

# Chapter 18

## Mediterranean Migrations and Cities with Their Cultural Histories and Imaginaries: The Case of Marseille



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### 18.1 Introduction

History reveals that Mediterranean cities have been formed from the significant mixing of populations since very ancient times. This means that the Mediterranean area has become a kind of universal model in terms of cosmopolitanism, which makes it possible to focus on the multiple identities of the cities from the South and North of the basin between the colonial period and decolonization. Using the case of Marseille, our aim is to reflect on the way in which the major cities in the Mediterranean, both by their past and current activities, have played a fundamental role in how migrants are perceived, and how a positive cosmopolitan imaginary has been constructed at a time when the movement of people is simultaneously encouraged and discouraged. Marseille is not the most prominent city in the National Association of Welcoming Cities and Territories (ANVITA), an organization founded in September 2018 by nine French cities, and which brings together local authorities, groups of authorities and elected officials who seek unconditional migrant reception policies, to include exiled populations, and for hospitality to be shown on their territories. However, its role is essential, as is the evolution of its political situation after 25 years under the management of Jean-Claude Gaudin (1995–2020). Indeed, being able to showcase the historically cosmopolitan dimension of Marseille appears to be a fundamental issue in the implementation of migrant reception policies. Marseille has often been considered as rebelling against Paris, and more broadly, against the French state, even though President Macron is keen to make the city more attractive in the eyes of the rest of the country.

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The history of Marseille is not necessarily that of a welcoming city, but rather of a city which has had to contend with the issue of migration over a very long period of time. The intensity of mixing different migrant populations has produced different types of showcasing, and therein lies the challenge of studying the city. In some situations, it is the rejection of migrant populations that takes prominence, whereas in others it is the welcome. Thus, the city constantly swings between positive and negative representations of its migrant presence. The 1980s and 1990s represented the showcasing of cosmopolitan Marseille, notably through the work of Emile Temime, a leading historian from the city. He is the author of four volumes entitled *Migrance, histoire des migrations à Marseille*, published between 1989 and 1991, and successfully undertook the vast project of tracing the history of migration in relation to Marseille as far back as the origins of the city, while emphasizing the astonishing diversity of this migration. Until then, migration had been dealt with in various historical texts about Marseille and Provence, but never in a specific way. The study by Emile Temime and his team has provided a solid base of knowledge, and has been supplemented by various scientific works that address, in whole or in part, the question of migration for the city of Marseille alone. The bibliography at the end of this chapter demonstrates the omnipresence of Marseille among researchers addressing this subject. A new generation of researchers, led by Pascal Blanchard and Gilles Boëtsch in 2005 with *Marseille Porte sud*, which uses the title of an Albert Londres' book, have complemented Emile Temime's work, particularly in terms of iconography, as have all the more detailed approaches proposed by the collection under the direction of Emile Temime and Pierre Milza, *Français d'ici, peuples d'ailleurs*, which was published by Autrement at the end of the 1990s. Different places and/or nationalities, such as the Belsunce district, the camp at the Grand Arénas, the Comorians and the African peddlers, have been studied over given periods of time. The work of economists, such as Bernard Morel, and sociologists, such as Jocelyne Cesari, Véronique Manry, Jean Viard and Michel Péraldi, is also very useful, and reveals that for the past twenty years, the abundant issues surrounding migration in relation to Marseille have been feeding the interest of human and social sciences. The universities of Côte d'Azur and Marseille have been conducting a range of projects on how Mediterranean cities showcase their relationship with migrants. More recently, new work has supplemented this reflection on migration in Marseille, such as that by Céline Régnaud with an original study on nineteenth century Marseille entitled *Marseille la violente*, and the collective research by Stéphane Mourlane, entitled *Les Batailles de Marseille*. In 2019, Judith Aziza also wrote a history of Marseille through place. Moreover, a number of research projects are ongoing, for example, MedMed, a website containing the memories from the Mediterranean area since 2008<sup>1</sup> on various types of media; MiMed (Lieux et territoires des migrations en Méditerranée)<sup>2</sup> since 2009, MonuMed

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.medmem.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://mimed.hypotheses.org/>

about the contribution of memories and monuments to cities since 2019,<sup>3</sup> and more recently, *Mars Imperium*, a project about imperial Marseille: (post)colonial history and memories nineteenth to twenty-first centuries) between 2021 and 2024 from the TELEMME laboratory in Aix-en-Provence.<sup>4</sup>

### ***18.1.1 The Central Role of Marseille in the Management and Showcasing of the Immigrant Presence Over the Long Term***

Marseille has made migration an integral part of its identity.<sup>5</sup> Foreign nationals and migrant workers from around the world have always been present in the city. This cosmopolitanism is obvious to casual observers across its various contexts.<sup>6</sup> Following the great plague of 1720, which devastated Marseille, a merchant noted in 1726: “*Although Marseille is in France, it may be perceived as a little Turkey, a little Italy, a little Barbary, or an embodiment of all these countries, both good and bad*”.

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<sup>3</sup>At a time when Europe and the Mediterranean seem to oscillate between collective amnesia and commemorative hypersensitivity, research on memories, ~~on~~ monuments and on the whole process of urban “monumentalization” enables us to analyze the creation of culture. Since 2019, the MonuMed project has been endeavoring to enrich this material, which is essentially multiform, by linking it to geopolitics, history and art history, in order to shed light on the construction of artistic practices and discourses at a time of globalization. The dialogue between researchers and artists constitutes an instrument that will facilitate the reformulation of the achievements of academic efforts, as well as common sense categories.

<sup>4</sup>The Mars-IMPERIUM project (“Imperial Marseille: (post)colonial history and memories 19th–21st centuries”) brings together five joint research units: (UMR) from Aix-Marseille University (IrAsia, IMAF, IREMAM, TELEMME, LPED) and ten socio-cultural partners (ANOM, Archives municipales de Marseille, Bibliothèque Municipale à Vocation Régionale de Marseille, la Bibliothèque numérique Odyssee, Ancrages, INA-Méditerranée, the Archives de la Chambre de commerce de Marseille, the MuCEM and the Musées de Marseille). The aim of the project is to investigate the imperial history of Marseille as a long-lasting “total social fact” and to present the research results through a web portal showcasing a vast array of resources (web documentary films, virtual exhibitions, heritage walks, archive index) contributed by all the consortium members. Situated at the crossroads of the latest research in imperial history and ICT enhanced social sciences and humanities, Mars-IMPERIUM will enable the Aix-Marseille University to position itself in the fields of Global History and Digital Humanities, to promote and enhance the university’s scientific heritage and its social visibility, to intensify its relationship with the main socio-cultural partners of its environment, to dynamically rethink the way social sciences and humanities are structured, and to act as a catalyst for international cooperation on these topical issues.

<sup>5</sup>Legend has it that Phocaea, a Greek maritime city in Asia Minor, created a trading post known as Massalia around the sixth century B.C.: the leader of the Phocaean expedition, Protis, married the daughter of the king of Segobrigia, Gyptis. It is hence a couple, consisting of a native and a foreigner, which founded the city. According to Herodotus, when the Persians wanted to seize Phocaea, the inhabitants took refuge in Massalia and hence populated it definitively.

<sup>6</sup>For example, Philippe Joutard, “Marseille cosmopolite. Mythes et réalités” in *Hommes et migrations*, n°1092, 1986.

At the end of the eighteenth century, half of the population was not Marseillais in origin: among the main groups of foreign nationals were Italians (Genovese and Piemontese for the most part) and Gavots (peasants from the Alpine valleys), as well as Spaniards, Greeks and Levantines (a term that covers Syrians, Greeks and Armenians). A 1754 painting by Joseph Vernet, *Intérieur du port de Marseille*, which is kept in the Musée de la Marine, Paris, shows a colorful crowd on the Canebière, the central avenue of Marseille.

## 18.2 Marseille, Diversity as a Historical Landscape

During the French Revolution, the cosmopolitan nature of the city is reflected in the revolutionary discourse of 1792–93, which often denounced “bands of foreigners” led by counter-revolutionaries: “*Marseille is the city where we constantly see the ferment of the scum hurled forth from the prisons of Genoa, Piemonte, Sicily, the whole of Italy and Spain, and finally, the archipelago of Barbary. This is the deplorable flaw of our geographical position and our commercial relations*”.<sup>7</sup> We must also add the Mamelukes at the time of Napoleon 1st. In 1844, Flora Tristan, a French observer at *Le Tour de France* mentioned the same phenomenon: “*The more I see of Marseille, the more I dislike it. The city is not French. Here there is a ragbag of nations: Italians, Greeks, Turks, Africans, and all those from the Levantine coast. Have they done bad business here?*”.<sup>8</sup> Later, in 1922, the journalist Ludovic Naudeau wrote of “*a formidable workshop where the human races are constantly condensed, mixed and condensed again*”<sup>9</sup> in *L'Illustration*, while in 1927, the great reporter, Albert Londres, in his article *Marseille porte du Sud*, pointed out the same reality: “*Do you want to see Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia? I'll take you to rue des Chapeliers. Here you'll find the “gourbis”, the “Bicots” and the “mouquères”. Stay off the footpath, and if you want to avoid a fight, don't talk to their women (...)*”.<sup>10</sup> In confirmation of these observations, statistical sources remind us that the city of Marseille has welcomed different national groups over time: poor Italians and Greeks from the end of the nineteenth century, Russian emigrants in 1917, Armenians in 1915 and 1923, Spanish refugees after 1936, North Africans during the interwar period, Africans after 1945, and “Pieds-Noirs” after 1962. The creation of the industrial port of Fos-sur-Mer, which coincided with the end of the French empire in the early 1960s, created a strong attraction for foreign nationals and made Marseille a real metropolis.

The dividing lines between people have not necessarily been drawn according to their membership of a particular national or religious group. The social and

<sup>7</sup> Michel Vovelle, *De la cave au grenier*, Québec, Fleury, 1981.

<sup>8</sup> Flora Tristan, *Le tour de France, journal 1843–44*, Maspero, Paris, 1980, rééd.

<sup>9</sup> Ludovic Naudeau, *L'Illustration*, 21 October 1922.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Londres, *Marseille, porte du Sud*, Paris, Editions de France, 1927.

professional divides that have become significantly more pronounced in contemporary times have forced us to question certain community ties. If the city is denoted by migrants from North Africa, who have arrived relatively recently and who are generally not very wealthy, it is because this population has partially covered up, or even erased, the traces left by the previous migrant populations, especially in the city center, where the buildings are often in a dilapidated state. If you linger in the streets, you will see Tunisian restaurants and Algerian cafés, bazaars, and Armenian and Lebanese stores; you will pass from a former Roman Catholic church to Jewish and Muslim places of worship, all close to each other. These are obvious signs, even if they are generally fragile and fleeting, of an ancient coexistence, born from the settlement of successive migratory waves that have left their mark on the city, but whose particularities often fade with the years.<sup>11</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the importance of migrants became decisive in a Marseillais system based on the precariousness of employment and the low qualifications of employees. The port was a source of raw materials for a French industry which was in constant expansion. This is why Marseille became the natural outlet for the Mediterranean, as it sat along a shipping corridor between East and West, and hence benefited from the development of the Suez Canal. The economic system of the city operated solely according to the existence of a cheap and renewable workforce, for example, from 1830 to 1860, the city's growth rate averaged 3% per year. Marseille was both a place to bring in and a place from which to send out. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, goods arrived on the Quai de la Rive Neuve, but were then stored in warehouses so that they could be shipped on. People were the same: they were also brought in and shipped on, sometimes covertly.

The city and its port can be considered as both a passageway and a fixed abode for the migrant population. Emile Temime insists on the transit function of the city: it is a crossroads, and the port is the epicenter of industrial life, supported by the figure of the docker whose role evolves throughout contemporary history. Although the growth of port activity played an important part in the development of a migratory movement towards the city, the tremendous acceleration of this trend occurred during the nineteenth century because of numerous advances in communication techniques which generated the setting up of new continental links. Marseille was therefore a city of two dimensional migration. On the one hand, the departure of Europeans to America had begun in previous centuries, but increased considerably from 1830 to 1840. This East-West movement progressively affected the entire Mediterranean world, and even though Marseille, which was competing with Le Havre, was not the only port to benefit from this migration, it became a major hub. On the other hand, the constitution of the colonial empire provoked a movement of populations towards Algeria, then Tunisia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Indochina and Morocco.

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<sup>11</sup> Emile Temime, "Des solidarités anciennes au brassage culturel", in *Confluence Méditerranée*, n° 10, Spring 1994.

### 18.3 The Making of an Image: Cosmopolitan Marseille

Accompanying the new maritime routes were new forms of relations which came about after national companies set up in Marseille and opened lines to other continents, thus ensuring a worldwide influence for the city. From 1850 onwards, the growth of the port was remarkable, as 50 million Europeans emigrated between 1800 and 1914. Although Northern Europe provided the majority of these emigrants, the Mediterranean basin also contributed. The Italian and Iberian peninsulas saw large contingents leave for America, particularly Latin America. 6.5 million Italians, mostly from the Mezzogiorno, emigrated between 1851 and 1910. Very early on, the Levantines participated in the migratory movement, and although Marseille could not claim to be a source of emigrants from Northern and Eastern Europe, it was a logical and unavoidable stopover point when it comes to people on the move from the Mediterranean towards the New World.

All this may give the impression that Marseille was only ever a stopover point, but the reality is different, as by its very presence, the ebb and flow of migration helped develop the local economy. Emigrants were the driving force behind the prosperity of the shipping companies, holding maintenance and service jobs in the port and providing a living for the city's hoteliers and merchants, not to mention the intermediaries and traffickers of all kinds who offered the passing traveler a wide variety of services. The growth of Marseille, as well as its unique character, cannot be understood without reference to this continuous flow of people from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. The journey to the New World was not a one-time event: after leaving from Constantinople, Beirut and Alexandria, the Levantines would stop over in Italian ports or in Marseille. It was then possible for them to reach the Baltic and North Sea ports by train. Marseille was therefore in competition with Genoa, Livorno, and even Hamburg, Antwerp and Le Havre. However, certain shipping companies established themselves in the port, and opened transatlantic lines so as to be able to keep a tight control of the migration chain. From the Second Empire onwards, the French State sought to organize the flows of people crowding into the country's major ports, as there was a concern that a floating population could be a potential source of disorder. The State also wanted to ensure that the national economy would benefit from the consequences of this movement. An important decree of 1855 imposed duties on the shipping agencies in terms of hygiene and quotas, and hence "emigration commissioners" were appointed, initially in the North, and then in Marseille as of 1878. The commissioner's job was to inspect each ship in order to verify that the emigrants would be traveling in decent conditions. The archives show that these conditions were not always decent: there are numerous complaints from unfortunate emigrants, indicating the dubious and often degrading practices of the carriers, which could be compared to human trafficking. From the point of departure to the point of arrival, the emigrant risked being held for ransom, and sometimes even raped or killed.

Nevertheless, Marseille was not restricted to the role of a transit port in the globalized trade network that was being developed in the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The movements of people caused ramifications, insofar as some of these populations, for very different reasons, settled permanently or were permanently housed, hence accentuating the cosmopolitanism of the city. The great migratory currents that traversed the city-port in the nineteenth century brought together groups from very different backgrounds, and included both the established communities and the communities who were passing through. The former comprised a large number of Italians, but also “People from the North”, such as Germans, Swiss, Belgians, Dutch and even Scandinavians, some of whom had already been present in Marseille since the seventeenth century, as well as Sephardic Jews and Armenians who had settled under the Ancien Régime, and Levantines who had arrived after 1789. All of this international migration was combined with domestic migration, often involving Gavots<sup>13</sup> and Corsicans who had been attracted by the port activity.

The very nature of the city changed dramatically from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, although the old city was not completely replaced. It was at this time that the city expanded in an anarchic way to be able to adapt to its current function; at the same time it experienced significant demographic growth. Based on data collected by Emile Temime and Renée Lopez, in particular data from the 1851 census, which show the details of the distribution of the various foreign communities in the city (10% of the total population), a brief geography of the migrant settlements reveals a number of strong trends. The city was divided into three parts: (1) the furnished quarters of the wealthy neighborhoods, which housed a composite population, the majority of whom were characterized by a certain material affluence, (2) the garrisons of the Grand Puits district, which covered part of Old Marseille and housed workers from the working classes, and (3) a mass of underprivileged people living in particularly precarious conditions on the outskirts of the city in the extramural territory of Marseille.

More specifically, different writings by Emile Temime on Belsunce, and by Anne Sportiello on the Vieux-Port, have highlighted a logic of “ethnically-dominated neighborhoods” in the urban fabric of Marseille: a mosaic of small “villages”, or a “city of 111 neighborhoods”. This fragmentation reflects a grouping of populations belonging to national and/or religious groups. New monographic research would make it possible to refine our knowledge of migration on this scale through ethnological studies based on life stories and oral archives.

This phenomenon did not prevent the development of meeting places and neighborhoods, for example, in the arteries of the Panier district, and in particular the rue des Chapeliers, the study of different sources, such as census tables and police reports, brings to light a zone of intercultural sociability. On the footpaths, in the cafés, in the shops, at the washhouse, and at the Place de Lenche where women had

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<sup>12</sup>Suzanne Berger, *Notre Première Mondialisation: leçons d'un échec oublié*, Paris, Seuil, 2003.

<sup>13</sup>Michel Vovelle, “Gavots et Italiens: les Alpes et leur bordure dans la population marseillaise au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *Provence Historique*, 1977.

their market stalls, people from different countries met and chatted. Albeit that the Italian population was present everywhere, but especially around the port and in the extra-mural Northern districts, the Swiss and German populations were concentrated in the bourgeois part of the city. Emile Temime emphasizes the permanence of the distribution of foreign nationals in the city, notably on the basis of social distinction, and hence, over and above ethnic affiliations, the other two major forms of settlement were that of higher and lower income populations. The higher income group consisted of traders, shipowners, brokers, port masters and industrialists, whereas the more numerous lower income group includes the migrant workers.

### ***18.3.1 The Cosmopolitanism of Marseille in the Face of Postcolonial Events***

Evidence displays that these were the realities of cosmopolitanism in Marseilles, and indeed, other French Mediterranean cities experienced similar patterns of population mixing. However, the reality of cosmopolitanism ignores the imaginary and consciousness of the lived experience, and its links to the feelings of the population, including its communal elites. After decolonization, the presence of North African populations became a manifold issue with multiple consequences. As the Mediterranean capital of migration, Marseille is the city to which all eyes turn when deploring racism or when considering interculturality. Therefore, as in the past, the postcolonial situation of Marseille compelled the city and its inhabitants to become acutely aware of cosmopolitanism, for better or for worse.

## **18.4 Marseille and the Shock of Racism (1970s)**

At the beginning of the 1970s, the advocates of a Marseillais identity were attempting to place cosmopolitanism at the center of shared local values. The argument was that the Marseillais inhabitants were traditionally welcoming and willing to accept the mixing of populations. In 1972, the anthropologist, Francis Lesme, a specialist in migration, saw his city as the place of “living together” par excellence.<sup>14</sup> He maintained that every migrant was sure to find a roof over his or her head and food in the home of a “brother or sister”, especially in the Porte d’Aix neighborhood, which he considered to be the most intercultural place in Marseille: *“People manage to get along (...) this neighborhood has gradually taken on an international vocation, which it lives up to today and which is its raison d’être (...) Israelis, Arabs, Africans, Italians, French citizens from modest backgrounds... live together. It is their complementarity that gives the district its dynamism”*. The

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<sup>14</sup> *Provence, bulletin de l’association des anciens élèves*, Marseille, n°4, May 1972.



cosmopolitanism of the Belsunce-Porte d'Aix district appeared to be a specific asset for the city of Marseille, attracting visitors and the curious alike, who came at the weekend from other districts and communes to shop or participate in festivals and cultural events.

Several local texts and brochures published at the turn of the 1970s went beyond a simple viewpoint to present the city of Marseille as essentially cosmopolitan: a study by Dr. Joseph Alliez, a psychiatrist from Marseille, on "L'Homme provençal",<sup>15</sup> an investigation by the *Le Provençal* journalist Constant Vautravers, *Marseille équilibre du Sud*, an article by Jean Contrucci, editor-in-chief of Provence-magazine and writer on the "Marseille personality",<sup>16</sup> in the *Tout Marseille* review, and above all, a brochure, *L'Homme de Marseille*, published by Le Pêcheur d'hommes and promoted by the Marseilles Diocesan Center. Envisaging the existence of "l'âme de Marseille" (soul of the city) gave rise to the constructed image of a tolerant city enriched by a secular mixing of populations: "Is there not a Marseillais coloring that marks the sensibility, the behavior and the reactions of these millions of people crowded in the narrow perimeter of our hills facing the sea (...) the soul of Marseille is the history of the city that has left behind some deposit, silt or humus that interferes with the multiple influences on the present form of our collective unconscious".<sup>17</sup> According to the same brochure, which was widely distributed in the city and in the Provence region, Marseille was a "crossroads of the world": "all the Mediterranean is there: Marseille is the first Corsican city, the second Armenian city of France, a large Italian agglomeration, one of the first Pied-Noir cities, an important Hellenic colony, a real kasbah and an African capital". There was a feeling that the whole world was represented in this kaleidoscopic urban space, and the tolerance of the Marseillais was self-evident: "Metropolis or cosmopolis? This human cocktail is our strength; it saves us from sclerosis; it gives us a never-ending supply of imagination". In short, this portrait led to a definitive statement: "the Marseillais is not racist, at least not congenitally. But he or she is, however, a racist from the point of view of crime". If most of the vectors for the construction of the Marseillais identity were traditionally the prerogative of the socialist/communist left and Christian militants, economic and conservative circles also made their contribution at that time. The consensus favored the saturation of this discourse, and thereby ignored certain harmful aspects of Marseille's cosmopolitanism, retaining only a watered-down reflection. Convincing public opinion conveniently avoided taking into consideration the more painful realities of the city's relationship with migrants, as studied by Claire Paris through the analysis of the image of the "North

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Alliez, "L'Homme provençal", in *Marseille*, revue municipales, n°75, 1968,

<sup>16</sup> Jean Contrucci, "Enquête sur la personnalité marseillaise", *Tout Marseille*, 1st, 15th, 22nd and 29th March 1971.

<sup>17</sup> *L'Homme de Marseille* publication du Pêcheur d'hommes, Centre diocésain marseillais, 1st semester 1972.

African” in the daily *Le Provençal* between 1970 and 1974.<sup>18</sup> The context of the “*shock of decolonization*”, which deeply marked the city of Marseille when it occurred and which continued into the early 1970s, offers a major key to understanding the changes to the Marseillais identity in terms of tolerance.

Any optimism was swept away by the racist outbreak of 1973.<sup>19</sup> The murder on August 25 in the city center of streetcar worker Emile Guerlache by a mentally ill Algerian worker, Salah Bougrine, triggered an outbreak of xenophobia which had not been seen in France since the end of the Second World War. There was a very real prospect of ethnic confrontation, which was not helped by incitement in the form of leaflets, press conferences and articles in the local press, in particular in the columns of *Le Méridional* under the pen of its editor, Gabriel Domenech. In one month, a dozen North Africans were victims of racist attacks in the city. The real targets were Algerian, as the still raw resentment and hatred arising from the loss of French Algeria could now be expressed in a different context which was just as sensitive to the relationship with the Other. The “*ratonnades*” (racist attacks), which were modeled on those carried out during the Algerian war, reanimated certain former actors of the conflict who had been struggling to accept its epilogue. The consequences of this xenophobic agitation went far beyond the local framework<sup>20</sup>: the French government was obliged to condemn the drama unfolding on its soil, while Houari Boumediene, the Algerian president, decided, in an expression of discontent, to suspend emigration to France as long as the safety of Algerian nationals was not assured.

The cosmopolitanism of Marseille suddenly seemed disturbing and dangerous. In an attempt to find explanations, observers and experts put forward the idea of exceeding a “*seuil de tolerance*” (threshold of tolerance),<sup>21</sup> i.e. racism was inevitable because there were too many immigrants in Marseille. Far from typifying the utopian vision of a city of different nationalities living in harmony, the racist outbreak, which was accompanied by a murderous attack against the Algerian consulate on December 14, 1973 (4 dead and more than 30 wounded) by the Charles Martel Club, an extreme right-wing group, fueled a totally negative image of harmonious mixing. In the national press, a number of articles began to speak of Marseille as the “*capital of racism*”. The city had become undignified and a sort of isolate within the Hexagon, allowing the rest of the country to ease its conscience. The charge was so strong that Jean Rambaud from *Le Monde* attempted to mitigate the discredit poured on the city of Marseille with the headline: “*If Marseille were racist, it would not exist...*”; “*All the same, Marseille and its thousand-year-old tradition of racial and*

<sup>18</sup>Claire Paris, *Le Nord-africain dans les quotidiens provençaux (1970–1974)*, mémoire de maîtrise, University of Avignon, 2001.

<sup>19</sup>Yvan Gastaut, “La flambée raciste de 1973”, in *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, third trimester 1993.

<sup>20</sup>*Le Monde*, 1st September 1973.

<sup>21</sup>This notion is used with quotation marks insofar as it is not based on any scientific research, but rather on an ideological argument that claims to be scientific.

*religious tolerance. Marseille, the cosmopolitan, has suddenly become racist. Shouldn't we do more than treat it as an anathema?'*". The events in Marseille shocked the public to such an extent that an introspection on racism began. Suddenly, the phenomenon seemed to be of an unsuspected magnitude in France. The question, "Are the French racist?" emerged in the media.<sup>22</sup> The image of a worrying cosmopolitanism kept the benevolent speeches on the welcoming nature of the people of Marseille tucked away in filing cabinets for several years. From 1973 onwards, in a context of economic crisis that made immigrant workers undesirable, the city was considered to be a potential site for intercommunity confrontation. The local authorities, which had been convinced by the "threshold of tolerance" argument, paid attention to the problem of cohabitation between French nationals and migrants by elaborating a coherent housing policy. In 1974, the mayor, Gaston Defferre, commissioned a survey on the issue of slum clearance and the improvement of housing for migrants. Concerted action between the city and the new Secretary of State for Immigrant Workers led to the signing of a "program contract" in December 1975 in favor of migrants, and represented the first steps of the city's future policy on migration.

### **18.5 "Proud to be Marseillais" and Citywide Action: Promoting Positive Cosmopolitanism in the 1990s**

According to numerous articles in the press, Marseille was "sick of its immigrants"<sup>23</sup>: racist murders, xenophobic behavior on the part of police officers and cab drivers, attacks such as the one at the Gare Saint-Charles in 1982, which was attributed to Muslim fundamentalists, and campaigns linking insecurity and immigration from 1983 onwards. However, some Marseillais residents, generally representing left-wing and Christian thinking, refused to give in to catastrophism. A symposium organized by the UFCV (Union Française des Centres de Vacances) and the University of Provence in May 1986, entitled *Marseille cosmopolite*, gave the floor to local academics Philippe Joutard, Lucien Tirone and Alain Hayot, along with representatives of the different communities, to remind the audience that the Marseillais identity was based on mixing populations. In November 1986, a group of associations distributed leaflets and posters on the theme of *Marseille, city of immigration*, which was relayed by the local press, but above all, a large demonstration organized for June 23, 1987, consisted of 25,000 people, including Lionel Jospin and Jack Lang, on the Canebière under the banner of "Marseille fraternité", a collective of 120 associations whose aim was to shatter the racist image of the city: "Because we can no longer stand Marseille being presented as the capital of racism;

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<sup>22</sup> *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 3rd September et *Paris Match*, 4th September 1973.

<sup>23</sup> *La revue de l'union française des centres de vacances*, n°227, May 1986, dossier, "Marseille, malade de ses immigrés".

*because Marseille is worth more than these extreme right-wing politicians who only know how to reject, exclude and banish; because we believe that it is in Marseille today that we must affirm the values of equal rights and fraternity (...), together for fraternity in Marseille*".<sup>24</sup> There was a clear desire to reclaim cosmopolitanism as a positive value in the Phocaeen identity. Imbued with political meaning, the version of cosmopolitanism defended by the progressive thinkers close to the Socialist Party, was one of integration, which featured prominently in both national and local programs. After the death of the emblematic socialist mayor, Gaston Defferre, in 1986, the electoral victory of Robert Vigouroux, a professor of medicine, in the 1989 municipal elections was largely built on the values of a cosmopolitanism based on tolerance. As early as 1990, the new mayor decided to set up a specific structure in the form of an association, "Marseille Espérance", which aim was to promote intercultural encounters and avoid racial tensions. The association regularly brought together representatives of the different religious communities to engage in a dialogue about the social and cultural nature of the management of the city. However, the context was not very favorable: terrorist attacks and the debate over the wearing of the headscarf led to a rise in the fear of Islam; there were concerns about the Middle East, and there was the issue of the "banlieues" (suburbs).

What Robert Vigouroux wanted was for the people of Marseille to see themselves first and foremost as being from the city: *"I am not in favor of integration at any price. The important thing is to have the common goal of being "Marseillais"*".<sup>25</sup> The initiative was a success: "Marseille Espérance" became a regulatory body which was respected by the people of Marseille, and always called upon when local, national or international events risked provoking community tensions. However, the city's cosmopolitanism proved difficult to manage, and progress remained limited, for example, problems surrounding the mosque were not resolved, and the presence of migrant populations on electoral lists remained rare. In addition, racism persisted, as illustrated by the tragic death of a 17-year-old Comorian, Ibrahim Ali, on February 21, 1995, at the hands of National Front supporters. Nevertheless, during the 1990s, the image of Marseille evolved differently from this violent reality. Through the cumulative effect of cultural productions, political will and the input from associations, the city assumed openness and tolerance, giving its cosmopolitanism an opportunity to thrive.

The promotion of "mixing" has helped to forge a Marseillais identity based on particularism and tolerance, for example, the slogan *"Proud to be Marseillais"* invites people to place themselves on the margins of their national identity. Marseille was also being presented as cosmopolitan again via national media, and what had begun without much success in the early 1970s found a much stronger echo twenty years later in a more favorable context. Among these efforts, besides the works of Emile Temime quoted above, we have to mention the success of the detective novels of Jean-Claude Izzo who told the adventures of Fabio Montale, a police officer in a

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<sup>24</sup> *Le Provençal*, 11th June 1987.

<sup>25</sup> *Le Monde*, 27th September 1993.

diverse Marseille.<sup>26</sup> In 1999, in the novel *Le soleil des mourants*, the author evokes the wanderings of a homeless man who comes to die in Marseille because “*here it looks like it could be anywhere*”.<sup>27</sup> Robert Guédiguian’s films, including *Marius et Jeannette*, which was released in 1998, were equally successful in resonating with the French public, whereas they had previously been shunned. A few years earlier, in 1993, Bertrand Blier’s *1, 2, 3 Soleil* presented a fable of miscegenation in Marseille, as did director Karim Dridi’s *Bye Bye* in 1997. At the same time, Marseille’s “mixed” musical groups, such as IAM, whose lead, Akhénaton, is the son of an Italian immigrant, and the “raggamuffin” group, Massalia sound system, developed a huge fan base. Television also made its contribution, notably through the thematic evening, *1, 2, 3 Marseille*, shown on Canal+ in October 1999, which included a documentary on positive intercultural relations entitled *Tellement Marseille*.

Olympique de Marseille, the soccer club which won the UEFA Champions League in 1993 with Bernard Tapie as club president, crystallized local opinion. The matches at the Velodrome stadium gave the opportunity for scenes of fraternization in the stands which represented a truly positive cosmopolitanism. Christian Bromberger’s studies on supporter groups in Marseille during the 1990s indicate that intercommunity tensions tended to fade at the Velodrome Stadium. Among the seven main fan groups, the “Winners” based their existence on “interethnic fraternity” and solidarity. In 1998, during the World Cup, several matches were scheduled in Marseille: during the Tunisia-England match, Marseille supporters fraternized with Tunisian supporters even though clashes were breaking out in other parts of the stadium.

Festivals also showcased Marseille’s “mixing”. Massalia, a festival financed in large part by the city in June 1999, was organized to commemorate the city’s 2600th anniversary. Every component of local cosmopolitanism was brought together: 6000 artists of all nationalities offered performances as diverse as oriental dances, hip-hop, rap, Provençal songs, techno, African percussion, Corsican polyphonies and French variety as a way of affirming their pride in being Marseillais. The success of Massalia was made possible through the efforts of artists, teachers and city hall employees, all of whom volunteered their time. It was the occasion for Jean Contrucci to publish, alongside Roger Duchêne, a history of Marseille with a special emphasis on the mix of cultures. This solidly organized collection helped to present the city of Marseille as a real “laboratory for cohabitation between communities”. As Michel Samson, a journalist from *Le Monde*, notes: “*The major question that Marseille is asking is how do we achieve cohabitation between communities? As a frontier city, it has been welcoming the world’s most miserable and most adventurous for centuries, willy-nilly. It must therefore invent and reinvent a style of cohabitation with each new wave of immigration, and above all, reflect on how to*

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Claude Izzo (1946–2000), *Total Khéops*, Paris, Gallimard, “Série noire”, 1995; *Chourmo*, Paris, Gallimard, “Série noire”, 1996; *Soléa*, Paris, Gallimard, “Série noire”, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Claude Izzo, *Le soleil des mourants*, Paris, Flammarion, 1999.

*integrate people from other economic, social, cultural and religious worlds*".<sup>28</sup> The same Michel Samson had already noted in 1998 that "*the Marseille identity is to welcome the Other*".<sup>29</sup>

In the post-colonial context, the mixing of populations has been the object of a political and cultural investment to construct an identity in the delicate context of a Mediterranean undergoing constant transformation. The image of "cosmopolitan Marseille" is as much about welcoming foreign nationals as it is about racism. Since 1962, these two sides of cosmopolitanism have collided and succeeded each other according to the circumstances. At times, racism has triggered intercultural tensions and conflicts, whereas at others, the welcoming nature of the city has led to intercultural harmony and wellbeing. Indeed, the cosmopolitanism of this Phocaean city has a dual foundation: there is the reality, which is based on precise and rigorous indicators demonstrating an effective mixing of populations during a given period and in a given space, and there is the imaginary, which brings into play a process of identity creation. Since the modernization of part of the city, the appearance of the MuCEM Museum (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations) in 2013, the year of the "European Capital of Culture" label, and the arrival in 2020 of a new municipal team under the left-wing mayor, Benoit Payan, the representations of the city are gradually evolving, but the cosmopolitanism of Marseille remains blurred between the image of economic modernization and the altogether different image of neighborhoods trapped in precariousness.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Le Monde*, article by Michel Samson, 22nd June 1999.

<sup>29</sup> *Le Monde*, "Vivre Marseille", 15th October 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Gilles Suzanne, "La controverse du cosmopolitisme marseillais", in *Terrains & travaux*, vol. 13, n°2, 2007, pp. 149–168.

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