15. From the 16ème to South Ken? A study of the contemporary French population in London

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> To be French is to love France like a mother, to respect her like a father and to cherish her like a child.[2]

Introduction

If French identity can be defined as above, why is it that thousands of French citizens, in the prime of their lives, are choosing to leave France behind them in favour of London? Is this close relationship with the 'la mère patrie' the initial trigger? Comparable to teenagers rebelling against parents as a natural developmental process, have today's French come to London in search of freedom, adventure and immersion in another culture, another language, no longer seeking refuge, as in historical waves of cross-Channel migration from the Huguenots to the post-Revolution aristocracy and the Free French, but rather personal independence and opportunity?

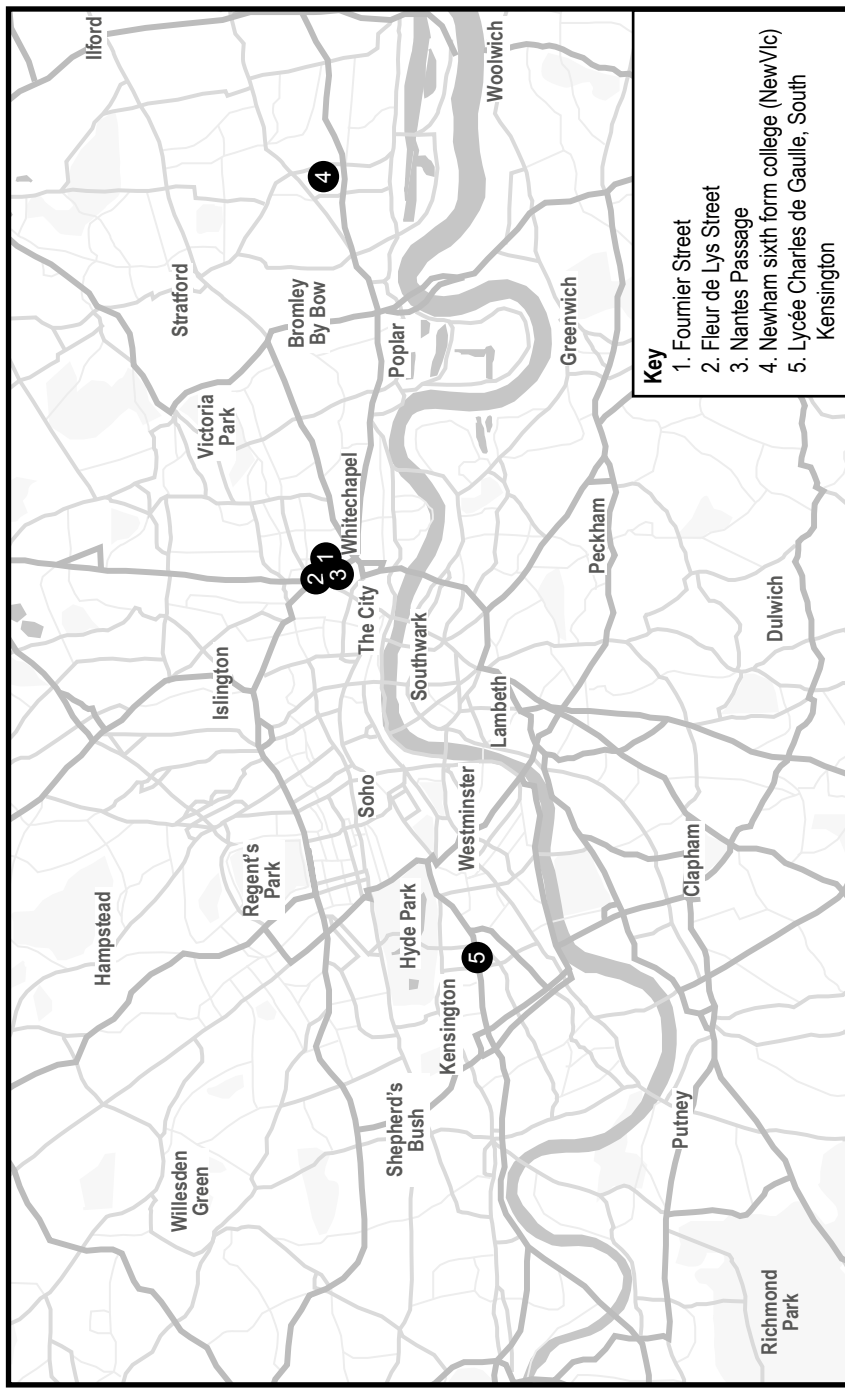
According to the Maison des Français de l'Etranger (MFE), on 31 December 2010 there were 108,999 French nationals registered at the French Consulate in London. However, the Maison itself estimates that the true number of French people living in and around London is more than double that figure, at 250,000,[3] while the French Embassy moots a far higher amount, closer to the 400,000 mark,[4] making the British capital France's 'fifth' or 'sixth' largest

[1] Photographs in this chapter courtesy of S. B. Huc-Hepher.

[2] 'Etre français c'est aimer la France comme une mère, la respecter comme un père, et la chérir comme son enfant' (Amel, Stéphanie, Karim, Carla, Vito, Yanis – Extract from responses to the question 'Pour vous, qu'est-ce qu'être français' in the Grand Débat sur l'Identité Nationale, 4 Jan. 2010).

[3] See <http://www.mfe.org/index.php/Portails-Pays/Royaume-Uni> [accessed 28 Oct. 2012].

[4] See article in *The Independent*, 15 Nov. 2010 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/bienvenue-frances-expats-get-their-own-radio-station-2134199.html>; or *Le Monde*, available via the Association des Membres de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques website <http://amopagb.org/Pages/articlelemonde.pdf> or <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18234930> [all accessed 28 Oct. 2012].



Map 15.1. Places mentioned in the text (Base map: 2013)

city in population terms[5] (depending on the source). The MFE cites the twenty-five to forty age bracket as being the most represented among those registered at the French Consulate; in contrast, in Ewan Ledain's survey of young arrivals passing through the Centre Charles Péguy, and subsequently declining to register at the Consulate,[6] the eighteen to twenty-five age bracket was found to be the largest. This means that the under-twenty-fives are almost certainly under-represented in the official figures: they are 'the Forgotten of St Pancras'.[7] When we consider the number of French adults allocated a National Insurance number upon entry to the UK between 2002 and 2011, the figures are indeed striking. According to the Department for Work and Pensions official statistics,[8] France has been the only European nation to appear consistently in the 'top ten' year-on-year since 2002, with a peak in 2008–9 when allocations to individuals originally from France accounted for 24,010, placing France almost in joint third position with the Slovak Republic (24,090), after Poland and India. In fact, on the basis of NI number assignations, two other nations alone, worldwide, appear to have matched this consistency, in terms of the pattern of emigration to the UK, and they were – unsurprisingly, given Britain's colonial history – India and Pakistan. These NI figures demonstrate (contrary to Tzeng's evidence on the basis of Office of National Statistics (ONS) population estimates that Ireland is the 'largest group of foreigners from western European EU countries')[9] that the consistency of French migration to the UK is not equalled by movement from Ireland, Poland or any other EU country, including the A8 (recent Eastern European EU member states). The lowest influx was in 2003–4, when the total number nevertheless remained significant, at 13,130. It is worth noting that the 2008–9 peak referred to above took place during and immediately after the global financial crisis

[5] This popular media comparison is misleading, however, as it is based on the respective populations of the French city centres only (or 'communautés urbaines' proper), to the exclusion of greater numbers of inhabitants living in the adjoining suburban districts.

[6] A. Favell, 'London as Eurocity: French free movers in the economic capital of Europe', in *The Human Face of Global Mobility*, ed. M. P. Smith and A. Favell (New Brunswick, 2006), pp. 247–74.

[7] E. Ledain, 'Les Oubliés de St Pancras' survey, Consulat Général de France à Londres/Centre Charles Péguy (2010).

[8] Department for Work and Pensions, 'National Insurance number allocations to adult overseas nationals entering the UK: summary tables – latest quarterly data to December 2011, annual figures to March 2011' (2011), available at <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/niall/index.php?page=nino_allocation> [accessed 28 Oct. 2012].

[9] R. Tzeng, 'International middle class migration and mobility: French nationals working in the UK' (Institute for the Study of European Transformations (ISET) working paper no. 18), p. 12, available at <http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/Research/iset/Working%20Paper%20Series/WP18%20R%20Tzeng.pdf> [accessed 11 Aug. 2011].

which, far from discouraging the cross-Channel migratory wave, as some analysts predicted, appears instead to have contributed to it, London no doubt enticing jobless young French men and women with its flexible, if fickle, labour market to a greater degree than in times of plenty.[10] That said, assessing the number of people simultaneously returning to France is a feat in itself, as return migrants are a notoriously elusive cohort the world over: 'There are no global estimates on the scale of return migration, although most experts believe that it is substantial'[11] and, confirming the empirical evidence provided by the interviewees, it 'is often the case that migrants go home to retire, having spent their working lives abroad. While they may take home money and experiences, they are not economically active themselves upon return'.[12] This grey area of return migration again casts doubt over the reliability and durability of the official statistics on the number of French people in London at any given time.

However, the 2011 UK census should shed new light on the French population of London, given that, for the first time in British censorial history, it included a set of questions pertaining to nationality, identity and languages other than English spoken by respondents. Indeed, scrutiny of the latest Annual School Census showing the distribution of different languages spoken in all London's state schools, published in August 2011, is revealing in both quantitative and demographic terms.[13] While offering only a partial picture of the true numbers, in that they represent British state schools only, the findings are nonetheless useful. Overall, they indicate a greater number of French speakers in inner London (1.7 per cent) than outer London (0.9 per cent), with the exception of the City of London, where a decidedly unambiguous 0.0 per cent was recorded. The more telling figures are perhaps those that offer a comparative representation of the number of pupils recorded as having French as their main language in Greater London as a whole: with a total of 11,680 pupils, more children speak French at home

[10] For confirmation that in the current 'double dip' recession the French are still flocking to London, see BBC News article 'London, France's 6th biggest city' by Lucy Ash, published 30 May 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18234930> [accessed 26 July 2012]; or *London Evening Standard* article 'Pippa Middleton's Paristocrats are coming to London' by Joshi Herrmann, published 10 May 2012 at <http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/pippa-middletons-paristocrats-are-coming-to-london-7733404.html> [accessed 26 July 2012].

[11] K. Koser, *International Migration: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2007), p. 21.

[12] Koser, *International Migration*, p. 51.

[13] Institute for Education, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (LSE), and London Borough of Newham, 'Languages spoken by pupils, borough and MSOA' (2011) <http://data.london.gov.uk/datastore/package/languages-spoken-pupils-borough-msoa> [accessed 26 July 2012].

(1.2 per cent) than Spanish (0.8 per cent), Portuguese (1.1 per cent), Polish (1.0 per cent), Greek or Italian (both 0.3 per cent). Another perspective on the figure is that it constitutes twice as many as those who speak Chinese at home, and yet the Chinese community presence by far exceeds that of France in the collective host imagination and in local cultural practice, as Jacqueline, a French-Canadian HR manager of forty-two who lives in Nunhead, south London, pointed out during her interview:

> The Chinese community … is far smaller than the French community, but far more visible. Everyone knows when the Chinese New Year is, not just in Leicester Square, but all over the city; my local library in Bromley dedicated a week of activities to the Chinese New Year, and the same can be said for lots of other communities. Maybe the French are more integrated, [so] their influence is relatively 'quiet'.[14]

Despite this comparatively discreet presence, there is little doubt that the London French make a positive contribution to the capital. In macro-economic terms, France has been the UK's primary outside investor 'since 2003, with 12.9 billion euros (about 19.3 billion pounds) invested, which represents 34.7 per cent of the total amount of the French outgoing Foreign Direct Investment',[15] and a dizzying 'over 2,900 companies [constituting] the French business community in London'.[16] Bearing a close resemblance to the cultural and commercial contributions of bygone generations of French Londoners, dating as far back as the Huguenots and beyond, the more tangible manifestations of the London French presence include at least thirty-two French schools;[17] 'an extensive range of fine French eating establishments to meet all budgets, from homely Parisian-style bistros to glamorous and exclusive restaurants [including ten] Michelin starred restaurants';[18] several French bookshops (from Clapham to South

[14] 'La communauté chinoise … est bien plus petite que la communauté française, mais elle est bien plus visible. Tout le monde sait quand est la nouvelle année chinoise, pas seulement à Leicester Square, mais partout dans la ville; ma bibliothèque de Bromley a passé une semaine d'activités pour le nouvel an chinois, et c'est vrai aussi de bien d'autres communautés. Les Français sont peut-être plus intégrés, [du coup] le rayonnement [de leur présence] est relativement "peu bruyant"'.

[15] G. Bellion, 'French business in the UK – a survey' (Université de Franche-Comté/The Relocation Bureau MSc dissertation, Besançon/High Wycombe, 2005).

[16] Think London report 'French community in London' (2007), p. 2, available at <http://www.thinklondon.com/downloads/london_communities/europe_france/CommunityreportFranceAWlowres.pdf> [accessed 28 Oct. 2012].

[17] Seventeen French and bilingual (French/English) full-time weekday schools, from pre-school up to secondary level, and 15 part-time, often Saturday-morning, French schools, scattered all over Greater London.

[18] Think London report, p. 4.

Kensington); numerous French medical centres, such as Medicare Français, La Maison Médicale or the Cabinet Dentaire Français dental practice (there is even a dedicated French veterinary doctor for monolingual quadrupeds!); regular French markets (from Bromley to Wembley) and myriad neighbourhood delicatessens (such as *Le Tour de France* in Streatham or *Mimosa* in Herne Hill, which sits opposite a bicycle retailer named *Bon Vélo*); French estate and recruitment agencies; cultural and entertainment bodies such as the Institut Français and its Ciné Lumière, the French Music Bureau and the Maison du Languedoc-Rousillon in the West End, which stages an annual southern French festival every year in Cavendish Square; as well as various 'houses of worship, from the Synagogue Française de Londres in North London, to the *Eglise Protestante Française* in Soho and the *Eglise Notre Dame de France* near Charing Cross'.[19] And this is by no means an exhaustive list. Indeed, a cursory glance at the advertisements in French community publications, such as *Ici Londres*, reveals a plethora of French businesses, retailers, services, educational institutions, medics and associations, as well as regular community social gatherings, such as the London French Wednesday[20] or the burlesque Soirée Pompette.[21] The French in London also have their own alternative record labels, such as Brownswood Recordings or Thrills and Beats Records, their own underground online publishing house, Les Editions de Londres, their own theatre company, Tamise en Scène, and a dedicated digital radio station, French Radio London (FRL), launched in November 2010.[22]

Mindful of the gap between such realities, and the unreliability of statistics, our analysis is based on an unprecedentedly systematic and in-depth empirical study of today's London French conducted by Huc-Hepher between 2009 and 2011, with additional material derived from an earlier and smaller pilot study conducted by Drake in the summer of 2008, both studies based on extensive secondary analysis. The main study in particular comprised a mix of methods, all designed to elicit both information and observations from our respondents, and to contextualize these within the literatures of contemporary Franco-British mobility and migration. The field work in this case consisted of 200 questionnaires; twenty one-to-one, non-random interviews; and two focus groups of six and seven participants

[19] Think London report, p. 4.

[20] <http://www.facebook.com/pages/London-French-Wednesday/6244556445> [accessed 26 July 2012].

[21] <http://soireepompette.blogspot.co.uk> [accessed 26 July 2012].

[22] See <http://www.tunecore.com/music/thrillsandbeatsrecords> or (forthcoming) <http://thrillsandbeatsrecords.com>; <http://www.gillespetersonworldwide.com/brownswood-recordings>; and <http://www.editionsdelondres.com> [all accessed 2 Aug. 2012].

respectively. The desk work was characterized by its extensive search for web-based resources relevant to our enquiry. For its part, the 2008 pilot study comprised thirty one-to-one interviews conducted on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire. In the following section, we set out further details of this primary research, and make some preliminary remarks about the demographics of our population and the issues that their study raises in terms of the motivations, experiences and observations of our respondents.

Questions of method, motivations and demography

> Jacqueline: 'I came to learn English, to get my Cambridge Certificate'.
> Arthur: 'It looks good to have London on your CV; that was my plan'.
> Moses: 'Everything's easier in England: I found a job the day I got here'.
> Bruno: 'English culture was why I came in the first place … I liked English music, pop, etc., "Brit culture", the image it represents in France … You feel like there's lots to do here and there's always something interesting going on, an exhibition, a concert… You can't really get bored in a city like London'.[23]

In the case of the main study, and in an initial, pilot phase, Huc-Hepher distributed 200 questionnaires to parents from the Grenadine French Saturday School in Blackheath, either in person at the school gates, and/or by email; the overall response rate was low, at 10 per cent. Subsequently, in the study's second phase, Huc-Hepher conducted twenty interviews with a separate sample constructed to represent the community's diversity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social status, occupation, sexuality, geographical provenance and adopted London neighbourhood.[24] Personal (hi)stories were discussed in depth, with the average interview lasting one and a half hours, in an attempt to understand the mechanisms at play in this latest wave of French migration to the British capital. Together with the interviews, and in order to gain insight into the perceptions of a younger segment of London's French population, two focus groups were subsequently conducted in two very different schools, socio-economically and geographically speaking. The ages of those participating in the focus groups ranged between sixteen and eighteen years, and they came from a variety of backgrounds. The first focus

[23] Jacqueline: 'Je suis venue pour avoir mon Cambridge Certificate, pour apprendre l'anglais'; Arthur: 'C'est bien d'avoir Londres sur le CV, c'était ça mon idée'; Moses: 'Tout est plus facile en Angleterre: j'ai trouvé du travail le premier jour'; Bruno: 'Je suis venu au départ pour la culture anglaise … J'aimais bien la musique anglaise, pop, etc., la "British culture", l'image qu'elle représente en France … On a l'impression de pouvoir faire beaucoup de choses ici et qu'il y a toujours quelque chose d'intéressant qui se passe, une exposition, un concert; on ne peut pas vraiment s'ennuyer dans une ville comme Londres'.

[24] For a complete list of interviewee profiles, including geographical residency particulars, see the Appendix to this chapter.

group (Focus Group 1) took place in a state-funded sixth-form college in Newham (NewVIc), one of London's most deprived areas to the east of the city, with one of the highest migrant populations in the UK: according to the ONS,[25] 76.4 per cent of all children in Newham were born to non-UK mothers in 2010, the highest proportion of all local authorities in England and Wales. The group of seven francophone youngsters taking part were all from ethnic minorities, holders (or sons/daughters of holders) of French passports (including France's Overseas Departments and Territories) and, as such, this cohort was in stark contrast to the sample of teenagers in the second focus group (Focus Group 2). The latter comprised six students of the same age attending the over-subscribed Lycée Charles de Gaulle – a semi-independent, means-tested fee-paying school, subsidized by the French state, providing both bilingual education and the French national curriculum. The school is in South Kensington, one of London's most affluent districts in the fashionable, francophone and Francophile west of the capital. One of the students participating in the French Lycée focus group was of Moroccan heritage, but the remaining participants were of French/European origin and from socio-economically privileged backgrounds. Initially, by way of introduction to the field of research, and with the aim of providing some 'hard', 'objective'[26] data for subsequent analysis, the students completed a brief, user-friendly questionnaire.

The final form of primary research used in the main study was an analysis of a selection of online resources. Not only were national statistics and official online data scrutinized, but also less conventional material, such as that contained in French-speaking London community blogs and online reference sites, e-magazines and e-newspapers. These sources proved a rich stream of unadulterated and apparently unselfconscious evidence. Finally, and by way of comparison here, Drake's study was conducted on the eve of the global financial crisis that was to strike in autumn 2008. Between May and July of that year, she conducted twenty-six face-to-face interviews with young French workers employed across London in franchises of the French baker and patisserie company *Paul*. All interviewees were aged between

[25] Office of National Statistics, 'Births in England and Wales by parents' country of birth' (2010), available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/parents--country-of-birth--england-and-wales/2010/births-in-england-and-wales-by-parents--country-of-birth--2010.html> [last accessed 26 July 2012].

[26] Like the initial survey conducted, these questionnaires had the advantage over the interviews of allowing the respondents to answer freely, without perceived pressure or prejudice from the interviewer or peers. The same can be said of the choice of language: French. This resulted in the participants responding spontaneously and impartially, without fear of offence or inaccuracy, which may not have been the case had the oral investigations been carried out in English.

twenty-two and twenty-five years, almost all were working full time, and over a third had been in post for over a year at the time of interview, with one or two having risen to the role of 'team leader'. Virtually all had completed at most three years of higher education, and were either from the Paris *banlieues* or from France's regional towns and cities.[27]

Our desk research had already established that, broadly speaking, the French community in London is thought to be divisible into two principal groups: the middle-class, highly-skilled, highly-educated and highly-sought-after (euro)City (euro)stars;[28] and Ledain's young 'Oubliés de St Pancras', seen above, seeking language skills, a new lifestyle, perhaps a new self and, above all, employment. However, this standard dichotomous distinction between, on the one hand, the more mature and highly-skilled (Mulholland and Ryan's 'highly-skilled French professionals')[29] and, on the other, the younger, low-skilled[30] faction of the French diaspora is over-simplistic. Indeed, our studies suggest common motivations and experiences across our respondents: both camps came initially and superficially in search of flexible, fluid employment opportunities and English language acquisition, coupled with a quest for the (multi)cultural liveliness that London is thought to embody. Furthermore, most, if not all, take on jobs that local inhabitants fail to fill, both in the high-end fields of finance or insurance *and* the low-end sectors of childcare or hospitality, and both are typically welcomed by host employers.

Christian Roudaut[31] attempts to grapple with this over-simplification by defining a third group of French Londoner which he refers to as 'Français escargots' ('snail French'), but which migration specialists might prefer to term 'inter-corporate transferees (ICTs)',[32] and who were also present in our populations. These are expatriates proper, often from the diplomatic or administrative corps, who, as the mollusc metaphor implies, carry their native culture and lifestyles firmly on their backs, in an autochthonic transposition to the host city, rather than attempting to assimilate into their

[27] See <http://www.francobritishcouncil.org.uk/data/files/reports/drake.pdf>, for the full study, in French [accessed 28 Oct. 2012].

[28] A. Favell, *Eurostars and Eurocities: Free Movement and Mobility in an Integrating Europe* (Oxford, 2008).

[29] J. Mulholland and L. Ryan, 'French capital: a study of French highly skilled migrants in London's financial and business sectors – a report on preliminary observations' (Middlesex University, ESRC RES-000-22-4240, Dec. 2011).

[30] This definition is in itself somewhat of a fallacy, as many of the young French movers employed in unskilled tertiary-sector posts are technically over-qualified, contentedly there for the culturo-linguistic benefits in kind rather than job satisfaction or capital gain.

[31] C. Roudaut, *France, je t'aime je te quitte* (Paris, 2009).

[32] Koser, *International Migration*, p. 18.

new-found socio-cultural context, as would their aptly termed 'chameleon' counterparts ('caméléons' in Roudaut's terminology). We note, furthermore, that in 2010[33] Roudaut drew attention to a fourth category, which could be termed the ethnic-minority French migrant group. Anecdotal and observational evidence – be it from university seminars, Grenadine exchanges or bustling Brixton streets – would suggest that it constitutes a considerable proportion of the French community in London, but one that fails to feature in official statistics, despite its more visible presence than that of its 'Français de souche' ('ancestral French') counterparts or white 'European phenotype', to use Block's terminology.[34]

At the same time, the statistics are revealing in relation to the neighbourhoods they represent, which may offer an indication by proxy of the ethnicity of the London French. Contrary to popular belief, it transpires that the most French-speaking borough is not Kensington and Chelsea (with a considerable 2.6 per cent share nonetheless), but Lambeth, the latter having a 2.9 per cent proportion of French-speakers among its schoolchildren (in keeping with other deprived areas such as Hackney and Lewisham, each with 2.1 per cent), whereas a mere 0.8 per cent and 1.4 per cent were attributed to Ealing and Greenwich respectively – areas often (mis)perceived as having high concentrations of French expatriates. On the basis of these figures and the demographic zones to which they correspond (that is, densely-populated boroughs with a proportion of ethnic minorities which far exceeds the national average), it is not unreasonable to assume that in addition to the 'Français de souche', or French nationals proper, they also include a significant number of French-speaking ethnic minorities of ex-colonial descent. The observations made during the Newham focus group session support this theory, and our overall evidence suggests that, rather than conforming to the 'South Ken expat' stereotype, the majority of the London French replicate the 'French' presence across the globe, in all its complexity and diversity. In this light, how do 'our' French define and identify themselves, in terms of the republican principles of the France that they have left behind?

Liberté *vs* fraternité*: identity, belonging and transformation of the self*

> Charles: 'I think the emphasis is clearly placed on equality in France, I'd go as far as to say it's almost a form of egalitarianism, trying to make everyone

[33] In an interview with the news channel France24 on 23 Apr. 2010, available at <http://www.france24.com/fr/20100423-2010-04-22-2246-wb-fr-entretien> [accessed 29 July 2012].

[34] D. Block, *Multilingual Identities in a Global City: London Stories* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 208.

fit into the same mould. In England, the emphasis is really on liberty, and expressing difference freely'.
Miranda: 'I feel 100 per cent integrated [here]. 80 per cent of me belongs here, but I am still French deep down'.
Sarah: 'I feel like I'm a Londoner, but not English'.
Sadia: 'I don't feel like an immigrant. "Immigration", there's a movement that goes with it'.
Questionnaire respondent: '"Immigration" refers to other people'.
Brigitte: 'I didn't want to come to England to meet France'.
Séverine: 'London's changed me. I think I'm more resourceful now; I've become more entrepreneurial'.[35]

To complement our discussion of the demography of today's London French thus far, we refer to the self-identification of our population: do they see themselves as belonging explicitly to any of the groups mentioned above? How, exactly, do they define themselves? And how do they rationalize their departure to London, and the company that they keep in their London lives? We found in our field work that each member of the French community experiences and embodies their existence 'abroad', in London, in a highly individual, highly subjective way, and that there is no single rule that can be attributed to the London French identity, rather endless exceptions thereto. The sole existential trait uniting most of them, however, is a clear impression of being a Londoner, which perhaps explains why the overwhelming majority do not feel a need to be part of the French community in London, as they have an underlying sense of belonging to a broader, richer community: they are Londoners, and themselves meliorated by being so. As Charles eloquently puts it: 'You have an identity somewhere that is enriched by living abroad … You know yourself better … because you've got something to compare yourself with. But if you're still in the amniotic fluid, you don't spend your whole time questioning yourself'.[36]

[35] Charles: 'Je pense qu'en France l'accent est nettement mis sur l'égalité, je dirais même presque l'égalitarisme, de faire en sorte que tout le monde soit logé à la même enseigne. En Angleterre, l'accent est vraiment mis sur la liberté, et l'expression de la différence'; Sarah: 'Je me sens londonienne, mais pas anglaise'; Miranda: 'Je me sens 100% intégrée [ici]. J'appartiens à ici à 80%, mais je suis quand même française dans le fond'; Sadia: 'Je me sens pas immigrée. "L'immigration", il y a un mouvement qui va avec'; Questionnaire respondent: '"L'immigration", c'est les autres'; Brigitte: 'J'avais pas envie d'être venue à Londres pour rencontrer la France'; Séverine: Londres m'a changée. Je suis peut-être plus débrouillarde; j'ai développé un tempérament plus entrepreneur'.

[36] 'Justement on a quelque part une identité qui est enrichie du fait de vivre à l'étranger … On se connaît mieux … puisqu'on a un élément de comparaison, alors que lorsqu'on baigne dans le liquide amniotique, on ne passe pas tout son temps à se questionner'.

From 'aliens',[37] to 'strangers',[38] to 'foreigners',[39] the London French have always been labelled in accordance with the historical times. Today's London French, by way of comparison, and especially those constituting Roudaut's 'Français-escargots', are more likely to define themselves as expats than immigrants. Indeed, the very notion of being categorized as an 'immigrant' was often met by our respondents with a combination of hostility, incomprehension and astonishment. The idea that purely by virtue of their conforming to the dictionary definition of an immigrant,[40] that is, a person who has undergone 'the process of immigrating; settling in a foreign country',[41] they could be regarded as such was a revelation, and a concept to which many of the interviewees could not relate. Instead, most of our respondents identified themselves in relation to an 'imagined community',[42] usually 'London' or 'Europe' (meaning the European Union), less often 'England' or even 'the UK'. For example, and in keeping with the vast majority of interviews and in addition to her European self-identification, twenty-eight-year-old doctoral student Miranda reveals a vivid sense of belonging to London – 'I feel like a Londoner, yeah, totally'[43] – but the somewhat tortuous overall account of her internalization of identity appears, like that of many of the other informants, to arrive at its conclusion by default, the 'immigrant', 'migrant' and 'expat' tags all failing to correspond to her selfhood for varying reasons.

Furthermore, all of our interviewees (in the main study) have, without exception, made a deliberate choice to divorce themselves from French community ties at some point in their London sojourn, if not permanently, despite the community's clear physical presence. Fifty-two-year-old urban designer and architecture lecturer Antoine, originally from Marseilles, now calls Archway home and has lived in London for twenty-two years; in his

[37] J. Clark and C. Ross, *London: the Illustrated History* (2011), pp. 77, 270.

[38] As in 'stranger churches' (see A. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in 16th-Century London* (Oxford, 1986)).

[39] As the Foreign and Protestants Naturalization Act of 1708 testifies (see J. Noorthouck, *A New History of London - Including Westminster and Southwark* (1773), available at British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=46735> [accessed 25 Sept. 2011]).

[40] These in themselves vary considerably: the *Collins English Dictionary* stipulates a strict temporal and temporary dimension ('a person who has been settled in a country of which he is not a native for less than ten years'), while the *Cambridge Dictionary Online* includes an entirely contrary notion of longevity and intent ('a person who has come to a different country in order to live there permanently').

[41] *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (1999).

[42] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983; 2006).

[43] 'Je me sens londonienne, oui, carrément'.

Figure 15.1. 2012 Président Bankside Bastille Day Festival: perceptions of being 'French in London'.

words: 'I have avoided the French community from the beginning … that was a conscious decision … I haven't seen the benefit; I cannot see how I could contribute, or what it could do for me'. In many cases, this resolve originally appears to have been instigated by a desire to learn the English language through immersion technique – the academic approach learnt at school in France for ten years having failed them – and in an attempt to achieve full integration within the adopted society.

There was also a tendency for interviewees to spurn inclusion within a French association or club – of which London has many[44] – as it was often felt that it would involve becoming part of a French clique, inevitably resulting in anti-British discourse, voicing hackneyed objections to local services (trains were singled out here) and cultural practices (such as having to buy rounds in a pub, and having to go to the pub to have a social life in the first place) etc., perceived by many as being unfruitful and unnecessary. This rejection of compatriot associations, commonplace among our interviewees, was echoed by one of the teachers interviewed by David Block in the framework of his six-year, longitudinal study of French

[44] By way of example, the Fédération des Associations Françaises en Grande-Bretagne, founded, significantly, in 1942, brings together over 70 separate organizations, and there are many more in London which are not members of the FAFGB.

foreign language teachers in London.[45] Nancy explained: 'Every time I meet French people who are teaching, they are complaining, they are frustrated people. So I think we are frustrated people living in another country. We keep criticizing England, but we are bitter about France, because [it] did not do anything for us'.[46] However, when friendships with fellow French men and women grow organically, it is a different matter entirely, and if befriending host residents proves an insurmountable challenge, our French turn to their compatriots. Indeed, Sadia's situation became so desperate that she resorted to placing an advertisement in a local newspaper in search of kinship with a French Londoner: 'It was a nightmare trying to make friends here for years … the people are nice enough, but they're a bit closed up. It takes them a long time to trust you and open up. You really have to work at it; two years later they'll invite you over for a coffee!'[47] Relationships with fellow nationals with whom one shares a common sociocultural heritage, including food and wine, are unconscious or instinctive, and all the more effortless for it. This was a phenomenon communicated by the majority of those interviewed for this study, whose networks of friends were generally composed of French nationals or other non-British migrants, despite not deliberately seeking them out.

A possible reason for the community's default inter-French friendships and resistance to organized associations with French social and/or professional assemblages is that the French in London remain attached to and part of France by virtue of its very closeness, and therefore neither feel a necessity to integrate into host culture nor to form a distinct, homogeneous community apart from it. This is a notion confirmed by Bellion: 'The cohesion of the French expatriates is weak. They do not feel the need to meet each other, maybe because of the geographical proximity of France'.[48] Respondents in the *Paul* UK study cited similar factors in their decisions to move: 'London is easy to get to', stated Sophie Le F, a twenty-year-old.[49]

As with previous generations of London French exiles, living in the capital was found to have a transformative effect, sometimes profound, on the identities and behaviour of those interviewed. Most felt that they had undergone modifications to their personalities or behaviour which they

[45] D. Block, 'French foreign-language teachers in London', in Block, *Multilingual Identities*, pp. 107–35.

[46] Block, 'French foreign-language teachers', p. 121.

[47] 'Ici, j'ai galéré pour faire des amis pendant des années … les gens sont sympa, mais ils sont un peu renfermés. Il leur faut beaucoup de temps pour avoir confiance, pour s'ouvrir. Il faut vraiment s'investir; deux ans plus tard ils t'invitent prendre un café!'

[48] G. Bellion, 'French business in the UK'.

[49] 'Londres est pratique d'accès'.

perceived to be a positive and liberating experience. One recurrent and intriguing theme was developing a less volatile temperament since living in London, or placing a greater emphasis on courtesy and good manners. Hotel manager Arthur, on the lower socio-professional echelons of London society, highlighted a discrepancy between his experiences of working life in Paris (disrespected) and London (treated with courtesy): 'my family says "you've changed: you're calmer; you think more" – and that's the positive side of having lived here. I think I'm a little bit English now'.[50] Further accounts of courtesy ranged from the almost mythological queuing at the bus-stop, to moving to one side on the escalator in order to leave the other free for more pressed or energetic commuters, not forgetting both the unexpected applying of the highway code manifested by drivers stopping at zebra crossings, and the unspoken highway code of allowing oncoming vehicles to pass before oneself. This 'pleasure in giving' ('plaisir d'offrir') positive host trait, remarked upon and, more often than not, adopted by the French Londoners interviewed in both their working and private lives, is nevertheless surprising when considered in the context of the egocentric, individualistic society also purporting to be the London norm.

Some felt, however, that the speed and pressure of life in the megacity had in turn made them less patient, more frenzied, as Bruno from Bordeaux testified. Despite feeling 'a bit freer here than in France',[51] one of the major drawbacks of London life was for him a sense of claustrophobia resulting from the sheer scale of the conurbation and the geographical boundaries of the isle itself: 'from time to time I feel a bit hemmed in here because it's hard to leave London, and go and see something else; it takes so long to get out of London that it makes you think twice before doing anything at all outside the city. And that feeling is heightened by the fact that we're on an island'.[52] Whereas Brice perceived this urban energy positively, as integral to London's liberating force: 'Now that I've experienced something else, a big city and so on, I think I'd soon feel cramped [in Carcassonne]'.[53] As if in a curious reversal of physical reality, his personal reality was defined by a greater sense of space, openness and freedom in the buzzing hive of activity

[50] 'Ma famille dit "tu as vâchement changé; tu es plus calme; tu penses plus" – et ça c'est le côté positif d'avoir vécu ici. Je pense que je suis un petit peu anglais maintenant'.

[51] 'un peu plus libre ici qu'en France'.

[52] 'J'ai l'impression de temps en temps d'être un peu enfermé ici parce qu'on a des difficultés pour quitter Londres, pour aller voir autre chose, parce que ça prend tellement de temps pour sortir de Londres, déjà, qu'on hésite à faire quoi que ce soit en dehors de la ville. Et cette sensation est accentuée par le fait qu'on est sur une île'.

[53] 'Maintenant que j'ai connu autre chose, une grande ville, etcétéra, je pense que je me sentirais très vite à l'étroit [à Carcassonne]'.

that is overpopulated London than in the topographically broader open spaces of south-west France. This is evidence, therefore, of both positive and negative forms of change and individual positioning within the megacity.

Do our London French experience other forms of liberation from their former selves? Perhaps serving to counterbalance the London individualistic status quo were other transformative effects of a more spiritual or cultural nature. Thirty-two-year-old, Franco-Algerian Sadia, for instance, embraced Christianity while in London, much to the astonishment and disapproval of her 'friends' in France; and one of the teenagers taking part in the focus group in Newham expressed in appreciative terms the freedom to become more devout in his practice of the Muslim faith, which he gratefully believed had prevented him from embodying the typical French media representation of the 'urban delinquent' ('délinquant banlieusard') he thought he would otherwise have become had he remained in Paris. Self-realization also came in the shape of cultural experiments; by way of example, Brice reported taking on an entirely different persona under the cover of the city's darkness, being a financial/IT consultant by day and an actor by night, performing with the Tamise en Scène[54] theatre company; while Séverine developed her entrepreneurial skills, and Bruno took up amateur photography.

Others found themselves becoming – perhaps despite themselves – 'Anglo-Saxon', that term used consistently and derogatively in French political culture. Being 'liberal' in this sense is perceived by some of our respondents to be one of the most powerful, singular attractions of London, whether it be the individual's right to dress as they wish ('you can wear whatever you like here, no-one will bat an eyelid',[55] comment from Focus Group 2); to listen to the music they choose (Miranda: 'the type of music I listen to is really weird; they call it "doom". It's very instrumental, experimental music – sludge');[56] to engage in nocturnal pursuits which dispel any preconceptions based on their day jobs (including the 'am-dram' pastime mentioned above and even pole-dancing); or simply to break away from the mould that (French) society has assigned them ('in Paris, you have to stick to the model',[57] Focus Group 2). Séverine, the lawyer from Nunhead, illustrated this point having noticed a Franco-English variation regarding attitudes to eccentricity: 'I think you have more options in England, more options in London; eccentricity is still allowed and respected … You can

[54] See <http://www.tamiseenscene.com/pages/la-compagnie/vocation.html> [accessed 12 Oct. 2011].

[55] 'Ici, on peut s'habiller comme on veut; personne ne regardera'.

[56] 'Le genre de musique que j'écoute, c'est vraiment spécial, c'est ce qu'on appelle "doom". C'est la musique très instrumentale, expérimentale, sludge'.

[57] 'à Paris, il faut suivre le modèle'.

Figure 15.2. 2012 Président Bankside Bastille Day Festival: French Londoners strengthen intracultural ties over a game of café-culture 'babyfoot'.

be upper-middle-class in England without having to conform to one single mode of thought, lifestyle, etc.'[58]

These varied manifestations of civil liberties, of Londoners' indifference towards difference, ultimately of individual freedom, simultaneously permit, even encourage, the unconditional generation of personal income, and, equally importantly, the aspiration to achieve it: the Anglo-Saxon stereotype par excellence. This is a fundamental contrast to France, where the accepted attitude in the face of socio-economic success is reportedly either one of contempt or, more commonly, undisguised envy, and where manifestations of such success are habitually met with rancour, causing those in positions of relative wealth to feel obliged to conceal it, together with any efforts to hold it as an objective: '[Londoners] have quite a healthy attitude towards money. What I like here is that people are quite positive, and not jealous'[59] (Laura). These attitudes led some of the interviewees to alter their political stance in London, as Charles openly acknowledged: 'Often at

[58] 'Je trouve qu'on a plus d'options en Angleterre, plus d'options à Londres, l'excentricité est encore admise et respectée … Je pense qu'on peut être bourgeois en Angleterre et ne pas se conformer à un seul modèle de pensée, de vie, etc.'

[59] '[les Londoniens], ils ont une façon de vivre cet argent qui est plutôt saine. Ce que j'aime bien ici c'est que les gens sont assez positifs, et pas jaloux'.

dinner parties with my friends [in France], I've practically been verbally abused. They'd swear at me, telling me I'd started thinking like a Blairite, that I'd become a liberal, and I'd say "no, I've become a pragmatist"'.[60] His interpretation of British liberalism is not restricted to market economics and free enterprise, although he does acknowledge these aspects, but it also incorporates freedom of thought, a sentiment that was echoed by Séverine: 'I think I've become less anxious, more tolerant … more inquisitive'.[61] Cordier makes a pertinent comparison in this respect, which is representative of the divergence in attitudes towards socio-professional mobility on either side of the Channel, stating in his essay that 'One of the good things about job ads in the UK is that the salaries are shown, even for top managerial positions, which almost never happens in France [where] money is a taboo subject'.[62] It would appear that neither earning nor spending money, and subsequently flaunting its fruits, is taboo in London, a point borne out in Bellion's thesis: 'British people spend more money on shoes, clothes and accessories than the other Europeans'.[63]

Another justification for the aforementioned endemic obligation to conceal one's wealth in France, as a preventative measure against others' green-eyed disapproval, could lie in the country's Catholic tradition. Despite it seemingly being at odds with the nation's current, proactive, institutional secularism, several of the interviewees spontaneously referred to Catholicism's power to stifle success or at least any manifestations thereof. Indeed, the notion that material wealth should initiate a shameful sense of guilt, bringing with it only ignoble, short-lived, earthly pleasures, is one that is tacitly corroborated by Cordier, who writes 'there's nothing shameful about earning a good living [in London]',[64] and explicitly by forty-eight-year-old Chantal, who believes Catholicism to be deeply embedded in the French *vox populi*: 'actually in the Catholic religion you mustn't say what you have, you must never show it; no nice cars; as soon as you begin to show it, there's a huge amount of envy'.[65]

[60] 'Moi, souvent, j'ai été injurié presque, en me sortant des gros mots, pendant des repas avec mes amis [en France], en me disant que mes idées étaient devenues Blairistes, que j'étais devenu libéral, et moi je dis "non, je suis devenu pragmatique"'.

[61] 'je pense que je suis devenue moins anxieuse, plus tolérante … plus curieuse'.

[62] 'L'une des bonnes choses avec les offres d'emploi au Royaume-Uni, est que les salaires sont mentionnés dans les annonces, même pour les postes de haut dirigeant, ce qui n'est quasiment pas le cas en France [où] l'argent est un sujet tabou'.

[63] Bellion, 'French business in the UK', p. 15.

[64] 'bien gagner sa vie n'a rien de honteux [à Londres]' (V. Cordier, *Enfin un boulot! Ou le parcours d'un jeune chômeur à Londres* (2005), p. 134).

[65] 'effectivement, dans la religion catholique il ne faut pas dire ce qu'on a, il ne faut jamais montrer, ne pas avoir de belles voitures, dès qu'on le montre un peu, il y a énormément d'envie'.

One respondent even claimed that, based on her own experience, there was a higher proportion of Catholic families among the French in London than in France: 'When we first moved here, we were surprised by the number of Catholic French expats … They go to mass, and get baptised and make their first communion: something I hadn't come across before and hadn't seen among my friends [in Paris]'[66] (Laura). In what is perhaps a manifestation of the same phenomenon, Bellion describes the above-average size of families emigrating to London, stating that, on the basis of French Consulate statistics, 58 per cent of families moving to the UK 'are three children families, 25.5 per cent are four children families, 8.6 per cent are five children families, 2.2 per cent are six children families, 0.6 per cent of them are seven children families, and the 0.5 per cent left represent families with eight to twelve [children]'.[67] Perhaps, then, it is precisely France's vehement secularist agenda that is causing its practising Catholics and Muslims (in the case, for example, of Focus Group 1) to seek religious freedom in London, just as, in an ironic twist of fate, their Protestant Huguenot forefathers sought refuge from the Catholics within London's walls several centuries earlier?

Given our findings, is it not justified to hypothesize that, contrary to popular and personal belief, many of the London French effectively correspond to the 'immigrant' epithet far more faithfully than might initially meet the eye? In *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, Chiswick says that 'immigrants are … described as fleeing the poverty, repression, and claustrophobia of the place where they were born and raised, and sometimes as being attracted or pulled by the magnet of the wealth ("streets lined with gold"), opportunities, freedom, and anonymity of where they settle'.[68] While not escaping from the same sort of poverty as immigrants from developing nations, many of the London French did, as has been discussed, originally come to the city in search of employment, opportunity and freedom, and many also came to break loose from the ideological shackles that confined them in France, thereby conforming with uncanny exactitude to the experts' definition of the typical 'immigrant'. However incompatible the label may seem, as the London French tend to be considered more as long-term tourists than economic, labour, ideological or even lifestyle immigrants by the host population (and indeed by themselves,

[66] 'Quand on est arrivé ici, on a été étonné par le nombre de Français expatriés qui sont très catholiques … Ils vont à la messe et en font leur baptême, leur communion: quelque chose que je ne connaissais pas, et que je ne voyais pas dans mes amis'.

[67] Bellion, 'French business in the UK', p. 9.

[68] B. Chiswick, 'Are immigrants favorably self-selected?', *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*, ed. C. Brettel and J. Hollifield (2000; 2008), pp. 61–76, at p. 64.

as Laura appreciatively revealed when describing 'that feeling of being slightly on holiday all the time [in London]'),[69] the following illustrations of the underlying causes that ultimately triggered their first migratory steps should serve to quell any doubts.

Egalité*: escaping racism, xenophobia, sexism and homophobia*

> Miranda: 'Racism is more visible in France, it's really one side against the other … there's a lot of fighting between both camps'.
> Paulette: 'People don't see my colour in London'.
> Moses: 'Professionally speaking, in France people are generally categorised in terms of their status depending on their age, gender, that kind of thing, sometimes even their ethnic origin. In England, I didn't experience that; it's people's skills, attributes and strengths [that count]. You see people working their way up and getting promotions, and I know it doesn't happen quite like that in France'.
> Charles: 'In France, there's a tolerance of intolerance that is shameful'.
> Chantal: 'As soon as English couples have their first child, the man babysits one day in the week so that the woman can go out with her girlfriends, and another day, she'll stay in so that he can go out. That never happens in France'.[70]

In addition to personal and pecuniary motivations, a common cause for the French migratory wave, evidenced through both studies as well as web research, was *exile*, not an enforced banishment from their native land, as might be the case for a refugee, but a self-imposed flight. Despite their apparent diversity, the majority of those taking part in the study were linked by a shared – though not necessarily conscious – desire to escape a certain phenomenon in France. Whether they were fleeing racism, homophobia, xenophobia, sexism, conservatism, elitism or 'lookism', the realization that they had effectively been escaping a form of prejudice in France materialized, in a number of cases, as the interviews progressed.

[69] 'cette sensation d'être toujours un peu en vacances [à Londres]'.

[70] Miranda: 'En France, le racisme est plus visible, c'est vraiment les uns contre les autres … il y a vraiment beaucoup de combat entre tous les deux'; Paulette: 'À Londres on ne voit pas ma couleur'; Moses: 'Au niveau professionnel, en France, on est plutôt basé sur des statuts attribués par rapport à l'âge, par rapport au sexe, ce genre de choses, parfois même à l'origine. J'ai expérimenté en Angleterre que c'est pas ça; c'est plutôt les compétences, les qualités, les valeurs de la personne [qui comptent]. On voit les personnes qui montent en grade ou qui obtiennent des promotions, et je sais que ce n'est pas exactement comme ça en France'; Charles: 'En France, il y a une tolérance vis-à-vis de l'intolérance qui est coupable'; Chantal: 'Dès que les Anglais ont leur premier enfant, l'homme "babysit" un jour dans la semaine pour que la femme puisse sortir avec ses copines, et un autre jour, c'est la femme qui le fait pour l'homme. Ça, en France, on ne l'a jamais'.

While not all were the direct victims of such discrimination – some were, however, for whom it constituted an explicit motivation for leaving in the first place – many of them quite simply felt trapped by the country's narrow-mindedness and were keen to sample a fresh way of life: more tolerance, more equality.

First, the generally obscured yet reportedly endemic racism of France was referred to by a number of the interviewees, for whom it constituted a driving force for leaving the *patrie*. Arthur was unambivalent in his account of the degrading treatment to which he was subjected when he initially emigrated to Paris from his native La Réunion: 'It was hard for me in Paris because of racism. At work, people treated you as if you were a slave; it really wasn't easy'.[71] A comparable overt expression of racism in the workplace was recounted by an evidently non-Caucasian blog commentator: 'Time and again in France I was reminded that being from East Asia was a handicap. For that matter, do you ever see a single Oriental artist in any of the performing arts there, whether it be theatre, music or film?'[72] The harshness of the language employed is no doubt an impulsive re-articulation of the harshness with which each was treated when they lived in France. In a similar vein, Miranda, a young, *white* French female, perhaps surprisingly, also identified racism as a deciding factor for international migration: 'In Paris, society is really split in two – it's terrible. I think people live in a more unified way in England'.[73] She went on to explain how it was this racial antagonism at the core of French society, in Paris and the provinces, that compelled her to leave, no longer able to bear the tyrannical burden it posed for her. The tone of her discourse was lexically violent, with notions of physical confrontation peppering the language, such as 'combat' and 'fight' ('bagarre'), irrespective of the fact that in this case she was not the victim, rather a priori 'on the side' of the perpetrator, albeit against her will. This was evidently a position she was not comfortable assuming and which subsequently caused her to choose London as a permanent abode.

Leading on from undisguised racism is the notion of xenophobia, and this was another reason why London 'attracts many French people suffocated by

[71] 'À Paris c'était dur pour moi; j'ai eu des problèmes de racisme. Au travail on vous traitait comme si vous étiez un esclave; c'est vrai que ce n'était pas évident'.

[72] 'En France, j'ai souvent compris que pour un chanteur, le fait d'être asiatique était un "handicap". D'ailleurs, voit-on un seul artiste asiatique dans le milieu, que ce soit le théâtre, la musique ou le cinéma?', comment uploaded to the 'French in London' blog by 'An', 12 May 2009, 12:19, at <http://www.frenchinlondon.com/blog-francais-londres/2009/05/irreconciliables-francais-de-france-et-de-letranger/> [accessed 5 Oct. 2011].

[73] 'A Paris, il y a vraiment une division de la société qui est terrible; en Angleterre je pense que les gens vivent plus d'une manière homogène'.

the social mores of Paris'.[74] Since xenophobia is defined as an 'intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries',[75] several of the interviewees can justifiably be said to have been subjected, in France, to xenophobic treatment which had tangible repercussions on their personal, but primarily their professional lives. Paulette, a thirty-five-year-old, black – or 'Black Other (French)', as she denotes herself on UK forms – international logistics manager and mother of two, came to London in search of more equitable employment opportunities given the discrimination to which she had fallen victim in the French workplace: 'I found it very, very hard to find a job in France … – and I'm talking specifically about discrimination. It was such a waste of my academic qualifications and my time going from one futile training course to the next'.[76] In France, since neither her extensive qualifications – holder of a French BSc equivalent and a BA in business studies – nor her immediately discernible ambition were sufficient to secure her a job which reflected these desirable attributes, following in her exiled sisters' footsteps, she took the courageous decision, almost despite herself, to test the UK labour market. There, she hoped that employers would not instil in her a confidence-crushing sense of being socially and professionally out of her depth, as they had in Paris: 'I was really made to feel I shouldn't be there'.[77] Like many of the interviewees, Paulette felt that the London labour market was a meritocratic one (confirmed by the initial findings from Mulholland and Ryan's research),[78] with the emphasis placed purely on knowledge, skills and performance. As a result, she describes herself as being 'completely fulfilled in [her] work'[79] and intends never to return to France. While a somewhat categorical and definitive decision, it is one that was informed by her experiences on the ground in Paris and London, as well as by non-moving friends who have remained in France.

Unfortunately, xenophobia of this kind is not isolated, and is spoken of by other interviewees and authors, such as Hamid Senni,[80] who dedicated an entire literary work, *De la Cité à la City*, to his personal professional pathway,

[74] M. Deen and A. Katz, 'French making themselves at home in London', *New York Times*, 5 Feb. 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/25/style/25ihtafrench.1.9495133.html> [accessed Sept. 2011].

[75] *Oxford Dictionaries Online* <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/xenophobia> [accessed 28 Oct. 2012].

[76] 'J'avais beaucoup, beaucoup de mal à trouver du travail en France … – et là, je parle vraiment vis-à-vis de la discrimination. Avec mon bagage académique, c'était un gâchis de rester là à traîner à perdre mon temps, faire des formations aussi futiles l'une que l'autre'.

[77] 'on m'a vraiment fait sentir que je n'étais pas à ma place'.

[78] See Mulholland and Ryan, 'French capital'.

[79] 'complètement épanouie dans [son] travail'.

[80] H. Senni, *De la Cité à la City* (Paris, 2007).

from growing up in the ghettoized suburbs of Paris to ultimately becoming the owner of a successful business in London, and the arduous journey in between. One sentence captures the frustrations expressed throughout the book with particular clarity and mirrors some of the accounts expressed by other interviewees with telling precision:

> In London I am Hamid the Frenchman, to whom people give the means to succeed, who is judged purely on his achievements. I do not want go back to being Hamid the North-African low-life from the hood, who has to prove himself on a daily basis and make the most of the tiny concessions people are willing to make for him.[81]

For others, homophobia appeared to be a key motivation for emigrating and, like Senni and Paulette, not envisaging a permanent return to France. Robert, a qualified teacher of French as a foreign language, who now lectures in higher education, is a forty-year-old, white, homosexual male, born and raised in a village in northern France, who had also lived in larger cities, such as Lille, before deciding to make his cross-Channel move. He came to Newcastle for his PGCE teaching qualification seventeen years ago, later migrating south to join his then common-law partner and now husband, Adrian, in London, where they now own a flat in East Dulwich. He recounted that the reason for his desertion of France was threefold, but recognized that escaping small-minded mis- and pre-conceptions regarding homosexuality, on a macro, societal level and a micro, personal level, constituted a primary contributing factor: 'well I left France because of that [my sexuality] … I had friends at uni who turned their backs on me when they found out I was gay; but that's never happened here; I don't feel that burden'.[82] His sexuality in France was experienced as a burden, a heavy load that weighed him down in all spheres of life, and one that was immediately lightened upon migrating to the UK. In Robert's case, flight was key in informing his decision, the discourse being entirely devoid of references to economic or employment motivations, unlike the aforementioned victims of xenophobia whose prejudicial treatment in France directly impacted their position, or inclusion, in the labour market, rendering occupational opportunity a simultaneous beacon. The prospect of return migration remains slim for Robert, just as it was rejected by Paulette, neither of

[81] 'A Londres je suis Hamid le Français, celui à qui l'on donne les moyens de réussir, que l'on juge uniquement sur ses résultats. Je n'ai pas envie de redevenir Hamid le Beur de la cité qui doit faire tous les jours ses preuves et se réjouir du peu que l'on veut bien lui concéder'.

[82] 'déjà, j'ai quitté la France à cause de ça [ma sexualité] … j'ai eu des amis qui m'ont tourné le dos à la fac quand ils ont appris que j'étais gay; alors qu'ici, jamais; je ne ressens pas cette lourdeur'.

them wishing to expose themselves to systemic discrimination on anything other than a visiting basis. Robert was, and evidently remains, an 'alien', 'stranger' and 'outsider' in his *native* country. In a paradoxical inversion of the traditional model, in which the immigrant is the 'alien' in the eyes of the host, Robert leads an inconspicuous existence in his capacity as immigrant, taking on 'alien' selfhood when returning to the motherland. Migrating to London freed him from the stigmatization linked to his homosexuality and allowed him fully, yet indiscriminately, to embrace his true identity without fear of victimization (in his fifteen years in London, only once has he fallen victim to 'a comment to do with my sexuality' – 'une remarque par rapport à ma sexualité'). London provides a setting in which Robert, together with the significant number of other French homosexual migrants in the capital,[83] can 'fit in', not to a distinct gay community as such, but to the established, heterosexual community, which is a significant distinction as it emphasizes the sense of self-portrayed belonging. In the interview, Robert made a point of verbalizing the fact that most of his friends were heterosexual and that he had become good friends with the heterosexual families that lived in his gentrified East Dulwich street, 'even' being on Christmas-card terms with his *Catholic* neighbours. Although Robert could not be considered a gay activist, there is little doubt that belonging to a predominantly 'straight' street has contributed to his sense of well-being, unlike in France, where his difference continually ricochets back at him through the reactions of others, be they friends, family, colleagues or strangers.

An additional trigger for cross-Channel migration was the experience of sexism, also touched upon by a number of the interviewees, and dealt with in some detail by historian and journalist – and French Londoner in her own right – Agnès Poirier.[84] It cannot be denied that gender attitudes and behaviour differ on either side of the Channel. Although some British women might succumb to the heavy-handed but romantically-versed 'French touch', and their male counterparts may envy it,[85] so too has many a French woman tried to escape the tacit institutionalized sexism, or 'sexisme ordinaire' as it is dubbed by the Association des Femmes Journalistes;[86] the kind of deep-rooted sexism that is almost integral to inter-gender social codes in France, as Poirier openly affirms, but which can be experienced as retrograde and oppressive by women who have chosen to move to London. In practice, however, Frenchwomen are better paid than their English

[83] See <http://www.lepetitjournal.com> June 2012 [accessed June 2012].

[84] A. Poirier, *Le Modèle Anglais une illusion française* (Paris, 2007).

[85] Poirier, *Le Modèle Anglais*, p. 82.

[86] Quoted by J. Lambert, 'L'imaginaire du corps féminin freine la parité dans les médias', *Esprit*, 12 Oct. 2009.

counterparts and better represented in managerial, and now political, positions, as President Hollande's unprecedently paritarian government demonstrates. There seems, in France, to be a divorce between the equitable institutional reality concerning gender and the sexism perceived on the ground. In London, the opposite phenomenon could be said to exist; it is difficult to judge which form of discrimination is more offensive.

Related to sexism is the idea of what we are calling 'lookism', pinpointed by a number of the interviewees, and perhaps summarized most concisely by Chantal when she explained how, in France, she felt judged by the way she dressed. This represented a view common to several participants that the way people look physically affects how others categorize and prejudge them; this is true of biological factors including age, height and weight, but also of dress codes and deliberate bodily manipulations, such as piercing and tattoos. Many of the interviewees commented on the freedom they felt when dressing in London in comparison to the far more conservative and uniform (ironically, as they do not have an imposed uniform at school, rather a self-imposed, neutral 'jeans & T-shirt' one) dress codes of France, which seem to be, whether at the chic or the shabby end of the spectrum, overly regimented and conformist for the French in London. Our most telling story here concerned Miranda, who, legs adorned with an array of tattoos, and bodily parts pierced with decorative gems, appeared to make a self-conscious decision to rebel ostensibly against the French stereotypical ideal 'look', thus confirming Valentine's assertion that body modification is a lasting articulation of self-identity and those who practise it do so either 'to express individuality [or] as a group marker'.[87]

Our second example of lookism concerns forty-one-year-old singer-songwriter Laura's sartorial transformation, even liberation, and subsequent informed manipulation of national dress codes, deliberately playing to domestic stereotypes, and having gained greater sensitivity of gaze since living in London. She described how she dresses differently according to whether she is performing in the UK (London) or France: the 'girly', frilly French look appeals in the former; the low-key denim norm is a requisite in the latter. Laura expressed a rare awareness of the subtle codes that differentiate her audiences and their attitudes to her. She was not, however, prepared potentially to lose any face by donning the same 'frou-frou' attire in France, since the prospect of prejudice or ridicule on the part of the audience would inhibit such a brash break with convention. In France, therefore, she plays it safe, satisfies the opposite stereotype, and abides by the unspoken diktat of casual denim. It seems, nevertheless, that the new-found confidence

[87] G. Valentine, *Social Geographies: Space and Society* (Harlow, 2001), p. 37.

which she ascribed to living in London is becoming an intrinsic trait of her character, and one she is now tentatively taking back across the Channel, beginning with her blue-varnished nails. Laura now has a greater sense of indifference to the judgemental gaze of her Parisian audience, apparently taking pleasure in embracing her new, non-conservative 'look'. She perceives it to be a liberating experience that, to some extent, simultaneously also allows her to embody the so-called British eccentricity that Poirier, in an interview with the *New York Times*, discerningly summarized thus: '"Paris is the epitome of perfection and elegance," she said, "London of imperfection and eccentricity."'[88]

Opportunité*? Education, confidence and the new self*

> Sarah: '[At school in London], there's a lot more interaction, a lot of groupwork, it's not always the teacher explaining something. Pupils do a lot of teamwork and individual research, and everything's very lively and engaging'.
> Laura: 'In French schools, the discourse is far more "could do better" and so on. Whereas in English schools, it's always "well done, brilliant"; there's a lot more focus on oral work and on joining in; there's a lot more encouragement … In the French education system, we are all equal, so you're not allowed to say that some children find it easier than others; everyone has to do the same lesson, which means that the brightest kids are bored stiff and so are the weakest ones … That's what you get from the French system of equal opportunities and equality among individuals'.
> Catherine: 'You are more likely to make your way up quickly [in London]; not everything is based on which school you went to'.[89]

In London, where difference is purportedly met with assent, empathy or apathy, and where eccentricity, or simply otherness, is found by our respondents to be respected not denigrated, a positive cognitive self-representation is (re) born among French migrants, and the 'post-traumatic' repair process is set in motion, ultimately bringing with it a regained sense of self-respect. In Laura's

[88] Deen and Katz, 'French at home in London'.

[89] Sarah: '[A l'école à Londres], il y a beaucoup plus d'intéraction, beaucoup de groupes, c'est pas toujours le professeur qui explique quelque chose. Il y a beaucoup de travail entre élèves, de recherche personnelle, et puis ils rendent tout vivant'; Laura: 'Dans l'école française, le discours c'est beaucoup plus "peut mieux faire", etc. Alors qu'en l'école anglaise, c'est toujours "well done, brilliant"; beaucoup plus sur la prise de parole, sur la participation; beaucoup plus d'encouragement … Dans l'école française, on est tous égaux donc, on n'a pas le droit de dire qu'il y a des enfants qui arrivent mieux que d'autres; on fait le même cours pour tout le monde de sorte que ceux qui sont très forts se font chier et ceux qui sont très faibles aussi … C'est le résultat du système français de l'égalité des chances et de l'égalité de qui on est'; Catherine: 'On a plus de chance pour progresser vite [à Londres]; tout n'est pas basé sur l'école qu'on a faite'.

case, we saw that living in London liberated her sufficiently and instilled in her a sense of self-worth that gave her the opportunity to realize her suppressed ambition to become a singer-songwriter, rather than managing the performers she had formerly craved to emulate: 'I felt a lot freer to put myself forward as a performer here than in France … To begin with it was difficult considering myself as a performer, probably because of my education and upbringing'.[90]

A key word in Laura's account is 'éducation' – upbringing/education. She saw the difficulty she encountered when trying to marry her internalized self-identity (her inner performer) with her external corporate representation (her outward managerial image, considered a more 'natural' evolution from the Paris stock-exchange trader she had previously been), as a function of her upbringing and academic education. Indeed, France's systemic tendency to value academic qualifications and disparage artistic qualities – in the workplace and at school – was cited time and again by our respondents, as was the education system's infamous achievement of ridding gregarious young children of any confidence they had once had before entering the 'usine' ('factory', Focus Group 2). Beginning at nursery and primary school, the British system was described as being more 'ludique' (user-friendly and fun) and generally a more positive and nurturing environment in which to learn than the French education system, where 'there's a lot more aggression, from teachers and students alike'[91] (Marie). This was not an isolated opinion; mothers of young children with experience of both the French and English early-years' education systems made analogous observations. For instance, Laura, who has three children, each of whom is following a different educational pathway in London (one attends an independent English secondary school, another the French Wix primary school and the third an English state primary school, Honeywell, with a strong French influence), echoed both the antagonism and lack of authority alluded to by Marie: 'the teachers feel like they're constantly under attack, and the parents feel like no-one ever listens to them'.[92] She described the French teachers' detrimental over-compensation for their authority deficiency: 'they're always giving orders, whereas in English classes, the children are very calm, it's all very peaceful and the teachers never shout'.[93] She also

[90] 'en étant ici je me suis sentie beaucoup plus libre … de me présenter comme artiste qu'en France … C'était d'abord difficile pour moi, pour des raisons d'éducation sans doute, de me considérer comme une artiste'.

[91] 'il y a beaucoup plus d'agressivité, autant chez les professeurs que les élèves'.

[92] 'les profs ont l'impression qu'on les attaque tout le temps; les parents, eux, ont l'impression qu'on ne les écoute jamais'.

[93] 'ils sont toujours en train de donner des ordres, alors que dans les classes anglaises, les enfants sont très calmes, il n'y a pas du tout de bazar, mais les maîtresses ne crient jamais'.

noted the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the teaching staff at the French school: 'at the Wix school, there's a heaviness to the atmosphere, you can feel the depression, whereas at Honeywell, all the staff seem to be having a whale of a time, they're really happy'.[94] She therefore believed the British system to be confidence-building and engaging, inspiring pupils to learn rather than reprimanding them if they do not. In short, the emphasis is on success and achievement, whereas French teaching aims to obtain results through a reverse approach, driving students towards their goals through humiliation and failure, as she explained: 'They are much more positive [in London], and geared towards enjoyment; in France, it's a lot more about punishment and frustration'.[95] Similarly, in the UK, a greater emphasis is said to be placed on 'learning through doing … In France, there is too much thinking about doing, more than doing and then thinking about it', as Antoine wittily recounted in relation to higher education, but which Sarah claimed to begin at pre-primary level: 'I prefer the English education system for now. Children get to join in more than in French schools. I think the focus is on "engaging the children" rather than gorging them with information'.[96]

This overwhelming positivity among the interviewees regarding British pedagogics was more than a little surprising given that the French model is often lauded in British political and media discourses, as is the stereotypical French intellectual *homme de la rue* or 'man in the street', who has 'an interest in discussion for the sake of it' (Antoine) and a level of general knowledge that is generally far superior to his British counterparts, 'who couldn't locate China or Russia on the map at all' because 'they specialise very early, probably too early' (Moses).[97]

Likewise, spontaneously, unanimously and separately from each other, both focus groups of teenagers referred to education being either the main advantage of living in London, in the case of Focus Group 1 (comprising students attending the British state sixth-form college in Newham), or the main disadvantage, in the case of Focus Group 2, who were denoting the French Lycée itself (which they all attended), therefore coming to the same,

[94] 'à Wix, il y a cette espèce de poids, on sent le côté déprimé, alors qu'à Honeywell, vous y allez le matin, tous les profs ont l'air de s'éclater, ils sont hyper heureux'.

[95] 'Ils sont beaucoup plus positifs [à Londres], et dans le plaisir; en France on est beaucoup plus sur la punition et la frustration'.

[96] 'J'aime mieux pour l'instant [l'école anglaise que française]. Je trouve que c'est beaucoup plus participatif. Je pense qu'ils mettent l'accent sur "intéresser les enfants" plutôt que leur bourrer le crâne'.

[97] 'qui ne savaient pas du tout où situer la Chine ou la Russie sur une carte' because 'ils se spécialisent tôt, voire trop tôt'.

Figure 15.3. 2012 Président Bankside Bastille Day Festival allows individual expressions of French history.

albeit reversed, conclusion. Indeed, despite their diametrically opposed socio-economic backgrounds and the divergent school pathways taken by the members of each group, both cohorts were unexpectedly concordant in their opinions on education, and both once again reiterated the comments made by the interviewees. The themes of punishment and an overly academic, 'hands-off' approach were cited by Focus Group 1: 'There's less punishment here than in France', where 'it was always written, written, written work, and there was a lot less practical work';[98] while Focus Group 2 criticized the attitudes of staff at the French Lycée in London and the emphasis placed predominantly on marks and qualifications. Although the

[98] 'Ici, il y a moins de punition qu'en France' where 'c'était l'écrit, l'écrit, l'écrit, et il y avait moins de pratique'.

students taking part in Focus Group 2 conceded that the Lycée was pleasant on a social level, the pedagogical rigidity and prosaicness, together with the haughtiness of staff, outweighed that singular advantage, causing a number of students to turn to the English alternative for GCSEs, A levels or the International Baccalaureate, and university courses, of which both Laura and Chantal had first-hand experience. Two out of Chantal's three children had opted for an independent Kent boarding school over the Lycée for their final years at school, while the third is set to go to Harrow, the archetypal English public school, next year. Likewise, one participant in Focus Group 2 expressed his intention to attend an English school (City of London School), and his downright rejection of the French higher education route: 'I am not going back to France [for my higher education], no way'.[99] In each case, and at all levels of the education system, from early years to higher education, it is the value placed on creative, practical and sporting pursuits that attracts the children (and their parents).

It is telling, however, that all the English schools to which they refer are high-fee-paying schools at the acme of the country's educational pyramid; only a select few will be able to access such schools, and even fewer will be in a financial position to pay the fees (in the region of £30,000 per annum for boarding places). These examples of French children in London from affluent backgrounds preferring English teaching – in privately-funded schools – could be perceived as non-representative of the francophone migrant picture as a whole. However, somewhat unexpectedly, and perhaps as a testament to their own naivety, the students involved in Focus Group 1 in Newham were also in favour of the English education system, in this instance specifically the state-run system. They were not opposed to its two-tiered (independent versus state-run) structure, believing it to be fair and ultimately a matter of personal choice, apparently unaware of the likelihood of means taking precedence over preference, and bearing no grudge against the inequity of the situation. Indeed, rather than resentment, they all expressed a feeling of gratitude that the English education system would not only offer them greater opportunities once on the labour market, but equip them to deal with such opportunities when they presented themselves, thereby reiterating the assertions made above. One student from Focus Group 1 stated: 'there are more opportunities here than in France … you can get all kinds of different jobs with your qualifications … you'll have more opportunities than in France'.[100]

[99] 'Je ne vais pas retourner en France [pour les études supérieures], no way'.

[100] 'il y a plus d'opportunités ici qu'en France … les différentes places que tu peux avoir avec tes diplômes … tu auras plus d'opportunités qu'en France'.

This is an impression reinforced by fifty-three-year-old Catherine who now lives in Bordeaux and whose experience of the British workplace dates back to the 1980s: 'When I was at university in France, it was very, very academic; with a degree in English, the only way to get a job would be to take the competitive State teaching exams. Going to England opened other doors for me that I may never have had at all if I'd stayed in France'.[101] Similarly, Laura believes that the English system's emphasis on oral, as opposed to written skills, improves applicants' chances of filling the positions on offer: 'the English are a lot better at oral skills because of their education, so they are far more at ease when speaking publicly'.[102] She feels that the English system instils confidence and aptitude in presentational skills, yet acknowledges that a French education, as draconian as the students might find it, provides essential competence in analysis and maths, ironically two key attributes London employers find highly attractive. Indeed, almost every interviewee referred to their skillsets speaking more loudly than their qualifications in a recruitment context, unlike in France, where employers suffer from the chronic condition Roudaut amusingly terms 'diplomitis' ('diplômite', 2009), hence closing door after door on applicants deemed insufficiently or inappropriately qualified for the job in question. Less defensibly still, this elitist recruitment approach also rejects those who possess the qualifications, but do not correspond to the 'expected' profile, as seen above, or lack the all-important 'connections', either in the workplace or via the Grandes Ecoles to which access is often denied, as it is itself often reliant on socio-professional connectedness and having previously attended the 'right' *lycée*; and so the vicious circle continues.

Consequently, it is logical for those who seek a more vibrant education system that leads on to present opportunities in a more open and adaptable workplace, in which 'everything is negotiable', unlike in France where 'everything is more certain, but less flexible' (Antoine), to choose London as their city of destination, finally free from the crippling preconceptions that haunted them in the superficially *douce France*, and try their luck in the city which is 'the exact opposite of what [they're] used to: brutal, fierce, unforgiving and yet magnificent, quick-witted and spirited'.[103] Keen to experience a different life, in a multicultural metropolis where they too

[101] 'Quand j'ai fait mes études en France, c'était très, très académique; avec une licence d'anglais, on aurait pu uniquement présenter des concours d'enseignement pour trouver du travail. Le fait que je suis allée en Angleterre m'a ouvert d'autres portes que peut-être je n'aurais pas du tout eues si j'étais restée en France'.

[102] 'les Anglais sont beaucoup plus performants à l'oral, de par cette éducation, et donc ils prennent la parole très facilement'.

[103] Poirier, quoted in Deen and Katz, 'French at home in London'.

are different, but where they can live this difference either as a personal asset, like Laura who enjoys her exoticism and exploits it creatively for her singing career ('I stand out from the crowd … people notice I'm different straight away … It's very nice to feel exotic. Actually, it's precisely because I'm different here that I was able to launch my singing career');[104] or on a more altruistic level, like Paulette, who despite appreciating her ethnic invisibility in London, considered her contribution to the city to be precisely her difference, of being first and foremost a Frenchwoman in an English society, rather than a black woman in a white one, as she had been in France.

Conclusion

The demographic complexities of the London French discussed at the beginning of this chapter mean that it would be over-simplistic and inaccurate to label them all as the *16ème arrondissement* diplomatic expat stereotype, although there is evidently a phenomenon where a population grows around a French educational institution – which probably led to the initial stereotype. That is, South Kensington is home to the Lycée Charles de Gaulle (and the French diplomatic corps), hence the undeniable 'Little Paris' effect. But we have discovered that there is also a considerable number of French people now living in Clapham since the Wix school opened in 2006, and in Greenwich/Blackheath with its Saturday school, Grenadine; and the same process of demographic transformation is taking place, as we write, in Kentish Town, where France's latest state-run *collège* was opened in 2011. Younger French migrants are opting for edgier (and more affordable) areas of London that could not be geographically or socially further from South Kensington, and so the East End too is seeing a French influx. Just as London's French are not all living in the neighbourhoods thought to be traditionally French, neither do they all come from bourgeois quarters of Paris. The population involved in our studies came from all over France, north, south, east and west, urban and rural, right-wing and left-wing regions, wealthy and deprived areas, and are inhabiting equally diverse and unexpected districts of the capital, some of which are notably the same places inhabited by previous generations of French immigrants: current French 'hotspots', such as Brick Lane in the East End and Richmond in the west, are areas occupied by their Huguenot forefathers 400 years previously. There is even evidence to suggest that some of the London French population is now seeping beyond the borders of Greater London,

[104] 'je ne suis pas noyée dans la masse … je suis tout de suite différente … Se sentir exotique, c'est très agréable. En fait, c'est en étant différente ici que j'ai pu me lancer dans la chanson'.

moving to the leafier towns and cities of the south-east, such as Guildford, Oxford and Canterbury. In the same way that it is impossible to designate a single geographical area of origin and destination to the London French, it is equally difficult to classify them socio-economically, professionally and ethnically. Our study attempted to provide an overview of opinions among a broad sample of London's similarly broad French community, who often presented a surprisingly narrow and united set of perspectives. Perhaps it is precisely this unity in diversity that epitomizes London and appeals to our French neighbours whose domestic, dogmatic search for equality and liberty seems to be failing.

London as a place of refuge, liberty and opportunity draws the French; it seems always to have done so and continues to fulfil that role. As we have seen, many of the French interviewed were at once attracted to London's liberating call and escaping France's petrified prestige. The professional value of the English language, the multicultural melting pot that is London, its green spaces and garden-backed houses, its proximity to France and its youth/pop culture are what ultimately make it score more highly than other potential destinations, such as Berlin or New York; together with a pinch of *eccentricité à l'anglaise*. And what London offers in terms of openness – spaces and minds – is ultimately what prevents many of the French from returning to France, as typified by Laura's words: 'London: it's greenery – it's trees, flowers and parks; it's the joy English people get from being in their parks. It's not like that in France: in Parisian parks you're not allowed to walk on the grass. You go to the park to sit on a bench and look at the flowers; absolutely no ball-playing allowed!'[105]

Together with language and career opportunities, the pull for younger migrants is evidently London's 'cool Britannia' image, the vibrant music and recreational scene which has attracted them in such numbers that it has culminated in its own term: 'les années Londres'. This phrase, coined by the French media to refer to 'gap years' spent in the capital, is itself a testament to the commonplaceness of the phenomenon and is not devoid of its own 'cool' connotations. Possibly what people did not anticipate, and what that phrase overlooks, is that many of the young migrants who intended to come for a year or two – to learn the language, escape their parents and make the most of London's liberated, liberal and liberating atmosphere – have ended up making London their permanent home (significantly a word absent from the French language).

[105] 'Londres, c'est la verdure – les arbres et les fleurs, les parcs; le bonheur qu'ont les Anglais à vivre dans leurs parcs. En France, ce n'est pas pareil, dans les parcs à Paris on n'a pas le droit de marcher sur l'herbe. On sort s'asseoir sur un banc pour regarder les fleurs; surtout pas le droit de jouer au ballon!'

Figure 15.4. Visual evidence of the diversity of the London French demographic: this graffiti is at the base of a tower block on the soon-to-be-demolished, notorious Aylesbury Estate, south-east London.

Thus, we have seen how the identity of French Londoners has changed over the course of their time in the capital and how their self-perceptions have evolved. Simultaneously, the French presence in London has altered the identity of the capital itself, both historically and presently. Today (as in previous waves of cross-Channel migration), there is a visible French presence in London areas with high concentrations of French inhabitants: quality French bakers, butchers, restaurants, cafés, bookshops and fashion boutiques have become habitual features of the cityscape, thereby making a socio-cultural and economic, as well as a visual, contribution to the capital and transforming the local environment. There are also less transparent, but equally ubiquitous, visible markers of the French presence, from its vast corporations to its downtrodden council-estate dwellers. The EDF logo adorns vans and billboards all over Greater London and beyond (whether the majority of the local population is aware of what the acronym designates – Electricité de France – is another matter), while the JC Decaux advertising trademark decks thousands of bus-stops and phone-boxes across the capital

which, according to their website, '90 per cent of Londoners see'.[106] At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, the French 'copier coller' ('copy and paste') gargantuan graffiti tag decorates buildings and railway embankments in the Elephant and Castle area, exposing a very different London French face. What links both representations is their presence at street level and their codification: while 90 per cent of Londoners might well see them, far fewer would be able to read into them and extrapolate their hidden messages about the London French.

Just as today's French inhabit many of the physical spaces once occupied by their predecessors, so they curiously step into the professional footprints of their forefathers, often taking the same career paths as previous waves of French migrants in London over the centuries. The French journalists, chefs, entrepreneurs, artists and teachers who dwell in the city currently are – possibly unwittingly – following a tradition handed down by the Free French journalists, Victorian chefs, Huguenot tradesmen, Impressionist painters and the aristocracy's French tutors who settled in the city before them. The French language heard on the terrestrial waves of French Radio London echoes that on the airwaves of the BBC during the Second World War, as does the title of the community's most widely distributed London French magazine, *Ici Londres*.

As well as mapping out the contemporary French presence in London, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate that, in a somewhat ironic twist, it is the very French republican motto of 'Liberté' and 'Egalité', in addition to the more obvious 'Opportunité', that the French are seeking in London, frustrated by the insufficiency of all three in France. 'Fraternité', however, is not developed in this chapter, precisely because the French community in London does not perceive itself as a single, bonded entity. No sense of brotherhood among the London French was conveyed in the interviews or surveys; all acknowledged the existence of a French community, but associated it with the 'others', the South Ken elite, and did not feel that they were a part of that closed community; nor were they keen to access it. It seems that many 'community' events are attended (and even orchestrated, in the case of the Bankside Bastille Festival, for example) by English Francophiles rather than French francophones. The London French are a group of diverse individuals keen to assert their individuality, but equally keen for it to go unnoticed in the urban mass that is London's population.

London French veteran, eighty-year-old Suzanne, explained in iconographic terms why London attracts and will doubtless continue to

[106] See POSTAR, available via <http://www.jcdecaux.co.uk/products/streettalk> [accessed 25 July 2012].

Figure 15.5. The London Eye, originally sponsored by British Airways, and now sponsored by EDF.

attract a constant flow of French movers on a quest for freedom, equality and opportunity. Referring to a symbol she thought fitting of the capital, the London Eye, she mused: 'The London Eye: it can be seen from far below and seen from far away. And it changes, it evolves, but it turns on itself, whereas London never turns on itself, it evolves. The Big Wheel revolves, London evolves'.[107] Since Suzanne made that comparison, sponsorship for the London Eye has been taken over from British Airways by … EDF.

[107] 'La grande roue; ca tourne, ça peut être regardée de très bas, et regardée de très loin. Et puis ça change, ça évolue, mais ça tourne sur elle-même, tandis que Londres ne tourne pas sur elle-même, ça évolue. La grande roue elle tourne, Londres elle évolue'.

Appendix: interviewee and focus group profiles

INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

Interview 1: Head chef in City; thirty-seven-year-old white male; originally from Bordeaux, now in south-east London, SE27. Lived in London: nineteen years [alias Bruno].

Interview 2: Human resources, EC3; forty-two-year-old white female; Franco-Canadian; lives in Bromley. Lived in London: nineteen years [alias Jacqueline].

Interview 3: Head of investment risk framework, EC2; thirty-seven-year-old white female; originally from Lyon, now in Greenwich. Lived in London: ten years [alias Sarah].

Interview 4: Hotel food and beverage manager; thirty-four-year-old non-white male; originally from La Réunion, now in Docklands. Lived in London: eleven years [alias Arthur].

Interview 5: UK foreign correspondent; thirty-four-year-old white male; originally from Brittany, now in Crystal Palace and Oxford. Lived in London: eleven years [alias Charles].

Interview 6: Urban designer/architecture lecturer; fifty-two-year-old white male; originally from Marseilles, now in Archway. Lived in London: twenty-two years [alias Antoine].

Interview 7: Retired import-export administrator; sixty-three-year-old white female; now based in Aix-en-Provence but lived in Wandsworth forty years ago [alias Marie].

Interview 8: French graduate/PGCE student; thirty-two-year-old female; Franco-Algerian; originally from Paris, now in Beckenham. Lived in London: twelve years [alias Sadia].

Interview 9: Financial/IT consultant and amateur actor; thirty-three-year-old white male; originally from Carcassonne, now in Tower Hamlets. Lived in London: fourteen years [alias Brice].

Interview 10: Surgeon in inner-city NHS hospital; fifty-two-year-old white male; originally from eastern France, now in Richmond. Lived in London: five years [alias François].

Interview 11: Post-doctoral molecular neuroscientist; thirty-five-year-old white female; originally from Lyon, now in Bethnal Green. Lived in London: three years [alias Brigitte].

Interview 12: Commerce/export representative; twenty-four-year-old black male (Senegalese heritage); now lives in Paris suburbs where originally from, but lived in London (Dartford/Abbey Wood, south London; Leighton, east London; then Arsenal, north London) for two years [alias Moses].

Interview 13: English as a foreign language teacher; fifty-three-year-old white female; now based in Bordeaux, but lived in London (South Woodford, north-east London for three years, then Acton for two years) for five years in the 1980s [alias Catherine].

Interview 14: French as a foreign language lecturer; forty-year-old white homosexual male; originally from the north of France, now in East Dulwich. Lived in London: seventeen years [alias Robert].

Interview 15: Retired teacher from Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle and writer; eighty-year-old white female; originally from Dijon, now in Holland Park. Lived in London: forty-seven years (first school exchange visit in 1948) [alias Suzanne].

Interview 16: Singer-songwriter; forty-one-year-old white female; originally from Paris, now in Clapham. Lived in London: five years [alias Laura].

Interview 17: Housewife, formerly in marketing; forty-eight-year-old white female; originally from Paris, now in Kensington. Lived in London: twenty-two years [alias Chantal].

Interview 18: International logistics manager; thirty-five-year-old black female; originally from Normandy, now in Chiswick. Lived in London: eight years [alias Paulette].

Interview 19: Doctoral linguistics student; twenty-eight-year-old white female; originally from a small village in the Aube region (north-east France), now in Brick Lane. Lived in London: ten years [alias Miranda].

Interview 20: Lawyer; fifty-year-old white female; originally from Paris, now in Nunhead. Lived in London: twenty-six years [alias Séverine].

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Group 1: Seven students from Newham Sixth Form College (NewVIc), Prince Regent Lane, London E13; non-white (mainly of sub-Saharan African and Asian descent); male and female participants, all aged sixteen to eighteen.

FOCUS GROUP 2: Six students from Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle, South Kensington; predominantly white males, one female of North African origin, all aged sixteen to eighteen.