process of institutionalised inertia and societal blinkeredness, the xenophobic microaggressions reported by interviewees, at times intensified by their intersectional operationalisation, are able to flourish. But how has today’s unseeing prejudice been shaped by yesterday’s attitudes? The following section will briefly explore precisely this habitus-oriented question.

‘A History Made Nature’:²⁵ xenophobic symbolic violence as a reproductive phenomenon

Charles’s suggestion that contemporary microaggressions are the by-product of residual rancour left over from the Second World War concurs with Bourdieu’s assertion that habitus ‘can be understood as a virtual “sedimented situation”, lodged deep inside the body’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.28). Consequently, unconscious bias is ‘deeply ingrained into our thinking and emotions’ and, as such, ‘resistant to change’ (Tate & Page, 2018, p.143). Operating like a ‘second nature’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.24), or ‘second skin’ (Tate, 2018, cited in Tate & Page, 2018, p.153), and tacitly reliant on social field dynamics past and present, even the gatekeepers of equality fail to see its workings. That is, anti-French xenophobia has been embedded and generationally reproduced in British society for so long that its very historicity fuels an ‘epistemology of ignorance, [...] a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities’ (Mills, 1997, p.18). It is this societal non-knowing that Charles evokes when attributing the

25 Bourdieu (2000, 263).

subjectivated (mis)conception of the French as ‘cowards’ to the objectivated (mis)representation of France as a land of Nazi collaborators during WWII, and its subsequent entry into the collective British imagination as such. However, historically, the ill-feeling can be traced significantly further back, with William the Conqueror’s claim to the English throne being a foundational trigger (Janvrin & Rawlinson, 2013). The centuries which followed simply reproduced the distrust, hostility and alienation, whether regarding London’s Protestant Huguenot settlers (Randall, 2013), post-Revolution *émigrés* (Carpenter, 2013) or exiled Paris Communards (Jones & Tombs, 2013). Only the 1904 *Entente Cordiale* would *formally* conclude the animosity, but by then, the field struggles had arguably been incorporated into ‘host’ population habituses, thereby normalising the violence of the microaggressions, whether gendered or “jovial”.

In this historical light, therefore, the endemic hostility experienced by interviewees assumes new meaning, because ‘[a]s the reader’s context changes so does the world in front of the text’ (Robinson, 1995) and vice-versa, as the hermeneutic circle dictates. Rather than a contemporary phenomenon fuelled by post-Maastricht migration from France and the damaging ‘Vote Leave’ campaign, therefore, the acrimony is found to be engrained, having evolved over centuries of French settlement. For ‘continuity across generations is forged practically through the dialectics of externalising the internal and internalising the external, which is partly the product of the objectivation of the internalisation of previous generations’ (Bourdieu, 1972, p.262). Through a dynamic of embodiment of the external field and subsequent projection of inherited outlooks onto that field, animosity towards the French – however light-hearted – has become a taken-for-granted and reproductive aspect of the diasporic space, its historicity servicing its insidiousness. Today’s bias is thus rendered implicit through a collective past, and as such anti-French xenophobic microaggressions are largely unrecognised in the popular consciousness.

The reproductive nature of habitus and its role in perpetuating symbolic violence is also notable among interviewees, whose non-recognition of anti-French hostility is indicative of complicity *and* a reincarnation of past migrant attitudes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). For example,

18th-century French Londoner, Comte A. de la Ferronnays alluded to ‘these English clubs where people speak of us so badly, and where I feel so usefully humiliated by my inadequacy’ (Carpenter, 2013, p.78).²⁶ Although the ‘usefully’ denotes a degree of diplomatic cognisance, irony even, which could belie the genuine victim complicity, the statement nevertheless highlights the ubiquity of the animosity, the degree of injury suffered and its historical foundations.

On this backdrop, a present-day anecdote recounted by Sarah warrants consideration.

Drawing connections between past and present, field and habitus, it illustrates concretely the self-perpetuating nature of anti-French symbolic violence established over the last millennium:

Sometimes there’s racism towards the French here. Some English people are very intolerant. I remember going to a Proms in the Park concert once, on the last night [...] with all those traditional, nationalistic songs, and there was a group of us French people, and this Englishman next to us who’d been drinking, and who looked like a hooligan, started burning a five euro note. And I think he did it to send us a message. So, there is racism here.

If, for the reasons put forth above, Sarah’s interpretation of this xenophobic microaggression as the practical translation of “racism” is ill-conceived, the potency of the act remains. The light-hearted mask now cast aside, this was an explicit affront to the dignity and legitimacy of the non-native Londoners present, an overt microassault (Sue et al., 2007) intended to pose a physical threat, even if inebriatedly and to the patriotic accompaniment of an outdated, imperialist *Rule Britannia*. Such openly hostile behaviour raises questions over the underlying causes: were the aggressor’s actions triggered by misguided resentment borne of the 21st century, but echoing that of centuries past? Just as Huguenot settlers were accused of tax evasion, undercutting English traders and threatening livelihoods (Randall, 2013), so Sarah declared that ‘sometimes people blame us French for taking all the best jobs’. Significantly, such nativist discourse was precisely the message propagated by the ‘Vote Leave’ Referendum campaign, itself the culmination of over a decade of mainstream political rhetoric of the sort. The *left-wing* slogan, ‘British jobs for British people’, coined by Gordon Brown in 2007 and later adopted by the BNP, exemplifies its omnipresence and – significantly – resonates with the 1925 British Fascists’ slogan ‘Britain for the British’ (Richardson & Wodak 2009, p.256).

²⁶ Note the term ‘humiliated’ was also used by Bruno several centuries later.

Thus, while ostensibly a topical concern related to the free movement of EU citizens and their strong presence in the capital's labour market (Rienzo, 2016), Sarah's anecdote in effect echoes bygone (mis)apprehensions and tensions over (French) migration and employment.

Consequently, although recent studies conceptualise "old" EU migrants', like the French and Italians, as a 'valuable' migrant group, more 'entitled to privileged treatment than others' (Lulle et al., 2018, p.3), the antagonism brought to bear here suggests that view is an oversimplification. The interplay between historical field variables and current "host" attitudes and behaviours, habituses even, is as complex as it is powerful and imperceptible. This embeddedness does not, however, absolve the aggressors (Tate & Page, 2018), nor does it detract from the palpable repercussions in the daily lives of contemporary French migrants in London, a space where they had hoped to find a 'tolerance' of their presence which would equal that of other minorities (Remigi & Martin, 2017), but where instead some have encountered xenophobic symbolic violence articulated through an array of everyday microaggressions.

Conclusion

By studying the personal accounts of eight members of London's French community, expressed within the context of a wider ethnographic study, and briefly setting them in a historical context, this article has demonstrated entrenched anti-French feeling present in the unseeing social space. Often disguised as amicable joviality or vindicated through notions of national reciprocity, the antagonism has articulated itself through a variety of xenophobic microaggressions, from reductionist national stereotyping to gendered objectification, the subtlety and externally perceived harmlessness of which being both characteristic of the phenomenon and amplifying the symbolic violence. Close analysis of interviewees' language has demonstrated the offence caused by such microaggressions, with the term "racism" being adopted more than once to account for the intensity of feeling and the absence of more apposite vocabulary readily available to them in a pre-EU Membership Referendum period, when there was little, if any, public debate on anti-EU-national

xenophobia. Equally compelling in interviewees' narratives, interpreted according to a Ricœurian hermeneutic model, was the evidence of victim complicity integral to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, expressed lexically and grammatically, and contributing to the cycle of reproduction. Participants' testimonies were thus seen to convey explicit and implicit messages, revealing broader social meanings pertaining to the othering experienced and the double-standards present in the migratory field, at times beyond the consciousness of the speakers.

By integrating xenophobic microaggressions within an overarching framework of symbolic violence and apprehending the empirical data with Ricœurian suspicion, the article has made a unique contribution to our understanding of the London-French diasporic experience and illustrated how today's essentialising attitudes and commonplace microaggressions have been informed by generations of anti-French prejudice, itself 'embedded in the sediment of decades of immigration practices' (Fox et al. 2012, p.691). This confirms Bourdieu's theory of reproduction and how 'the social structure tends to be self-perpetuating' (Bourdieu 1994, p.39), while explaining the social acceptability and normalisation of such xenophobic microaggressions. Acting as a counter-narrative to the political and academic discourses which conceive of contemporary French/EU mobility to London as, at best, desirable²⁷ or, more often, 'invisible' (Kelly, 2013; King et al., 2008; Thatcher & Halvorsrud, 2016), largely due to its economic and cultural contributions, this article has revealed more negative undercurrents. By bringing them to the fore, it has attempted to disrupt embedded "host" habit(u)s and confirm that such hostile belief systems predate the 2016 Referendum and the much-mediatised anti-EU hate crimes that ensued.

The empirical evidence brought to bear is considered particularly important during a "Brexit" era which has seen the rise of explicitly nativist attitudes and behaviours, and arguably ones which are today more accepted than in any other post-war decade.²⁸ As Tate & Page contend,

²⁷ Confirmed by Boris Johnson in 2015, then London Mayor, who exclaimed on French national radio – *in French* – that he was 'very, very proud [of London's French migrants]; they work, and we welcome them warmly' (Cohen, 2015). Ironically, a few months later he was leading the "Vote Leave" campaign and ultimately responsible for its seditious anti-EU-migration propaganda.

²⁸ Two recent examples are the assault on a young Spanish woman - resulting in head injuries - by two Black British women, who disapproved of her publicly speaking Spanish (*Independent*, April 13, 2018) and another verbal and

we have reached a time when there is an urgent need to engage in ‘the other meaning of bias, a thinking diagonally, against the grain’ (2018, p.152). Only by raising awareness and encouraging such diagonal thinking can a gradual change be initiated, and hence a welcome subversion of habitus’s intrinsic resistance to transformation and ultimate societal reproduction. Only through such change, therefore, can the London-French migratory experience escape the imperceptible xenophobia in whose faint shadow it is currently draped.

physical assault on a group of French Lycée students, for the same reason, told to stop speaking French, ‘to go back to your country’ and ‘Welcome to Brexit Britain’ (*French Morning London*, May 22, 2018).

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