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Racial and ethnic minorities, immigration and the role of trade unions in combating discrimination and xenophobia

Third Report : Results of Sector B fieldwork and analysis
(French National Report)

Retailing (Draft)

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1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RETAILING AND DISTRIBUTION INDUSTRY

In 2003, the French trade sector was characterised by a positive economic development (+0,8% in volume) with a 1,100 billion euro turnover (excluding tax) [Insee Premières, 2004]. Wholesale and retail businesses represented 400 billion of the 2003 turnover, and mass merchandisers 44% of sales. The trade sector has known a larger increase of companies than any other sector of the French economy. However, these new enterprises do not necessarily employ many workers. In 2003, the trade sector employed more than three million wage earners and 350,000 self-employed persons. 244,000 persons were employed within the craft industry, of which 25% were self-employed persons. As a contrast to the rest of the economy, where employment decreased in 2003, employment increased with 1,2% in the trade sector.

The retailing and distribution industry has known radical changes since WW2. From the 1960s onwards, the link between production and consumption has been altered progressively. Certain observers speak of the emergence of a “market society” or indeed a “society of consumption” in Western Europe and the United States. Even though one does not agree with the use of these particular concepts, one cannot deny that the modes of marketing and consumption have been fundamentally altered by industrial and technological changes, choices in urban and country planning, the development of the urban population, changes in the modes of production and, more recently, the speeding up of economic globalisation. These factors have led to more complex forms of supplying and selling and to the development of large chain stores, and the retailing and distribution industry has become one of the leading economic sectors [Carluer-Lossouarn and Dauvers, 2004].

The organisation of the retailing and distribution industry is extremely complex. It is subdivided into three main sub-sectors: wholesale, retailing in the food sector, and retailing in such articles as clothes, furniture, or domestic electrical appliances. Various methods are used for selling, whether in stores, by mail or by Internet, which is a fast-expanding method. In this report, we deal more specifically with chain stores (hypermarkets) that are specialised in the food sector. Lately, these have merged into six groups (Auchan, Casino, Leclerc, Les Mousquetaires, Système U, Louis Delhaize and Carrefour) and five central buying offices.

There are very diverse definitions of mass merchandisers and hypermarkets, based on criteria that are as diverse as the store surface area, the kinds and amount of products that are sold, and the number of employees¹. Most of these criteria are included in the definition developed by the FCD (Fédération des entreprises du commerce et de la distribution)², an employer's organisation that groups all enterprises within the retailing and distribution industry. According to the FCD's definition, a “hypermarket” is a self-service store that offers 3000 to 5000 different items of food, and in which a store surface area of at least 2,500 m² is used for retail³. As 80% of hypermarkets are located in suburban areas, most of them offer a vast parking area for their customers⁴.

¹ E. Colla [2001] use the same definition but adds other criteria.

² CF. Annex 2

³ “Supermarkets” have a store surface area used for retail that spans between 400 and 2 499 m² and offers 3000 to 5000 different items of food, (Fédération des entreprises du commerce et de la distribution, 2003). Discount houses and independent warehouses are also submitted to such kinds of definitions.

⁴ The aim was to build “selling factories in an ocean of parking lots” [Carluer-Lossouarn et Dauvers, 2004].

Since the opening by Carrefour of France's first hypermarket⁵, on July 15th, 1963, in the Parisian suburb of Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, the development of superstores has continuously modified France's commercial landscape⁶. The "everything-under-one-roof" concept and the opening of superstores in suburbs have been met with a lot of controversy. The governments' satisfaction with hypermarkets' low prices⁷ has been met with great criticism from smaller, more traditional shopkeepers, who wish that the public authorities and the parliament take measures in order to limit the development of mass merchandisers. From the 1970s until the current bill⁸, several acts have been passed in order to regulate the retailing and distribution industry in France. The process started in 1973 with the passing of the "Royer Bill", popularly known as the "Padlock Bill", because of its measures that restricted the development of hypermarkets in France. As a consequence, the national market quickly became glutted, and the bill actually accelerated the implementation of certain French hypermarkets abroad.

The acts known as Raffarin and Galland were passed in 1996. They regulated hours of business as well as certain practises that were considered as being a disadvantage for smaller, more traditional shopkeepers, as well as for the food processing industry. The Galland Act from 1996 aimed specifically at restraining the implementation of hypermarkets, but indirectly provoked the enlargement of already existing super-stores. The power that the retailing and distribution industry has over producers also increased, as there are few central buying offices.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the turnover of hypermarkets was steadily increasing. However, since 2002, the development of hypermarkets has slowed down, and their part of the market has decreased. In spite of this development and of the low turnover of trade in 2003, the INSEE's analysis shows that the turnover of the food sector in the retailing and distribution industry went up to 151,1 billion euros in 2003 [FCD, 2003]. A ranking of France's forty most important mass merchandise enterprises showed that Carrefour is at the forefront in this sector⁹.

1.1. The Organisation of Mass Merchandisers in France

The enlargement of already existing superstores mentioned above brought a series of restructurings of the organisation of labour in order to increase productivity and profitability.

In the 1980s, certain mass merchandisers realised that if they wanted to counter the various bills that limited their expansion, they shouldn't limit their strategies of competition to a war on prices. Instead, they could compete by having a larger selection of products and brands. According to Sébastien Seguin, "hypermarkets (...) increased the proportion of other products than food from 36% of sales in the 1970s to 46% by the end of the 1990s" [Seguin, 2001]. After these new sources of income were developed, hypermarkets that had previously been specialised in food now became competitors to other mass merchandisers specialised in selling such products as furniture, electrical appliances, or computers. In 1999, they held 50,7% of the perfume and cosmetics market, 30,3% of the market for electrical appliances and 22% of clothing, whereas the large enterprises specialised in these fields only held 8,5%,

⁵ The word "hypermarket" seems to have been coined well after the invention of the concept, in 1967 [ibid].

⁶ By the end of 2001, there were 1 211 hypermarkets in France (7 millions of m²). Cf. Jacquiau, "Producteurs étranglés, consommateurs abusés : Racket dans la grande distribution 'à la française' " *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 2002.

⁷ The slogan of the distribution industry, imported from the United States said: " Stack it high and sell it low".

⁸ This reform (Jacob Bill of April 13th, 2005) should lower prices for consumers.

⁹ Cf. *L'Expansion*, December 2003. See also table n° 1.

27,9% and 22,1%, respectively.¹⁰

More recently, new competitors have arrived on the market with the development of a new type of supermarkets that specialise in bargains and in discount. In 1998, there were 2,291 discount houses in France, and in 2003, they were 3,205, whereas the number of hypermarkets has remained the same, and has even diminished a little [FCD, 2003]. Also, at the risk of becoming competitors to themselves, each large group has developed new discount houses. Carrefour, for instance, has opened a series of discount stores, Ed.

Recently, and very rapidly, France's large retailing stores have merged into bigger groups. Six of these are rated among the fifty most important industrial and service groups in France, and two of these are among the ten first. In France, these groups control more than 90% of the food trade¹¹. In 2003, they were responsible for a 202,340 million euros turnover. This figure represents 18,5% of the turnover of France's fifty most important groups. They employed 951,183 persons, which is equal to 18,8% of the employees of the groups.

Table 1 : France's 50 main industry and service groups¹²

RANK *	GROUP	Turnover excluding tax (In millions of euros)	Net results (In millions of euros)	Workforce
2	CARREFOUR	70 486	1 629	419 040
7	Les Mousquetaires**	38 400	...	112 000
11	Auchan Group	28 700	575	165 000
13	Centres Leclerc	27 200	...	84 000
17	Rallye (Finatis)	23 768	108	124 143
28	SYSTÈME U CENTRALE NATIONALE	13 786	...	47 000

* Based on consolidated data from private and public enterprises within the industry and the service sectors, except for banks and insurance businesses

** Data from 2002

Source : Enjeux-les Échos, *Le grand atlas des entreprises* 2005, Minefi, " L'État actionnaire ".

These figures do not however reveal the great differences in the modes of organisation of the different groups. Certain groups, such as Magasin U, are organised as co-ops. They represent shops of very different sizes, from small food shops to mass merchandisers, and each owner of a shop is not only a member but also an owner of a part of the group. Other groups, such as Leclerc or Intermarché are organised as a grouping of independent shop owners, and yet others are groupings of franchised outlets.

In the food sector, buying represents more than 80% of the global enterprise turnover, and it is logical to concentrate cost reduction strategies on logistics and buying [Colla, 2001] by creating central buying offices, on a national and international level. These central buying offices are not organized in the same way; there are variations due to their history and the status of their members

- *Commercial bulk-buying organisations* group independent entrepreneurs, who are the owners of one or several shops that carry the same name, such as Leclerc, Intermarché, or Système U
- *Voluntary chains* group a limited number of enterprises at a regional basis, that were originally wholesale dealers, but who later opened up to retailing, such as Spar or Sélex, who are also often present in other European countries
- *Consumer cooperatives* are groupings of cooperatives that were initially very divided, but that have organised in order to be able to face competition by reducing

¹⁰ In other trade sectors that deal with furniture and sports accessories, specialised mass merchandisers dominate the market.

¹¹ Source : Référence, Sécodip, quoted by LSA (groupe Usine Nouvelle), n°1746, November 22nd, 2001.

¹² INSEE : http://www.insee.fr/fr/ffc/chifcle_fiche.asp?ref_id=NATTEF9301&tab_id=117.

costs and by merging, such as it the case for Coop in Italy.

- *Subsidiaries* also group in order to reduce costs while preserving their independence. However, these alliances are often temporary.

The capacity of negotiation of a central buying office depends on the amount of goods that they buy. In order to reduce the costs of administration of stocks, they centralize goods, group deliveries, by using computer and just in time technology, and by making agreements with their suppliers.

There are great differences within each group. The number of shops and their surface vary. Some groups are implemented abroad; sometimes they use their own brand names, sometimes their business partner's. The variety of brand names and activities, whether it be clothing, food, or DIY, add to the complexity of the sector. 80% of all mass merchandisers and discount houses in France belong to the Carrefour group, as well as 58% of supermarkets (Shopi), minimarkets (8 à huit), and franchised outlets (Marché M plus)¹³. Shopi, 8 à huit and Marché M plus represent more than 2,600 retail outlets, of which only 22% are directly integrated into the Carrefour group. The others are independent franchised outlets, and the Carrefour group offers them to "be owners of their own shops, while benefiting from Carrefour's training, supervision, and logistics". These shops usually have few employees, from 2 to 20 persons. As a matter of fact, of the 4,900 enterprises that sell food products, about 3,200 have less than 50 employees. However, according to Sébastien Séguin [2001], they "almost all depend on central buying offices (and) can negotiate their supplies in the same way as a shop that is part of a larger national group can. The fact that they are franchisees insures them a great purchasing power and an efficient network."

The Carrefour group was created after the merger of Continent and Carrefour in 1999, and it is the World's second retailing and distribution group (after American group Wall-Mart) in Europe, in Latin America, and Asia. It is responsible for 34,84% of the turnover and 44,05% of the employees of the six groups in table 1. At an international level, Carrefour towers above its national competitors, such as the Auchan group, a group that is also established abroad (more than 160 hypermarket, of which forty are under the Auchan name). In France, however, Carrefour, with its 216 hypermarkets, is only the second group after Leclerc (408 hypermarkets).

The specialized press has been warning against what it sees as a "running out of steam" of hypermarkets in France, as compared to superettes and local stores. An article in financial magazine *La Tribune*, entitled "Hypermarkets, questioning a concept"¹⁴, emphasizes that "in spite of being responsible for 60% of sales in the World's second retailing and distribution group, and in spite of their diversification in the services they offer (insurances, travels,) that allows them to develop customer loyalty, hypermarkets face more and more difficulties. In another article (February 3rd, 2005), the same magazine states that after having been leading in the French retailing and distribution industry, Carrefour's hypermarkets "have been struggling since 2001". Indeed, since their merger with Promodès in 1999, Carrefour and Continent were responsible for 17,8% of mass merchandisers' turnover. By the end of 2003, they were only responsible for 14,9% of the turnover, and in 2004, 13,4%.

¹³ These figures, from April 2005, come from Carrefour's web-site (www.carrefour.com).

¹⁴ *La Tribune* of September 27th, 2001

1.2. Legislation and Labour Regulations

In France, collective labour agreements and industry-wide agreements, that are the results of negotiations between employers' associations and trade unions are always more favourable for employees than labour regulations. Collective labour agreements¹⁵ have an intermediate legal status between private and public legislation. They are passed between a trade union or a union confederation and an employer or an employers' association and concerns either an enterprise, an industrial branch at a regional or national level, and can even be passed at an inter-professional level. Historically, collective labour agreements have been very important for the advancement of labour regulations [Pillon and Vatin, 2003]. However, the negotiation processes of collective labour agreements are always complex, and often last several years.

French law allows a rule governing exception under ordinary law for collective labour agreements. All trade unions and employers' associations can join the initial signatories by notification to the public authorities (Employment Department). The public authorities can apply a collective labour agreement to any employer, even an employer who didn't sign the convention, in order to apply the same working conditions to any employees in a specific branch and a specific region. These factors show why negotiations are difficult and often unsuccessful, such as one can observe it in the negotiations on basic welfare benefits that are taking place in the retailing and distribution industry.

In the case of this study, it is important to distinguish between collective labour agreements within a specific group (Carrefour Group)¹⁶ and sectoral collective agreements.

A national collective agreement on the initial qualification and periodic training of employees in food wholesale and retailing was passed on July 12, 2001¹⁷, followed by a decree of July 26th, 2002. Several amendments followed in order to regulate working hours and part-time work (n° 2 of April 10th, 2003), hygiene, health, and security on the work-place (n°3 of April 10th, 2003), working contracts for youths (agreement of July 7th, 2003), classification of functions (n°7 of March 25th, 2004), valorisation of working experience, the management of "second careers", and retirement from the age of sixty (n° 8 of June 9th, 2004), the implementation of the reform of vocational training (agreement of October 4th, 2004) and salaries (n°1 of October 4th, 2004).

However, many employees in the retailing and distribution industry are not concerned by this collective agreement. Seven categories of employees are excluded from the agreement, notably wage-earners who are employed in enterprises with less than 11 employees, and wage-earners who work in enterprises that have signed other collective agreements, such as wholesale and retail in fruit and vegetables, consumer cooperatives, and wage-earners who

¹⁵ To be applicable, a collective labour agreement must have been approved by at least one trade union considered as representative, nationally, or in the sector, the branch, or the company. At the national level, five organizations, CGT, CFDT, FO, CFTC for workers, and CGC for management, are recognized as representative. Other organizations, such as Solidaires (Sud) or UNSA may be granted some representativity, with the "advantages" this status entails, depending on the branch, sector or company where their influence has been evidenced, notably in professional elections. As a reminder, among these "advantages", only the representative organizations are allowed to present candidates for the first round of professional or *prud'hommes* elections (staff representatives or workers' councils) or to appoint union representatives in companies. On the employers' side, an agreement may be signed by the representative unions, MEDEF or UIMM for instance, but also by any other group — a non-profit organization for example — or even with one or several employers.

¹⁶ Projet d'accord de déblocage exceptionnel (September 2004) ; Accord de participation (June 2002) ; Règlement du Plan d'Épargne du groupe (December 2002) ; Règlement du plan partenarial d'épargne salariale volontaire (December 2002) ; Accord plan d'épargne retraite (January 2002).

¹⁷ *Journal officiel de la République française* August 6th, 2002. Brochure n° 3305, Commerce de détail et de gros à prédominance alimentaire : (cf.<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/VisuSommaireCoco.jsp?lenum=3305>).

are employed by managers who are self-employed.

From a trade union point of view, it is a paradox that certain collective agreements have negative effects on certain categories of employees such as those who work on a part-time basis or who are employed by “satellite” enterprises that have been bought up by more powerful groups. Thus, according to a CFDT union representative from Carrefour, there are “*more than 60 collective agreements within the group, that we have inherited from the groups various buying ups and mergers*”. This situation has direct consequences on working conditions, wages, and the possibilities of promotions¹⁸.

Be that as it may, none of the federations of trade unions make claims that concern migrant wage earners or descendants of migrants, and no work regulations in hypermarkets concern issues specifically related to them, either.

1.3. Employment in the Food Retailing and Distribution Industry

1.3.1. A Fast-Expanding Sector

34 % of employees in the food retailing and distribution industry work in large surface stores such as hypermarkets, supermarkets, and superettes. Even though hypermarkets only represent 11,5 % of retail outlets (as compared to supermarkets that represent 56%), almost half of the wage earners that work in large surface food stores are employed in hypermarkets (49,5%). Also, these represent a total 4% of France’s wage-earners (FDC, 2003)

According to the Observatory of Employment, Qualifications, and Training 2003 report on the service sector, hypermarkets have the following characteristics: 1) a constant increase in the work-force; 2) 94% of the employees work in the shops; 3) young employees (more than 60% of them are less than 35 years old), which also includes managers (departmental managers); 4) a majority of women (more than 60% of women).

The diversification in the services and goods offered by hypermarkets led to a period of ten years of growth in employment (+70%) in the food retailing and distribution industry. Today, however, this development is turning, in a context of general economic regression in France. In 2003, employment had a 18,5% growth in the food retailing and distribution industry. However, according to the FDC, the work force in hypermarkets grew with a mere 248 persons per store, which is 1,5%, as compared to more than 20% between 1998 and 2003. Thus, it is the weakest progression in the last five years.

In France, it is not permitted to collect any data other than nationality, age, gender, or profession. Thus, as opposed to certain other countries, it is not possible to give data on the ancestry, national origin, or religion of employees in a specific branch, sector, or enterprise.

¹⁸Nathalie Funès, « Salaires en solde chez Carrefour », *Le Nouvel Observateur*, June 23-29, 2005, p. 72-73

1.3.2. The Structure of Employment

• *Un-skilled Jobs*

The various structure of the workforce changes very little from year to year.

As compared to the rest of the French economy in 2003, the retailing and distribution industry employs few managers (47, 000 persons, or 7% of the work-force), as compared to workers (581,000 persons, or 84% of the work-force). Supervisors represent the remaining 9% of the work force.

The high proportion of workers in hypermarkets is also visible in the distribution of tasks: 24% *check-out assistants*, 36% *store clerks*, that is, 50% of the work-force, and 12% *sales assistants*, 7% *supervisors*, and 15% *managers*. This last percentage should diminish soon, as Carrefour, for instance, has decided that “as they are rapidly losing market shares and their turnover is decreasing, 350 employees out of the 2,000 who work at the group’s head office, will be asked to work at the groups hypermarkets as *sector managers*”¹⁹, within the next couple of months. This structure of employment limits the employees’ career opportunities.

25,000 to 35,000 posts are created each year. However, the great majority of the persons who are recruited are checkout assistants, stores clerks, salespeople, or packers who fill up shelves in self-service stores [Condis, 2004].

As T. Pillon and F. Vatin [2003] show in their analysis, the “concept” of “mass marketing” has led to the development of self-service stores, which has in turn led to reducing the number of supervisors and foremen. This development may be turning today. Carrefour, for instance, has decided to employ more supervisors, as they tend to develop specialised departments in their hypermarkets so as to compete with discount houses. In the hypermarket in Marseilles where we did our study, for instance, the human resource manager had been transferred, and a supervisor had been given the responsibilities of recruitment and promotions.

In the retailing and distribution industry, apart from selling and buying, a series of jobs are common to other economic sectors and concern human resource management, logistics, managing stocks, computer networks that handle inventories, prices, regular customer’s discount cards, payments by credit cards or cheques, Today, three jobs are however central to the retailing and distribution industry: supervisor, buyer, and store manager.

The supervisors put in orders, manage supplies, prevent theft, and manage a team of ten employees, which implies doing annual interviews, training new employees, and managing working hours. A supervisor can be promoted to becoming a departmental manager, a financial manager, or a human resource manager. As a consequence of the development of central buying offices, the managers of each store do not negotiate prices anymore, as buyers at a national level fix these.

The buyers move from store to store to check their selections and are in contact with suppliers in France and abroad. They explore new products; negotiate quantities, prices, profits, and discounts. According to the Association for the Employment of Executives (Apec), buyers often have two-, three-, four- years studies behind them, and have often been to business

¹⁹ Muriel Gremillet and Frédéric Pons, « Carrefour remet des têtes sur ses condoles », *Libération*, April 21st, 2005, Economy pages.

school.

The store manager in a group like Carrefour is usually very experienced in the field of trade and distribution, and is either a business school alumni with at least seven years of professional experience, or a person who has been an employee of the group for many years and has been promoted. It is very rare that a person stays in the same store if he is promoted. The obligation to geographical mobility is part of the contract that most executives sign.

Finally, security is an important and difficult task, as employees in hypermarkets are often faced with stealing, physical violence and verbal abuse. Security guards that work within or at the entrance of hypermarkets do not all have the same status. A number of them are recruited directly by hypermarkets (Cora, Carrefour, Leclerc...) tasks such as video surveillance. Others are employed by specialised enterprises that the hypermarkets hire to insure that there are surveillance staffs around the store and near the checkout counters. Finally, they sometimes work for the real estate businesses or the shopping complex that the store is located in.

• *A Majority of Women*

As we already pointed out earlier, more than 60% of the persons employed in the distribution sector are women. Table n°2 clearly shows to what extent the distribution by qualifications is unbalanced between genders. The higher a person is ranked in a store's hierarchy, the less chance there is that that person is a woman. Generally, in the retail and distribution industry, practically no women are store managers. At Carrefour, not a single woman is a store manager.

Table n° 2: Distribution by gender and qualifications

	Men	Women	Total
Workers	34% 91,000	66% 178,000	100% 269,700
Supervisors	55% 9,200	45% 7,600	100% 16,800
Managers	75% 20,000	25% 6,700	100% 26,700
Total	38% 120,000	62% 193,000	100% 313,200

Source: FCD, *Étude de branche de la grande distribution alimentaire*, 2003, by the Institut d'Informations et de Conjonctures Professionnelles.

Half of the women work at a part-time basis (51%), as opposed to a 36% average for both men and women. 86% of the women and 88% of the men have a "normal" contract (an open-ended contract). In an interview, a member of trade union CGT emphasized that in the distribution sector, the lack of job security, notably for employees working at a part-time basis is...

...deliberately favoured so that you can exploit them when you need them [...] The distribution industry take advantage of these people who have no choice but to work on Sundays and at night and on holidays.

A representative of trade union FO however points out that employees, and specifically check-out assistants, usually manage to negotiate an organisation of working hours that is adapted to their family life, especially when "they reach a certain age", even though they still "work six days a week until 10 p.m.", in extremely difficult and hard work conditions.

The FO representative also points out that a selection on the basis of ethnicity and gender takes place that leads to the exploitation of immigrant employees:

There is an enormous amount of unsaid exploitation, that consists in taking advantage of the fact that you can underpay them, that you can avoid telling them what their

rights are (...) I have been told that a selection was taking place in order to hire women, and preferably foreign women that do not understand French very well (...) It was a common practise, and it was quite well organised, but no, we couldn't prove it. It is impossible to prove, as it is written nowhere.

• ***Young Employees and a Rapid Turnover Rate***

The employees in the food retailing and distribution industry are a relatively young population, whether they are men or women. The average age is 33, 5 years old, and 63% of the work force is aged under 35. +The proportion of employees that are less than 25 years old (23%) is much superior to the proportion of employees who are aged more than 50 (7%). According to FCD data, employees in this sector stay for an average 7 years. The unemployment rate, especially as concerns young people, makes it easy for employers to be selective when they hire a person. Recent development shows that the level of education of newly hired employees in the sector is increasing. It has become much more difficult for persons with a lower level of education to find a job in this sector, as they find themselves competing with persons who have been to university for two years or who are business school alumni.

The annual proportion of persons who leave their jobs either because they have been fired or because they have chosen to leave is quite high: An average 10% of the employees leave a year. However, the proportion is much lower for managers (4%) [APEC].

• ***Status of Employees, Types of Contracts***

In spite of the fact that open-ended contracts are very common (550,000 employees, or 87% of the work-force), many employees are offered only fixed-term contracts. Temporary work and part-time jobs are extremely common, as they are in the hotel and catering sector. According to the FCD's 2003 report, the ratio between part-time jobs (228,000) and full-time jobs is stable, of the order of one third to two thirds (with a 2% progression between 2002 and 2003).

Students are often employed to work late, and at times where there are many customers (evenings, week-ends, during sales or holidays), and they are excluded from agreements that concern the improvement of contracts (cf. below).

The question of employees who are in part-time jobs, even though they wish to work full-time is often put forward in worker's demands. The trade unions often ask for wage increases for part-time workers. During the conflicts that took place recently, in April 2005, trade union CFDT-Carrefour asked that part-time work becomes a minimum 29 hours a week instead of 16 (except for students).

• ***Recruitment Problems***

Managers and supervisors are mainly recruited at a regional or national level, while workers are recruited locally.

However, the retailing and distribution industry have problems with recruitment. It is more and more difficult to find experienced butchers and fishmongers. That also applies to salespeople who are specialised in computers and multimedia. According to a report published in 2003 by the Observatory of Labour, Qualification, and Training Needs [2003],

many hypermarkets chose to work with subcontractors who centralize the demand and deals with fresh products, such as the carving of meat.

However, it is even more difficult to recruit managerial staff. However, 20% of qualified workers have been promoted to supervisors. Also, in 2003, more than 80,000 young people were recruited, notably by offering them initial training (59,000 trainees who are still at school or university, 13,900 block-release training contracts, 7,744 “youth contracts”). Also, the Carrefour Group has created a training centre that offers short-term employment contracts for 16-26 year olds with on-the-job training.

Generally, enterprises seek for favour internal promotions: in 2003, 24, 400 workers were promoted, which is the highest figure in six years. However, it should be said that 71% of these promotions concerned un-qualified workers who were promoted to qualified workers.

1.3.3. Wages, Working Conditions, Vocational Training

• Wages

A low level of qualifications within the work-force go hand in hand with low wages, from the lowest annual wage of 13,000 euros to 16, 300 for supervisors. According to UNI-commerce, the wages in the French retailing and distribution industry are 15% lower than wages in manufacture are. S. Condis [op. cit., 2004] stresses that there are great differences between shops. For instance, a departmental manager can earn between 17,000 and 30,000 euros gross per year, depending on the kind of shop he works in (superette or hypermarket, for example), whether he is an executive or not, depending on the number of years he has worked in the store, his qualifications (DTU: two year qualification taken at a technical college after the baccalauréat, BTS: vocation training certificate taken after the age of 18, in management or negotiation and customer relationship management. In the words of a CFDT union representative from Carrefour:

The problem is that there are more than sixty collective agreements within the group, that we have inherited from the group’s various buying ups and mergers, and that we have just as many different wages (...) To sum it up, it’s better to work in a Carrefour hypermarket than it is to work in a Champion supermarket, or, even worse, in an Ed discount house.²⁰

Buyers are paid about 55,000 euros per year.

Table n° 3: Annual wages in the retailing and distribution industry (in €).

Post	Annual wage
Business employee	13.700 – 16.900
Check-out assistant	13.700 – 15.100
Food salesman	13.700 – 15.400
Reception clerk	13.700 – 16.800
Skilled worker	14.000 – 16.800
Departmental manager	16.300 – 22.400

Source: FCD, 2003

The demand for higher wages is a central trade union demand, as “these groups never made such big profits”²¹. They stress the fact that the minimum wage offered by the FDC

²⁰ Quoted by Nathalie Funès, op. cit

²¹ *Libération*, May 3rd, 2005.

(Federation of Trade and Distribution Enterprises) is only one or two euros higher than the minimum growth wage in France, SMIC²².

During the strikes in April 2005, trade union CGT thus stated, “*the only threat today is low wages*”. Also, trade union CFDT reminded Carrefour’s shareholders that “*no workers’ demands, no trade*” (general meeting of shareholders, April 20th, 2005), and demanded “*the enterprise share its profits with its wage-earners, notably in their wage slips.*” The slogan of trade union FO-Carrefour is “*Yes to a real salary*” is one of the workers’ main demands in 2005.

• **Working Conditions**

Working conditions in the retailing and distribution industry are hard, generally speaking. The working hours are very inconvenient, and often adjusted for seasonal variations. This is particularly true for employees who have little qualification, especially packers, who come to work very early in the morning, before the opening of the store, to fill up the shelves, as well as the check-out assistants, who have flexible working hours.

The system implementing flexible working hours (*modulation des horaires*, articles L 212-218 of the French labour regulations) consists in the negotiation of a smoothed annual working time, so as to adapt the employees’ working rhythm to that of their activity and avoid having to resort to overtime in peak periods and short-time working when activity is at a low point. Pursuant to the law dated January 19, 2000, each full-time employee is supposed to work 1,600 yearly hours (with a maximum of 1,607 hrs), with an average of 35 weekly hours. Making working hours flexible is a play on the number of days over which to distribute those 35 hours. In 2003, 20% of all food retail employees (46,000 people) worked flexible hours.

Average effective hours for part-time employees in food retail has remained stable at 26.5 weekly hours, and has been increasing in hypermarkets. The working hours specified in work contracts may not include more than one interruption per day. In food retail, the length of this interruption is limited to two and a half hours. In 2003, for part-time workers, the maximum length of the interruption tended to decrease in hyper- and supermarkets, but remained stable at maxi-discounters. That same year, in French hypermarkets, the share of employees that were working both part-time and flexible time was 16%. The unions are not making many demands on this issue anymore.

• **Vocational Training**

The evolution of skills within food retail has increased the need for training programs that companies must provide their employees. By French law, they are required to invest a yearly 1.6% of their wage bill in training. In June 2004, the trade unions of the food commerce sector signed an agreement in two parts. On the one hand, a “passport” will be created, recording the training attended and passed by the employee — said “passport” should be considered valid if the employee changes companies. On the other hand, the agreement upholds the individual right to training and defines priority audiences: part-time or older workers, as well as women, more specifically those with long parental leaves in their career

²² Salaire minimum interprofessionnel de croissance - statutory national minimum wage, indexed on inflation, 7,19 €an hour in 2003 and 7,61 €an hour in 2004.

path.

The training issue is directly linked to that of promotions. Training programs are often qualifying, but they do not imply a right to promotion. Moreover, there are few of them and they often take place far from the workplace.

Geographic mobility is generally the only way to reach certain managerial positions. It often constitutes an additional hurdle to promotion for women with families²³. As we will see later, it also seems to pose more difficulties for people who are likely to face an environment they deem potentially hostile.

1.4. Immigrants and their Descendants in the Retailing and Distribution Industry

“The less social benefits, the more immigrants in an enterprise”

This conclusion, drawn by an FO official is widely shared by his counterparts in other trade unions. In spite of the fact that union officials have given us examples of many diverse situations, according to the year, the kinds of stores or groups, they all seem to agree that the smaller a store is or the closer it is to being a discount house, the more it is likely to employ immigrants who have recently arrived, who do not know their rights, nor the possibilities of submission for a settlement:

A CGT official: In discount houses they employ a lot of foreigners. Because they are often illiterate, they have no experience, almost none. And discount stores are for poor people, which applies both to clients and to employees. It's pathetic how management takes advantage of them. The employees often work overtime without seeing any difference in their pay-check by the end of the day.

An FO official: If you take Carrefour, they employ far less migrants than Leclerc or Intermarché or Franprix or Leader Price or ED. The more immigrants you've got, the less benefits they have (...) Those that you find today do not have a lot of money, they do not have a level of education (...) Generally, they do not have a lot of money, and they are always satisfied with what they earn, as compared to their home countries

Several union officials believe that the employers take advantage of the general deterioration in working conditions and wages in the sector:

An FO union official: Then a new period started where the distribution industry started paying less and less, and when we lost a lot of benefits, and then (...). Afterwards, they couldn't really find any European workers: they may have hired an Italian, here, a Spaniard there, but what they mainly found was people from the African continent. And Asian people, because at the time, they were known for being good workers and especially for shutting their mouths. (...) And then, year by year, the situation became worse: one could only find students who were there on a temporary basis, or persons with little qualifications, or immigrants...

Q. According to you, when did this change take place?

I would say that it took place five years ago. It may have started before, but five years ago, it became really obvious (...) and then, it was no longer a choice

They all insist on the fact that there were regional disparities / differences, even within a same group. A CGT official thus describes the diversity in recruitment strategies

For instance, at the S. store, that is located near Orléans, I believe that in a work force of 400 people, no more than 10 employees are of immigrant background. But if you go to D. in the suburb of Paris, it is the employees of French origins who are no more than ten (...) It all depends of the region: around Paris, that's where you find the most employees of foreign origin... In the Marseilles region, all my employees, at G, are of Maghrebi origin, but if you take M., nobody is of Maghrebi origin. If you're interested, I've got the names of all our members. I never thought about trying to find out of what origins they are.

²³ The fact that geographic mobility is compulsory when one wants to get promoted is an obstacle to promotion for women with families, whatever the industry (private or public) and their training level.

This interviewee believes that for the last couple of years, Carrefour has been recruiting employees with the characteristics of their customers in mind, as the group has wanted workers that represented the neighbourhoods that their stores are located in:

Michel Bon, the former manager of Carrefour, said that he recruited salespeople according to the clients. At the time this statement was quite a scandal (...) but to me, Michel Bon's ideas are still used by the group that recruits workers according to the clients' characteristics.

Several interviewees account for systematic discrimination in the recruitment process:

A CGT official: It is true, and I know this from experience, that as soon as a name doesn't sound very French, it is easy to throw the application into the bin. I know that this happens both frequently...on a regular basis. There are a lot of examples, it happens everywhere. In the store where I worked, it was forbidden for Blacks and Arabs. I used to call it a Barbie store. It was located in a neighbourhood where there were foreigners who had been living there for generations, who are French like we are, but the label remains.

An FO official: The employers, they were really something... they didn't want them, that's for sure (...) The employers looked upon the migrants as something that they didn't want. To them, there were two kinds of immigration: the immigrant like me, let's say European, and then Africans, who were the last ones to have arrived, because it's true that the Asians came a bit later. We were the second ones, and they were the last ones, I don't want to offend them. But I knew, at the time – 'cause I was an employee at the time, certain managers who refused to hire coloured people (...). And this was in a major French store, it has never been said before, but I (...), when I was checkout supervisor, it was strongly recommended "do you realize what the customers will say, we are in the 16th arrondissement in Paris"! Later, I worked in the 19th, and in the 19th, there were many immigrant, in Paris, I do not think that anyone was chocked by it... but at the time, when they hired somebody who wasn't French, it would be someone whose face didn't show, somebody like me, I would have been hired instead of someone else with the same qualifications...

Some employees are discriminated against when they ask for a promotion:

An FO official: Notably when promotions are concerned: They don't want to trust me with new responsibilities, because they assume..." Recently, somebody told me: "I have all the qualifications needed to become a store manager", I checked, and what he had told me seemed to be true. It seemed perfectly right that he should be promoted, but they told him no, no. When he tries to ask why, they simply do not answer, and he says, "It is because they do not trust me". As management has no obligation to say why... They can just say no, they don't have any legal obligations to tell him why.

A CGT official gives another example of discrimination:

Another example is a group of discount houses, where they had made a competition between the different stores belonging to the group. The store in D. had the best results; so all the employees got a special bonus. But because the supervisor was of North African origin the store was downgraded to the 4th placing Racism is very very difficult to prove.

As such statistics would be illegal in France, no information exists where the origin of wage earners and the kinds of jobs they have are compared. However, it is very clear that in hypermarkets, they mainly occupy unqualified jobs. Frequently, interviewees told us that a "hidden" ethnic agenda exists. "Non-European" minorities, especially men, tend to be employed in jobs where they handle the stocks, have very early working hours, and have no contact with customers. As regards minority women, they tend to be offered part-time precarious contracts check-out assistants.

The recruitment of security guards seems to be based more openly on ethnic, and even "racial" criteria. The fact that there are more "Blacks" and "Arabs" who work in security is explained as being "naturally" linked to their physical strength. Thus, a CGT official states:

If you work in security, you just have to be Arab, it's an old stereotype, and even the employers share this idea, that unless you're a freak of nature, like I've seen a few really sturdy white guys. To them, a security guard is black or Arab, he is two meters tall and two meters broad and completely brainless (...) it's a perfect contrast: this is one of the places where only foreigners are hired. Except for museums, because of the visitors... it's completely discriminatory

According to one of the interviewees from FO's federation for commerce, ethnic recruitment are practised by both far right enterprises and enterprises that have been created by migrants. Both also practise gross exploitation of their work force:

Basically, there are two types of security enterprises: the Front National kind or the migrant kind, that have been created by migrants, who have understood that they could make a lot of money like that. To me, they are bandits. They totally exploit migrants and they steal. Sometimes, they have a lot of undeclared income; it's difficult for factory inspectors to know what's going on. I don't trust them one bit.

Another reason behind the ethnicisation of security staff recruitment is justified by the notion that it is supposedly easier for security guards to prevent theft, when they are of the same origin as potential thieves.

1.5. The Retailing and Distribution Industry and Corporate Culture

As opposed to the public transportations sector, the retailing and distribution industry is not characterised by a pronounced professional pride. This is probably due to the organisation of work: a lot of persons are employed in part-time jobs, the work-force changes very often, and the employees have very diverse training that can lead to strong divisions between staff and supervisors.

However, employees at any hierarchical level strongly identify to the group that their enterprise belongs to, and are generally very proud to belong to an international leader, such as Carrefour. This sense of group belonging is forged throughout an employees' career, at recruitment and, more specifically, during vocational training. This strong identification to Carrefour is linked to the fact that the group has been considered as "the best of the bad" employers in the sector, with an advance in the matter of managing their work force and wages.

The creation of this sense of belonging is sometimes denounced as a "employers' propaganda", aimed at deterring employees from defending their rights:

They have bombarded us with corporate culture, with things like: "it is like a cathedral, everyone of us bring a contribution, a building block", etc. You see what I mean... fine words like that (...) according to this pseudo corporate culture, we were there to contribute...

...says a former employee of Carrefour. However, this strong sense of belonging to a group is never questioned by trade unions, which even reinforce it, as we saw it at several occasions²⁴.

* *
*

The French retailing and distribution industry, that has been considered as a driving force of economic growth, at a global level, has been plagued by numerous problems. The mergers and the development of large chain stores didn't give the expected results (both the turnover and benefits dropped). As a consequence, several restructurings of management were initiated. It seems as though the sector has reached the end of a cycle. The hypermarket as a concept is less appealing to consumers, who seem to favour more basic products and smaller

²⁴ For instance, the web-sites of trade unions CFDT, CGT et FO-Carrefour contain more information on enterprise than they do on their actions, such as the logos of the various chains belonging to the Carrefour group, their workforce and number of stores, how many of the group's workers are in Europe (68% of the group's workforce), the percentage of the workforce in each European country, as well as photos of several stores located in Europe...

neighbourhood stores that are closer to their homes. This is also true of costumers who are comfortably off. The discount houses, which anticipated this development, suffer less from the consequences of these transformations. Employment has had to adjust to these transformations. An executive in the distribution industry acknowledges the fact that the industry is facing difficult times: “the diminution in purchasing power creates great frustration, we are entering a zone of turbulence”²⁵.

According to sociologist Margaret Maruani, “ the (distribution) sector is very symbolic of the degradation of working conditions, as it has been a “laboratory for new forms of insecure jobs (...) In the beginning of the century, workers had to work at a furious pace. Today one can speak of the furious pace that cashiers have to work at, with the same social control and lack of respect of working hours that workers in the beginning of the century suffered from. Also, they have to live with a very negative social image. Small girls are still told today that if they do not do their homework, they will end up as cashiers”²⁶.

As a consequence of the reduction of their benefits, the Carrefour group has had to cut back in their employees’ benefits. For instance, the employees did not get a sharing of the group’s profit in 2004: “*Up until ten years ago, Carrefour gave a lot of social benefits to its employees, and these were quite well paid. However, this is not the case anymore, especially when it comes to wages! At a certain point they even had to bring salaries up into line with standard rates!*” according to an executive. The social climate was affected, especially when the chairman and managing director left in the beginning of 2005 and was given a 9,8 million euro allowance and a supplementary pension that can go up to 29 million euros ²⁷. A national strike affected about ten stores in various regions of France. This was unprecedented in the retailing and distribution industry, as it is a sector with little union activity.

The increasingly bad relations between workers and employers is also due to the fact that politicians, the media, and trade unions have openly criticized the role of the retailing and distribution industry in the increase of prices after the transition from francs to euros. “*Marges arrières*”, when producers pay a store in order to have their products displayed prominently, has been widely criticized. So have the working conditions and salaries of workers in certain hypermarkets, who are paid by producers and not by the store itself. Several of these workers have instituted proceedings against their employers.

²⁵ Michel-Edouard Leclerc (Leclerc Group), quoted by Stéphane Lauer, *ibid*.

²⁶ M. Maruani, quoted by N. Funès, *op. cit.*, *ibid*.

²⁷ Cf. Frédéric Pons, « Outgoing CEO hits jackpot », *Libération*, April 21st, 2005. Part of the political community, at the left as well as at the right, and some CEO (notably from smaller enterprises) showed publicly how appalling they found the scandalous advantages.

2. TRADE UNIONS IN RETAIL

In France, unionization has stabilized over the past ten years, but has halved compared to twenty-five years ago. In 2003, 40% of workers declared that a union was represented on their place of employ. This unionization rate is less high than in many other European Union member states, but goes with an increased union presence (representatives, elected or not) in the workplace. A recent publication by D. Andolfatto [2004] states that 14% of public-sector workers are members of a union, vs. 5% in the private sector. On the opposite end of the spectrum to civil-service and public-status companies (EDF, SNCF, La Poste) we find private-sector companies with less than fifty employees, where the latter are having difficulties getting union representation [T. Amossé, 2004].

Existing research on unionization usually highlights corporative, political or generational reasons [D. Andolfatto & D. Labbé, 2000]. Also quoted are individual motivations related to a particular family background, a local socio-economical context, as well as characteristics specific to each business line. According to many researchers, getting involved in collective unionized action may be contingent on the “right” working conditions (civil service) as much as on the employees’ dissatisfaction regarding their work contract. However, union involvement seems to be only partly linked to socio-economical conditions and social struggle [D. Labbé, 1991]: it mostly depends on the presence of cohesive and stable union teams in the workplace [D. Andolfatto & D. Labbé, 2000]. Based on statistical data, T. Amossé [2004] estimated that, for around twenty years, the development of flexible employment forms may have been instrumental in restricting the unionization of the workforce most concerned by these jobs. Indeed, in 2003, the unionization rate stands at a mere 2.5% for employees with fixed-term contracts or in temp jobs, and at 6% for part-time workers.

2.1. Unionism in retail: organs and operation

A federation for commerce and services exists within the four major French unions: CGT, CFDT, FO and CFTC, as well as within independent unions. Their presence has developed in specific zones of influence: SUD, for instance, is very active in the Rhône-Alpes area, and UNSA in Languedoc-Roussillon.

Being unionized may, in certain cases, be a way of showing one’s “company loyalty”. On the CGT, CFDT, and FO’s commerce federation websites, as well as in the union magazines (whether confederal or linked to one particular group’s union, such as CFDT-Carrefour), this corporate-mindedness shines through, as does a degree of pride, notably in the case of the Carrefour group, for which it is systematically added that it ranks world-second behind Wal-Mart. While the fight against walmartization, i.e. a low-wage strategy, is a formal priority for UNI-commerce²⁸, this US company is, on the French commerce federation websites, mentioned more for its sales (the only sales higher than Carrefour, on a worldwide scale) than for its exploitative working conditions — with a predominantly female workforce (2/3 of employees are women).

Frequent questions about the “representativity” or the “crisis” of unions are compounded by a difficult access to data for declared members, notably for each federation. According to D. Andolfatto [2004], an estimate of the major unions’ global audience stands at 9 million voters in France (45% of employees), of which 2.7 million vote for CGT, 2.2 million for CFDT, 1.6

²⁸ “The fight against walmartization of employment and working conditions in commerce is a priority for UNI Commerce”: cf.: http://www.union-network.org/UNISite/Sectors/Commerce/Activities/UNI_Commerce_Priorities_and_Work_Programme.htm, (site viewed in May 2005).

million for FO, 680,000 for CFTC, 520,000 for CGC and 1.4 million for non-confederal organizations.

2.1.1. Legitimacy of union representatives within the industry

In the private sector, three elements are in favour of unionization: the companies' size (unionization is at its maximum in medium-sized industrial businesses); the concentration of companies within the sector (unionization increases as the number of companies decreases); the use of a qualified workforce (unionization is inversely proportionate to the number of administrative staff and middle and upper management). Despite the heavy concentration of chains and the size of (predominantly food) supermarkets, retail's unionization rate is lower than the domestic average. According to D. Andolfatto [2004], the unionization rate computed on the basis of various staff data is lower than 8% of total staff. This rate is close to that recorded in general commerce, which is considered to have a low union presence (5 to 8%), like textile and agribusiness services.

Similarly, the recognition and legitimacy of the union action will not be the same in a group like Carrefour and in a franchised supermarket.

Hence, if one considers the statements issued by representatives of CFDT-Carrefour, over 3,500 employees of the group are members of this union at the national level²⁹ and there are over 200 company union groups. In specialist retail, union activity has no historical background of working-class activism: its development is recent³⁰, in parallel with that of hypermarkets, and it is marked by a new, discreet presence in some stores, while it is absent from many others [C. Chabault, 2004]. This low unionization rate in the industry is all the more surprising when compared with the potential of what constitutes, as one of CGT's Commerce Federation's officials states, the "leading force in terms of employees", which statement is confirmed by the newspaper *L'Humanité*: "Nowadays, commerce operations, which account for 20% of the working population and over a third of private-sector employees (...), have one of the lowest (unionization) rates in France. The CGT federation only counts 26,500 members in that industry, barely 0.5% of total workers". In June 2005, CGT launched a unionization campaign aimed at doubling its members in the retail sector³¹.

2.1.2. Trade union results in professional elections

Professional elections (*Conseil de Prud'hommes* – French equivalent of a labour relations board; *Comités d'entreprises* – workers' councils; staff representatives; *Commission administrative paritaire* – administrative joint commissions with equal representation of men and women) are a good way to measure the representativity of trade unions and the characteristics of their respective presence.

In 2004, in the commerce industry, the breakdown of union and non-union lists was as follows:

- For employees and workers: CFDT (32.2%), CGT (31%), CGT-FO (30.9%), CFTC (22.2%), other unions (10%) and CFE-CGC (10%);
- For middle and upper management: staff with at least one union list (61.9%), non-unionized staff (50.3%) [T. Amossé, C. Lemoigne, 2004].

²⁹ Pensioners are not included in that figure, as they are included in the pensioners' union.

³⁰ For instance, in the case of CGT, the commerce federation was created in 1974. It covers 70 branches and 110 collective labour agreements.

³¹ Christelle Chabaud, "Un plan de syndicalisation dans le commerce et les services", *L'Humanité*, June 3, 2005.

At the last professional elections (2003) for the Carrefour group³² (votes of all electoral colleges at both rounds): FO got 42% of votes; CFDT 21%; CGT 18%; CFTC 6%; CGC 1%; and CAT 3%.

As regards Carrefour hypermarkets, on 31/12/2004, in the first round (all colleges, over 41,340 cast votes): FO got 51.7% ; CFDT 20.7% ; CGT 17.8%; CFTC 5.3%; CAT 3.1%; CGC, representing middle and higher management, 1.4%³³.

At the *prud'homme* elections, despite the gradual erosion of its electorate, CGT retained the highest following at the national level, with equal representation between men and women. In 1997, CGT came first in the industrial, commerce, and miscellaneous-operations sections [D. Andolfatto et D. Labbé, 2000].

Tableau 3. Les résultats des élections prud'homales (collège salarié, ensemble des sections) (1979-2002)

		1979	1982	1987	1992	1997	2002	Évolution (base 100 en 1979)
Inscrits	En millions	12,7	13,5	12,3	13,9	14,7	16,4	129
Abstention	% des ins.	36,9	41,4	54,1	59,6	65,6	67,3	183
CGT	% des exp.	42,1	36,8	36,3	33,3	33,1	32,1	76
CFDT	id.	23,3	23,5	23,1	23,8	25,3	25,2	109
FO	id.	17,4	17,8	20,5	20,5	20,6	18,3	105
CFTC	id.	7,2	8,5	8,3	8,6	7,5	9,7	139
CGC	id.	5,2	9,0	7,4	6,9	5,9	7,0	135
Autres	id.	4,8	3,8	4,3	6,8	7,5	7,7	160
	dont CSL	id.	1,7	2,3	4,4	4,2		
	dont G-10	id.			0,5	0,3	1,5	
	dont UNSA	id.				0,7	5,0	
	dont FSU	id.					0,2	

Source : Banque de données sociopolitiques (BDSP-IEP) de Grenoble et ministère du Travail.

Source: social-political databank (BDSP-IEP), Grenoble and French Ministry of Labour, in D. Andolfatto (2004: 97).

The results of elections for workers' councils are used to measure the unions' following in the private and semi-public sectors, as well as the changes in breakdown. At the national level, CGT plummeted from 80% of votes in 1946 to 22% in 1997 [D. Andolfatto & D. Labbé, 2000]. Between the late '70s and 1995, non-unionized representatives benefited from the decrease, with over a quarter of the votes, which has enabled them to manage half of the workers' councils today.

³² The Carrefour group gathers 57 companies, with 127,933 staff, 56% of which in hypermarkets.

³³ Source: *CFDT-Groupe Carrefour*.

Table 4: Union voting figures at the workers' council elections (1991-2001)

	CGT	FO	CFDT	CFTC	CGC	Other union	Non-unionized
1990-91	22.7	12.3	20.2	4	6.5	5.6	28.7
1992-93	22.5	11.9	20.6	4.6	5.7	6.6	28.1
1994-95	22	12.2	20.7	4.7	6	6.5	27.9
1996-97	22.1	12.1	21.2	4.8	6.1	6.6	27.1
1998-99	23	12.1	22.3	5.3	6	6.3	24.9
2000-01	23	12.3	22.9	5.5	6	6.5	23.7
<i>Change (index base 100 in 1990-91)</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>142</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>78</i>

Source: D. Andolfatto, *op. cit.*, p.102.

Generally speaking, women are sharply under-represented among the workers' councils' unionized secretaries.

Within each chain, there are several workers' councils. In Carrefour's case, there are workers' councils (CE) for each supermarket (> 50 employees), central workers' councils (CCE) gathering all of the chain's French hypermarkets' councils (around 88 companies, as well as companies without employees), a council for the Carrefour group, which gathers the elected representatives for the workers' councils of all of the group's subsidiaries (around thirty people) and a European council (CICE). The appointment of the elected representatives of these workers' councils is pursuant with the law and occurs on a store-by-store basis for CE, is pursuant with distribution agreements at the company level for CCE, with the distribution agreements at the Carrefour group level, and with the distribution agreements at UNI-Commerce³⁴.

2.2. Union demands in food hypermarkets and the place of minority groups

2.2.1. Salaries and contracts within the Carrefour group

For all trade unions, salaries and purchasing power dominate the demands, particularly the minimum wages. These are followed by non-voluntary part-time jobs, hence by the improvement of employment contracts and that of precarious statuses.

Even when considering food (predominantly) retail exclusively, the situations faced by trade unions are very diverse depending on the chain, the local conditions, etc. As such, Carrefour hypermarkets are a generally easy case study, where workforce management remains mostly within the confines of legality and cases of abuse are relatively easy to spot.

As already mentioned, a national strike for wages was staged for the first time in the Carrefour group in March 2005, affecting a dozen of supermarkets. Due to a subsequent local conflict arising from a union official being accused of being an accessory to theft, a Carrefour hypermarket close to the one where we conducted our survey (Port-de-Bouc, Bouches-du-Rhône) was closed or partly closed (no fresh produce delivery) for several weeks in April-May 2005³⁵.

We have already mentioned this, but the huge amount of the golden handshake awarded Carrefour's former CEO contributed to a tense social climate in the company, at the same moment as it was putting a brake on relative wage benefits. During Carrefour's last

³⁴ The French federations adhering to UNI-Commerce are CFDT and FGTA-FO. In 2003, CGT announced it would join.

³⁵ Cf. *Le Monde*, April 3rd, 2005.

shareholders' general meeting on April 20, 2005, CFDT repeated that without social progress, there would be no commercial improvement, and clarified four claims, among which "the improvement of working conditions and employment" and "the distribution of the company's fruits towards its employees, in particular in their wages". Similarly, the slogan "Yes to real wages" is part of the demands relayed by Carrefour's FO militants who met last February to define their 2005 claims.

The general principle "equal pay for equal work" is particularly put forward by CFDT-Carrefour to limit the effects of collective labour agreements³⁶ that it deems discriminating against many employees (part-timers, hired by "satellite" companies or bought by more powerful groups), who, in large part, are notoriously women that are migrants or descendants of migrants. The part-time change from 16 to a minimum of 29 weekly hours is also demanded by CFDT. To this end, the "work more to earn more" slogan used by employers and part of the political right opposed to the reduction in working hours and to the 35-hour law was openly and ironically hijacked by this union.

2.2.2. Gender Equality

As far as discrimination is concerned, trade unions are noticeably more mobilized on union discriminations and professional equality between men and women than on ethnic or racist discriminations. After an audit, notably, carried out by the Vigéo firm³⁷ highlighting Carrefour's bad track record as regards professional equality between men and women, the group's CFDT section made this item one of its priorities for 2005:

The claim for professional equality between men and women is one of our priorities for 2005. Why 2005? Well, there were too many items on the agenda in 2004 and it got delayed till the year after. Today, we think that some tools were implemented by law and the company doesn't even comply with that. To give you an example, at management level, there are 24% of women, but go up to level 7 and there are only 14%. When you enquire about higher, the company says it has no data; it must be even worse. The truth is that in company management, out of 179 managers, there are 3 women. And (...) when we convene for the European committee meeting, all the Human Resource managers come: there is no woman! Without a single woman, improvement is not going to happen any day soon.

CGT's commerce and services federation also deems this question crucial:

[It's not only the statuses]... When one studies wages, some men in middle management earn more than women in the same position. And some women who earn as much as the men have to do twice the same amount of work.

Insofar as it primarily concerns women, the non-voluntary part-time work question and improvement of contracts has long been a union demand. The claim concerning the obligation of geographic mobility to get promoted seems to have started to elicit proposals.

According to an FO official, women in difficult social situations are preferentially recruited, as they are more easily exploitable:

I think women are a lot more exploited (...) So here's her profile: she's not from Paris, doesn't live with her parents, is preferably divorced, with children, so yes, women were targeted because there were more of them, because in retail, they're the majority.

³⁶ These Carrefour agreements were apparently ratified by FO's commerce federation. The 1982 agreement provided that only full-time workers would benefit from the reduction in working hours, and excluded part-time employees: in that case, CFDT sued, but the company won. The 1985 agreement provided that employees of all stores opened after that year couldn't benefit from the wage agreement in force in the Carrefour group's companies: they were paid 15% less than the others. Last, since the integration of Promodès into Carrefour, the employees of the Continent 2001 company don't enjoy the same wages conditions: their working conditions are the same as the other employees, but they earn €1,500 less a year.

³⁷ Vigéo, a social and environmental rating agency created in 2002 by CFDT's former secretary-general Nicole Notat, has implemented an audit and rating system specialising in sustainable development.

Obviously, our union interlocutors mention other situations heavily tainted with sexism, but which, although acknowledged, are not an official demand, and neither are they, apparently, part of the unions' awareness programs. It is the case for sexual harassment, which, despite its unlawfulness, is perpetuated or only receives inadequate penalties:

A CGT official: She went to court but... was awarded 1,000 Francs a month for two years, and the man isn't allowed to hire or fire... But he remained her boss. For me, this is not a victory, it proves that there are problems on this issue. What should have logically happened? He should have left the company, be banned... Banned from working: "Scoot, boy: you got issues, go get help, get a treatment!" What was their actual solution? She still lives near him, he's still her boss. My guess is every time there's a problem in the area, she gets to deal with it, she probably gets to deal with all the crap. That's why I'm telling you, it's very very hard, because people aren't looking. On the train, the metro... same thing. We're avoiding reality.

This is also the case for preferential recruitment or lay-offs on physical grounds:

An FO federal official: There was a time they stopped this sort of demanding top models. There was a time when people wanted beautiful, leggy women in break areas, with whatever other criteria... I was part of the management then and I would tell them, hold on, hold on, you can't want Cindy Crawford working part-time for the minimum wage...

(...) There was a woman with a moustache, well, I had to intervene for her. They tell me: "they're letting a woman go because she has a moustache" (...) I have to meet her. Someone must defend her.

Commerce federations as well as group unions highlight the issue of violence in the workplace. Verbal and physical violence was addressed by the unions at the European level (UNI-Commerce). It seems targeted more at the check-out personnel, at women in general, and at migrant women or women with an immigrant background in particular.

More generally, many of the events that were related to us cumulate racism and sexism.

2.2.3. Demands Concerning Minority Workers

The union officials that we interviewed distinguish between two categories of migrant workers, those who have migrated to France as adults, and those who have arrived as children, or who were born here. Their problems and demands are distinctly different.

Migrants are often victims of gross exploitation, as they suffer from diverse social difficulties. A series of actions could be undertaken to make their integration easier and help them become less vulnerable, such as French classes, initial and vocational training, access to information on their social rights, on social benefits, ...Trade unionists often speak of these actions, but always recall that even though the trade union "does what it can", it should in no way do the work of the social services.

Persons of immigrant background who were born in the country, or who arrived in France as children or teenagers, have been socialised in the country and are often of French nationality. Union officials describe this category of workers of migrant background as being more complex and very different to the first category. The two groups are often presented as opposites, and their radical difference is often interpreted as being caused by a generation gap.

A FO federal official: To me, there are two kinds of migrations. I make this distinction because we have to deal with situations and with demands that have nothing to do with one another (...) The older generation, whatever their origin is, do not understand the behaviour or certain young people (...) They don't have the same respect of working hours as their parents did. They have experienced things that their parents haven't, so they have different demands.

These "young people of immigrant background" are vulnerable because of discrimination, as they share the same social characteristics and competences with other young people of French origin. They are assimilated to

working-class youth in general, and are often criticised for behaving in ways that harm the reputation of all youth:

A FO federal official: You cannot judge all young people just because ten of them are thieves (...) Today, we face a general problem. Young people do not respect the enterprise they work for anymore, which is in part the employer's fault, because they go from one insecure job to another, which we didn't when we were young. They know that even if they work well, they don't really get any promotions. Even when they do, their salary often stays a SMIC.

Trade unions rarely make claims that specifically concern workers from minority groups, as they know that their main preoccupations are related to matters such as wage increase, going from part-time to full-time work, and access to vocational training.

One of the federal officials that we interviewed mentions that a demand had been made to make a collective agreement that allowed foreigners who originate from Africa to take a 10 weeks' holiday once every two year instead of a 5 weeks' holiday once every year. However, even if it had been a common practise for certain enterprises to accept these demands from their workers, this claim was not supported by every trade union, and it was turned down.

The question of religious practise is recognised as being more or less problematic. No claims seem to be made in order to get places of worship within stores in the retailing and distribution industry. However, demands have been made for special working time arrangements for religious practise, especially during Ramadan. Another demand that union officials often refer to is the wearing of the Islamic veil. In one case as in the other, union officials refer to unofficial, local arrangements that have been negotiated between workers and employees. They often criticize executives who refuse to negotiate such arrangements and whom they represent as intolerant people:

A CGT federal official: I do not know many stores with a place of worship! I do not know many union officials who try to negotiate special working time arrangements so that employees can go to the mosque on Fridays, even though the Friday prayer is the most important one to Moslems.

No trade union seems to be ready to officially represent workers who wish to make claims in matters that concern religion. For instance, they see it as the responsibility of store managers to deal with the difficulties that may arise during the traditional Ramadan fasting:

A CGT federal official: It's an individual matter. If you have a boss who is more or less easy-going, he'll arrange your working hours. But when you have a job to do, you have a job to do. Now, in the retailing and distribution industry, it's rare that they find solutions so that the colleagues can respect prayer and also work. Those whose working time is between 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. will not get more time in order to eat properly. From 2 p.m. to 7 p.m., there's only a 15 min. break, for somebody who hasn't eaten anything since morning. That's really short, but it can get even worse, it depends on where you are working. If you work as a check-out assistant, you finish at – say – 4 p.m. But in fact, you don't have 15 whole minutes. The supervisor calls the boy or the girl at the check-out and says; "It's your break!" Then he or she packs up, leaves the check-out, goes to the staff room, eats, and has to be back at 4.15. That leaves them less than 7 minutes to eat. Nobody helps them. There are a few cases where it doesn't happen like that, but they are really rare.

The "Islamic veil" is a very controversial subject in France, especially when it concerns pupils in state schools [Lorcerie, 2005]. The law is not very clear on the subject when it concerns work places in the private sector (cf. Annex 3). The veil is considered as a conspicuous religious symbol and is, as such, forbidden by Carrefour's rules of procedure. Union officials also consider it, unanimously, as a delicate and sensitive subject. They see it as a problem for the organisation of work:

A CGT federal official: The veil is a major problem. I know of a case in my store. It's a colleague with whom I've always had good working relations, she's a believer, but that used to stop at that. One day she asked me (this is symptomatic of working relations in the store – she came to me, not to the management)

“I have decided, by myself, to wear the veil. What do you think?” At an individual level, I don’t feel concerned about it, I shouldn’t decide about your future, about your religion. If that’s what you feel you should do in regard to your personal belief... However, at a professional level, it is going to be very difficult for several reasons...

The question is even more delicate when it concerns check-out assistants who wish to wear a veil (cf. below, 4.3.4.):

A CGT federal official: How can you know what kind of clients you will meet at the check-out register? It can become unbearable. I told her: you may get clients who will insult you, who will call you names. You may get clients who will be nice and calm, but, especially at weekends, you are bound to meet clients who are irritated, and anything will get on their nerves. They will call you all kinds of names, you will know them all... And they will insult your nationality, your origin. Secondly, even if the management chooses to tolerate it, it doesn’t mean that we can accept it, professionally.

Here, again, the question of the veil is treated as a question that is negotiated locally, in a particular context:

It’s a balance of power between two blocks... But for me, it’s a question that concerns the individual, and it’s important to find an appropriate solution. The only chance that she can get to... In my store, I’ve got this Algerian girl who wears a veil, but it’s discreet. She doesn’t work at the check-out, she works in one of the departments, so it’s easier, she says: “Boss, please, could you find a solution so that I don’t have to touch this, and that, could I rather work in this department? We consult our colleagues, and they agree to swap... as it’s a team of young people, they say “OK, you can have my department, and I’ll handle yours.” And then she can work in a department, where she doesn’t have to handle pork, and she can wear her discrete veil. Because people get along. But as a check-out assistant, it’s a completely different matter... For (check-out assistants) there are basically two solutions: Either you give her the sack, or you try and find a solution... Because otherwise, the other check-out assistants will be like: “Me too, I want to..., me too”, because... The veil is easier to handle within a department in the store than it is at the check-out counter.

2.2.4. Combating Racism and Xenophobia

All the trade unions that we have met say that their union representatives combat racism. Several French trade unions have joined action research programmes that bring together trade unions and researchers³⁸ in a common struggle against racism. These organisations share the belief that “combating discrimination is also fighting inequalities” UNI-Commerce’s website emphasizes the organisation’s engagement in the struggle against racism and xenophobia³⁹. With 22 million employees in Europe, the sector is central to the struggle against these violations of human rights. This is why a guide of good practise has been presented to the employers and trade unions in order to promote non-discrimination and combat racism.

Most commerce federations seem to agree that the rights of minority groups are closely related to matters such as the equality of treatment and the exploitation of workers, and these questions appear in several declarations of intentions against all kinds of discrimination in recruitment and promotions

However, in spite of the commitment of certain union representatives, notably within trade union groups, the fact that it is so difficult to prove acts of racism makes it very difficult to engage in a proper debate on the subject and an efficient collective action against it. All the persons that we interviewed from trade unions agreed in recognising that racism is a major issue (cf. above, 1.4). However, they all seemed to go from very general affirmations on the

³⁸ CGT’s research department (ISERES) and URMIS (CNRS, Universities of Paris 7, Paris 8 and Nice-Sophia-Antipolis) worked together in the European program OSIME; CFDT and CADIS (EHESS) were part of the EQUAL program.

³⁹ Cf. *Joint Statement on combating racism and xenophobia*, <http://www.union-network.org/UNISite/Sectors/Commerce/>

overexploitation of minority groups and the discrimination that they are victims of – these are presented as being the different stores’ executives’ or managers’ responsibility – to telling anecdotes about specific cases that they’ve known.

Everybody seem to agree that it is a very difficult subject to handle:

A member of the CFDT-Carrefour union: Today, at my level, there is nothing. I can tell you that I never hear about any problems related to racism or immigration! To this day, I would be incapable of telling you of a single problem at Carrefour that was connected to immigration: it doesn’t mean that there are none (...) This is the problem of your survey: today, nobody complains that they have problems related to racism. Either the union members avoid speaking of these problems, or these things are hidden, and we don’t see them.

A FO union official: *They make no claims. They don’t want to talk about it, unless it becomes really extreme. They speak about it when it’s already over, once the problem is solved, or you hear about it when it’s gone really far. They start speaking about it after three or four years, once they have managed to get out of it, once they are integrated, when they know how things work, when they can read their pay check, when they know their rights. No I don’t really have any... There are more individual than collective cases.*

They all say that they are favourable to legal procedures, but they affirm that it is very difficult to prove that acts of racism and discrimination have taken place:

Q. So it’s more difficult in cases of racist harassment?

A CGT union official: We get lawyers; we prepare the case, and everything... When it is possible: the thing is, you have to present a lot of evidence that can allow us to... It’s very complicated. One out of a thousand win their case. You really have to have a good case, with many witnesses.

When we hear of a case like that, we tell them to always keep a notebook on them, we practically force them to do it, so that they take notes about everything that happens and that seems ambiguous: “Write down the hour, the date, and the persons that were present...” It’s by these simple working methods that we can prove, eventually, what’s going on. But the person has to think about it all the time. And, secondly, a trade union isn’t there to replace an employee: “You have a problem at work? Well, I’m not there from dawn till dusk to support you, you are the only one who can be the judge, who can know how far you are ready to go. We will always be here to give you a hand, but in no way can we do the work for you”

The same person believes that certain managers are ready to negotiate various arrangements and even pay the victims of discrimination in order to make them withdraw the complaint they’ve lodged. Some victims accept, either because they need the money, or because they fear that they are unlikely to win a court trial:

Sometimes, when the executives see that the person has a chance to win a trial, they prefer to take action, and we don’t necessarily hear about it afterwards. The employer signs a contract that says that he will not bring the enterprise before justice... He is called all kinds of names, but gets a fat cheque with a word of apologise.

Even the judges are not very... They are afraid to get mixed up in these kinds of cases, because they often set a precedent.

A FO federal official also states that most victims of discrimination that he has met dreaded a court case:

Most immigrants do not want a big court case. Of course, a victim has more chances on his side if it’s a big court case, but not everyone is ready to be in the media. Most immigrants do not want that. It can really destroy somebody who isn’t ready, and I do my best to negotiate an arrangement, when it’s possible...

The same union official tells us that he is compiling information on problems that immigrants meet in the workplace, including cases of discrimination:

We’ve already organised ourselves and have started collecting information and setting up cases (...) At the moment, we treat the problems statistically, so that we can say: “we’ve encountered 400 problems of

discrimination in recruitment, 200 in I don't know what"... Well that's what we do. Because we want to be able to prove... Because until now, we hadn't been systematic about it. You know it because people speak to you about it, but we want to know whether these problems are specific to Marseilles, for instance, or whether they exist everywhere in the country (...) Afterwards, it will be easier for us to create a platform and make claims to the Ministry. I've initiated this project because I believe that a lot of evidence will be put forward. I don't think that it's worth it to continue writing nice texts that speak of discrimination in general, where nobody really commit themselves. And I want to know if I am mistaken about the way things are, because I can also be mistaken, so what I want is to be able to say and to prove "We've got so many cases that concern this problem, and so many cases that concern this one..."

A member of CGT's commerce and services federation also mentions that it is of the highest importance that cases be gathered at a national level, but he doesn't speak more about it during the interview. Instead, he continues by speaking of a debate on ethics and human rights in the trade sector, at an international level:

It would be interesting to compile cases and get an overview at a national level. That... Six or seven months ago, the Carrefour group signed an international treaty concerning ethics and the respect of human rights, on the use... on persons who work abroad to manufacture products. French trade unions were not questioned, and that is hardly a coincidence. Even if we've shown that we're interested in these issues: the prevention of child labour, of the exploitation of workers...

Racism, which everybody seems to agree, is a major problem ("*it's true, a lot of discrimination is taking place*") is not a matter that is reflected upon collectively within trade unions. The same CGT union official says that:

When you're facing employers who aggress workers at all levels (the 35 hour working week, low wages, not respecting labour regulations, unpaid working hours), it's difficult to combat racism, apart from the rare cases when it's brought before justice.

There doesn't seem to exist any forms of cooperation between trade unions and anti-racist organisations. The question is rarely mentioned, even when a trade union official is also a member of a charitable organisation:

A FO trade federation official: Well, to present myself, as a person, I can say that I am an ASTI⁴⁰ activist, it's very important for me. But I never hear about racism, never. But even if I don't hear about it, it doesn't mean that racism doesn't exist.

At a national level, it seems as if there is a certain competition, or at least a tacit division of tasks between trade unions and anti-racist organisations. Trade unions seem to present themselves as being the only bodies that have the legitimacy to interfere within enterprises, even though they state that they are powerless in matters of discrimination. As a consequence, racism stays the problem of racialised minorities, and they stand alone when they try to know what their rights are, denounce discrimination, or gather evidence...

A CGT trade federation official: Racism is very, very difficult to prove, it's like harassment is, you really have to have a good case, or you have to use the media, but you have to have a good arguments charisma, and you have to get in touch with SOS-racisme, MRAP, and other organisations like that.

Q. Would it be possible to build up a closer cooperation with these organisations on a long-term basis?

That would be great, but are we really able to do that? Are they ready to do what we ask of them? I'll give you an example: I'll be honest about this, you are an employee from Mali, I cannot do anything for you, all I can do is give you pieces of advice in order for you to know what kind of evidence you need and how to get it. You write down everything that's said, whether there are witnesses, and everything. But I, I can't be there, it's very difficult for us to be there... As soon as it's an enterprise where CGT is not represented, where there is no trade union, which is too often the case, they just do what they want...

2.3. Minorities Within Trade Unions

⁴⁰ Association de solidarité avec les travailleurs immigrés - Organisation of Solidarity with Migrant Workers

Certain initiatives are taken by trade unions in order to make it easier for women to be union members or union representatives, and to participate in meetings, such as having convenient meeting hours. However, the level of participation of women within trade unions stays very low, which is often explained by comparing to the low level of women in ... management!

Trade union CGT nevertheless try to establish equality between women and men within their leadership, which is doing far more than political bodies such as the French National Assembly or the Senate, do. There are three women and two men in CFDT-Carrefour's executive commission, and in CFDT-Carrefour's coordination council, six out of a total of thirteen members are women.

Very little data is available on the unionization of minorities (migrants, descendants of migrants, or French from the Overseas departments and territories)⁴¹ and even less is available on minority women in the retailing and distribution industry. FO's federation of commerce and services estimates that half of the 2000 unionized workers are migrants or children of migrants. According to CFDT-Carrefour, only eleven union representatives of 108 are of immigrant background: They originate from North Africa, Italy, Spain... Three of the eleven representatives are women of immigrant background.

None of the trade federations have specific bodies that group or represent minorities, even when certain measures are taken in the direction of these groups, such as leaflets in minority languages, or the coaching of young people of immigrant background, for instance. All trade unions put forward "colour blindness" and as a norm that guarantees the equality of treatment, and they do not even consider affirmative action. The very idea that one could officially take into account the specific situations of certain employees because of their real or alleged origin even makes interviewees feel uneasy:

Q. According to you, what kind of problems within the union seems to be related to the question of "origins"?

A CGT federal official: there are none. Nothing is written about it in our statutes, the union is open to everybody, whether they are "Black", "White", no matter what their ideological or political..., there are no problems regarding religion... Really there are no... Everybody can come.

Q. So do you believe that having more "minority" officials, or officials of "immigrant background", in general, could help promote equality within the union?

Yes, I do agree with you, it's true, but it's not by doing that that we will change things, it would be getting back to the ghetto... a thing bothers me, if you choose a "black" representative because you think that you will attract all the "Blacks", if you choose an Arab representative, isn't that prejudice? That's taking advantage of the problems that already exist. No, I know that it has already been done, but that's not a reason... I (...) I don't want to use... and do like they do. You can't criticize and then do the same thing as they do. Now, this is just my personal point of view, but I don't think that it would be the right solution... We would recreate what happen in suburban neighbourhoods: because there are "black" workers, I would choose a "black" union representative. I don't think that people would buy that (...) We shouldn't treat union members according to their origins, their colours, their religion. To us, that is taboo. We shouldn't touch that.

A CFDT-Carrefour official: The problem of hypermarkets is that most union members are of ... French origin (...) that means two things: that there are not many Maghrebis in the enterprise, and secondly that they are not considered as potential activists. One can ask "Why?" but we would need statistics of the employees of minority... and then that would depend on the regions (...) If you want to know, I've got the names of all our members, but I have never tried to know what their origins are.

In the best cases, union officials agree that one should keep an eye on the representativity of minorities in the list of candidates that are presented for the election of union representatives, but they all take their distance to any systematic counting or census:

A FO federal official: I've come to realize that you shouldn't go too far when there is a whole population in a store, you should be careful with the list of candidates at union elections. One day we were in a store (...) I hadn't noticed before: (in the list of candidates) there wasn't a single Black. But after the elections,

⁴¹ DOM-TOM, Départements et territoires d'Outre Mer

the bloke told me: “I’ve understood: I should’ve taken somebody from – I don’t remember what country it was”. I went there: There was this really big African population, so they had made a CGT union list with I don’t remember how many Africans, so they voted for their community, they voted CGT, but in fact it was for their community... so if you’re not cautious...

A CGT federal official: We’ve been working on “everything that has a background”, in order to represent the employees. There were surveys in my département in order to know how many immigrants and enterprises there were, so that we would have a list of candidates that would be identical to the list of employees, so that it would be representative. I know that others have done it too, but I don’t agree with these kinds of methods. I’m against equality of rights when it’s just for the sake of equality of rights, even when it concerns immigration. To me, it’s not something that you should do at the last minute, but work that should be done every single day. It’s a hard thing to say, but I believe that if you want to defend a woman or a foreigner, you don’t put them on a list just so that they are on a list, but you put them there so that they get better working conditions.

Several interviewees deplore the fact that there are few migrants or descendants of migrants in trade unions, but most tend to have these statements followed by one of the following remarks (or both of them):

- Minorities are relatively well represented among low-ranking union representatives (in stores)
- The use of quota is not an option, as a person’s background is not considered as a legitimate recruitment criterion.

No specific campaigns or initiatives are taken in order to reflect upon the fact that so few minorities are members of trade unions in the retailing sector, where few workers are syndicated in general, or in the distribution industry, where there are even fewer union members. The union officials that we interviewed all reject the idea of instoring formal or official forms of promotion or representation for minorities, just as they do when it comes to adapting working hours or working conditions to employees’ religious practises. In the best of cases, they put forward cases of informal and pragmatic arrangements that respect a “universalist” norm that they put forward as being an unbreakable value and a central reference. Globally, even when they do not use this concept, they are celebrating the assimilation of trade union members to trade union norms, as a union representative “of immigrant background” should be able to represent any employee, whether he is a member of a minority or the majority, just as a union representative from the majority should. A minority union representative should prove that he is able to respect this, according to the dominant “meritocratic” system.

Union officials are not unaware that some union members are victims of racism, but they do not really confront it. Within trade unions, certain “small” arrangements are made to make minorities “feel comfortable”, such as avoiding pork meat in collective union meals. This “thoughtfulness” is considered as being a particularly clever way to avoid putting “Moslem” union members into awkward situation, where there would be forced to stand out and confess to being believers.

A CGT federal official: It’s a really easy thing to do (...) We just ask caterers to avoid using pork meat. We don’t even ask our comrades whether they are believers or not. To us, this is a way of respecting people. They don’t have to eat something else than we do, they don’t have to mark their difference. The question is not even asked. These small things, it’s a means of integration (...)

I send my comrades a calendar with the other religious holidays. We avoid starting on a day during Ramadan (...) Well, you should try to integrate minorities, whether they are based on gender, race, or religion...

When it comes to racism within trade unions, it tends to be relativized, and its consequences are always minimised:

A CFTD-Carrefour union official: I never hear about racism, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But I can tell you that I can sense that even among union activists, they are not necessarily members of Mr. Le Pen's party, but sometimes, there can be an atmosphere... I believe that these kinds of quick and easy jokes exist.

Social explanations, such as poverty or the lack of schooling is often put forward as an explanation, and even an excuse:

A CGT federal official: But I believe that there are more poor people than there is racism. To me, there are not that many racists. There are some, and those are the ones that you should struggle against, but there is a tendency to speak more about them than of anything else. I don't have a magic wand (*the struggle against racism*), you shouldn't separate it, it's a part of everything that we do. It shouldn't be seen as a theme apart... It's like equality in the workplace, it's like wages, I don't agree with the notion that these should be renegotiated once a year; that's something that should be a part of everything that we do, it should be on our mind from dawn till dusk. These are all the little things that should be questioned.

Racism is sometimes explained through other conflicts, as, for instance, the gap between generations:

A FO federal official: No, it's rather a conflict between generations, honestly, it's not because they were immigrants. Some of them are, it's true, I talked to a guy, whom I don't believe to have been born a racist, but it's true that, bad luck, we could say, four maghrebis, four bad experiences. They insulted him, and he then became a racist himself, because of that. I once witnessed a confrontation between on one side somebody who was clearly a bit lost, and you could have put a Romanian and a Maghrebi in front of him and I believe the result would have been the same, and the older generation was responsible for training him.

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Unionization is low within the trade sector in general. However it is slightly higher in retailing and distribution and within major groups such as Carrefour. The demands put forward by trade unions mainly concern wages and non-voluntary part-time jobs. The questions concerning equality between men and women and the fight against discrimination, racism and xenophobia are not as important to trade unions as the issues related to working conditions per se, even though they all express their concerns regarding these questions.

The lack of participation of women in trade unions seems to be more of a concern than racism is, whether it is in the fields of recruitment, working conditions, or promotions in the enterprises as such, or whether the question of organising a better cooptation within a trade union's various bodies is raised. However, the issue of ethnist or racist discrimination is limited to a declaration of principles.

Trade officials state that they are confronted with two different concrete expressions of racism that are each linked to different populations.

The first one exists since the 60ies, and the moment when France started to recruit immigrant labour massively. The migrants that had arrived the latest are represented as easily exploitable as they do not know how to speak French very well, have a strong attachment to their home countries in the Third World, and have very little knowledge about their rights as workers in France. However, union officials who analyse this expression of racism as having been orchestrated by employers in order to divide workers and create unfair competition in order to lower wages and lessen working conditions, also use it as an argument for the recruitment of new union members.

Another expression of racism is found in the systematic discrimination that takes place in recruitment processes when racialised candidates are selected according to the old argument that "clients" supposedly prefer not to be served by minorities. As a consequence, the few

minorities that do get recruited get jobs that do not imply contact with clients, such as working in warehouses. Several union representatives believe that this has changed over the last five or ten years, as hypermarkets have had growing difficulties recruiting and as they have had to start employing workers that would “match” the clients of the store.

It is difficult for union officials to recognise the existence of - and to act against - acts of discrimination on descendants of migrants who are born and/or socialised in France. They tend to perceive this population in terms of “good” and “bad”. The persons that belong to the “good” part are “French like the others”, and they should be treated as such. They are represented as potential victims of their “bad” counterpart’s actions. Union officials fully share a widespread stereotype of “tough-suburban-youth” or “young-people-of-foreign-descent-who-live-in-housing-estates” that is supported by the media and exploited by politicians. These youths are considered as being non respectful to norms and potentially dishonest: youth delinquents (thieves), impertinent (impolite, rebellious towards established hierarchies), misfits (incapable of coming to work on time or dress properly), and fundamentally individualists (no attachment to the enterprise they work for nor to its image, capable of instrumentalizing trade union work according to their own hidden agenda, indeed using the union as a cover for criminal intentions).

Union officials tell many anecdotes that reinforce the criminalisation of this part of working class youths that is increasingly made to stand out as “a new dangerous class”. This is the case, even when they tend to argue for a generation gap within populations of foreign background (the “older” immigrants supposedly do not understand or approve of the behaviour of “their” youth, either).

Union confederal and federal officials are influenced by the recurrent image of the “*sauvageon*”⁴², so frequently confirmed by newspaper stories, as they avoid confronting racist behaviour, whether it is discriminatory or segregationary. This is especially the case when racist behaviour is not attributable to the employer, but to supervisors or colleagues. This distrustful attitude from union officials - even and especially when a couple of “good” individuals are put forward as examples and exceptions from the “others” - has direct consequences on unionization. In spite of the fact that workers have an interest in belonging to a union, these factors, as well as the assimilation that is expected of a union member, can only discourage minority workers from unionization.

⁴² A former Minister of the Interior from the Socialist party used this term. “Sauvageon” can be translated by “little savage”, but is also a word used in gardening. In spite of growing from a tree and being a part of it, a “sauvageon” has to be cut off, in order for the tree will to grow right. If the “sauvageon” is not cut off, the tree will be gnarled or dies.

3. STAFF RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING POLICIES AT THE HYPERMARKET - PRESENTATION OF THE CASE STUDY

In 1996, we analysed staff recruitment and training policy at a hypermarket, Continent, that had recently opened in a large shopping complex, Grand Littoral, in a large urban area suffering from many social problems, the Quartiers-Nord of Marseilles. When the hypermarket opened, 450 persons were recruited on the basis of a “local preference” policy, which was publicly announced. As mentioned above, it is not possible to know, even roughly, what the proportion of people of foreign origin is in a specific urban area in France. There is an average 12% of foreigners in Quartiers-Nord, which is not a very high percentage, when one compares it to certain other areas, with up to or more than 20% foreigners. However, everybody knows, in Marseilles, and even in the rest of France, that many residents in this area are French of the first or second generation. The population commonly referred to as “Maghrebis” is sometimes evaluated to represent 3/4 of the population in this area, and there are also many Comoro Islanders in the area.

When we carried out our survey in 1996 we learnt that 75% of Continent’s new recruits were people of Marseilles’ Quartiers-Nord, and that there were many descendants of immigrants among them. The hypermarket’s job creations and recruitment strategy had, in effect, been beneficial to its surrounding neighbourhood. Most of our interviewees agreed that the project had been a success, both in terms of the results that had been achieved as regards employment and in terms of the innovating methods that had been used for recruitment. Indeed, in order to guarantee equal opportunities, it had been decided that recruitment was not to be based on school qualifications and professional experience, and that initial and occupational training would be offered to the new recruits. At the time, work relations seemed to be based on a certain mutual trust between employees and management. Nevertheless, given the high unemployment rate at the time, several of the new recruits had a BTS (a vocational training certificate, taken at the age of 18), a university degree, or sometimes up to 5 years of university studies behind them⁴³. [De Rudder, Poiret, Vourc’h, 1997]

The *RITU* survey gave us the opportunity to come back to the field, and analyse how staff recruiting methods, promotions, unionization and work relations had evolved over the last nine years.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the various actors involved. Some interviews were conducted with two or three persons at a time. We also interviewed trade union officials, representatives of anti-racist organisations, representatives of various public employment programmes, and some of the hypermarket’s former employees. In total, we met about thirty persons (cf. Annex A: Interviewees).

⁴³ Cf. Annex 2: List of abbreviations.

3.1. Identifications and Assigination

3.1.1. Displaying identity

None of the interviewees at the Carrefour-Grand Littoral hypermarket in Marseilles spontaneously presented themselves in a way that involved a classification in “ethnic minorities”, not even the ones who are usually considered as belonging to a “particular” ethnicity within French society, or even in the city of Marseilles. The persons that we questioned do not present themselves primarily in terms of “origins”. Several of them did not even understand the question, asked at the end of the interview, concerning their own ethnic affiliation. This question was often followed by a long, embarrassed silence, or laughter, or the cracking of a joke (“*Can we play our trump card?*”), followed by a series of questions on what exactly we meant by using terms such as “ethnicity” or “ethnic belonging”: (“*Hold on, I don’t really understand the question. Religion?*”). In the majority of cases, the person then asserted his French nationality as a main identity, sometimes followed by other feelings of belonging, in terms of origins (regional or foreign) or culture (Arab, Berber, Spanish, Portuguese...) Religion was sometimes mentioned, but never “race”:

Mr. Hamsa, union member: *French, French. Well, of course, I am of foreign origin, but first of all, I feel French.*

Mr. Ben Khadi, union official: *Me, I’m Muslim, but a non-believer, eh! I am neither a practising Muslim, nor a believer. I fell French, first of all. Yeah, yeah, that’s right, I feel more French (...). I’d say French, that’s all. (...) As I said, religious-wise, I’m a non-believer, so... I tell you, I feel more... like a normal French person... An average French person... Maybe society looks at me as a Maghrebi ... But I feel that I’m just French...*

Mrs Osis, union member: *Sure, I’m French, but I’m also of Turkish origin. I feel French, but I also belong to another culture. And I do not forget our traditions, and I do not question... it’s just natural*

Mr. Chaib, union member: *Well, to me, it’s a bit similar; I am also of Algerian origin and of French nationality. To me, an individual is an individual (...) Apart from that my culture is... it is how it is, and I live by it, and I’m proud of it. I don’t go around asserting it all the time, but that’s how it is.*

Mrs Torti, supervisor: *Often, when people speak to me about racism, I tell them “I am of Italian origin myself”. I do not deny my origins. To each person his origin.*

Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as a denial: the persons that we met, both in 1996 and in 2005, do not avoid mentioning their origin or their family- or social history. On the contrary, they often refer to it in order to explain their own school or professional career, or the reasons that lie behind their opinions in the matters of politics or trade unions:

Mr. Guévir, a former employee of Continent, union member: *Me, my parents were workers, and they were always militants (...). Sometimes I had the feeling that I was living in the colonial era, just how my father had described it to me. That is, we called him Sir (the departmental manager), and he would call us by our first names. So you see, we weren’t equal at all.*

This interviewee was not the only one to mention that certain practises exceed what is usually expected from normal hierarchical working relations between managers and employees. Some of the interviewees used these examples as arguments to justify their opinions on their work or on the trade union (cf. Mr. Arhat, Mr. Hamsa)

It seems easier for the interviewees to speak about the issue of origins today than it was nine years ago. However, “colour-blindness” is often asserted. Belonging to a minority group is considered as having important consequences at a personal level, whether it is presented as a

stigma or as a resource for the individual. However, it is still considered as highly irrelevant in matters related to professional competences and work relations, whether one belongs to a minority group or not.

Even though the interviewees frequently refer to their diverse origins, they never make collective affirmations, such as “We, the French of X origin” or “We Muslims”.

A person’s origin is considered more like a personal characteristic, and often as a “resource”:

Mrs Khemissi, CGT union member: *I am rich in culture, because I am lucky to belong to several cultures. To me, it’s a treasure that not everybody has.*

Their way of expressing their origin is not different from the way persons belonging to majority groups will express their privileged relation to an “elsewhere”, and use it as a way of showing their originality as individuals. Thus, one of the interviewees tells us that he speaks Arabic:

Mr. Siles, CGT member: *I, too, am an immigrant. I come from Tunis. I spent my entire childhood there; I spent 18 years in Tunisia. I speak Arabic fluently”*

This interviewee mocks the descendants of Arabic speakers who do not speak their parents’ language:

When I speak to certain of them in Arabic, they are not even able to answer me.

However, one can imagine that employees who do speak Arabic may prefer not to show it at work, as it has never been recognised as a relevant skill by management. They might also fear that speaking a minority language in the workplace can arouse suspicion or that management could go as far as to forbidding it (cf. below, 4.3)

Another interviewee describes, with humour, her gipsy half-brothers as “*travellers who are craft workers*”, and that “*My father made them work when they were really young*”. The interviewee was brought up by her mother, who “*wasn’t a gypsy*”. She explains how she was the only one of her family to have studied and to have been a wage earner.

This relationship to origins and ethnicity can seem surprising, and even contradictory. However, it is very common in France, and is as visible in the hypermarket today as it was nine years ago. Our 1996 survey showed how both representatives of the public authorities, the hypermarket’s management and the employees themselves, made semantic detours when they spoke about ethnicity. We identified a very characteristic game of “hide-and-seek” where social categories such as “disadvantaged people” or geographical labelling such as “people from the Quartiers-Nord” implicitly made reference to people’s foreign origins, that was supposedly known by everybody:

De facto, there is such a majority of people that are... The local preference policy automatically included many... one cannot say minorities, but people who weren’t of French origin, to speak frankly. Automatically, that’s what it is [interview from 1996. cf. De Rudder, Poiret, Vourc’h, 1997].

Thus, as we expressed it in 1998: “The game of acknowledgement-concealing of ethnicity that is a common practise in the hypermarket is based on a shared consensus between the different actors, who respect a set of implicit rules. The consensus is continuously questioned, adapted, and updated” [De Rudder, Poiret, Vourc’h, 1998].

As a matter of fact, the identity that is displayed most frequently is “Marseillais”, from Marseilles, sometimes followed by “from the Quartiers-Nord” (cf. below, 3.2.2.). For

instance, Mr. Guévir justifies his use of certain expressions by the sentence “*As we say it in Marseilles*”, four times during the interview. The “us” is thus fully asserted.

Q. It seems to me that there is a strong “Marseillais” identity that transcends generations and origins?

Mr. Triolet, official from MRAP, Marseilles: *Yes, yes, that’s what they say. People notice it. I believe that it’s true. If you take the O.M., for instance, it is not a football club where the supporters are racists. It doesn’t mean that there is no racism at all, but it’s true that it’s something that you see very rarely.*

Q. Do you believe that the fact that the Quartiers-Nord is located within Marseilles could have an impact on the identification as Marseillais, as opposed to certain municipalities that are located in Paris’ or Lyon’s suburbs?

Mr. Triolet: *That is very likely. You might be right... We do not have the same borders, well, municipal borders. The Quartiers-Nord is a part of Marseilles, yes, nobody can deny that.*

Several interviewees, even persons who are not themselves from Marseilles were eager to tell us that there is a strong “Marseillais” identity:

Thus, a federal official from CGT:

Here, we are in a very particular region, it’s hot in Marseilles, you know. Conflicts in Marseilles are not the same here as they are elsewhere. I believe that there are two or three regions in France, where there are circumstances that make it easier to let foreigners in, whether they are “Black”, “Maghrebis”, anything you want... because there is a history here, an experience. Marseilles is one of these regions, with all the problems that go with it.

Or this interviewee from the hypermarket’s management:

We have to remember that we are in Marseilles, where the integration is not too bad, the kids are “Marseillais”, they support the O.M. football club, and it’s only by the end of the day that they consider themselves as being of immigrant background.

The interviewees thus refer to an assumed specificity of Marseilles (“*This is Marseilles, and in Marseilles, nothing here is like it is anywhere else*”). However, sometimes, the interviewees also question this supposed specificity:

One could also say what I so often hear: “It’s Marseilles, Marseilles, that’s all”, they always exaggerate by saying “Well, you shouldn’t be surprised, this is Marseilles!”

In a recent research on social identity among secondary school students in Marseilles, Françoise Lorcerie (2005, 2) concluded that there is a strong identification with Marseilles as a community, and that “it is characterised by the fact that one can combine it with a series of other possible identifications. These can be very diverse, such as a national sense of pride (the association of *French* and *Marseillais* is very revealing), a trans-national identification (the association of *Marseillais* and *National origin*), or a religious sense of belonging (the association of *Marseillais* and *Your religion*)”. Our own survey shows that even if the employees of Carrefour is a most heterogeneous population, they still express a strong shared identification with a positive picture of Marseilles as a cosmopolitan city, just as the secondary school students do. This identification to a collective ethnic identity can be analysed as what Brubaker (2002) identifies as “ethnicity without ethnic groups” (Lorcerie, 2003)

As concerns secondary school students from Quartiers-Nord, Françoise Lorcerie suggests that the reason underlying their main identification as *Marseillais* is an assertion that is used as a compensation for social stigmas. Our survey on employees of the hypermarket confirms her hypothesis.

3.1.2. The image of “Quartiers-Nord” and rumours on the shopping centre

The image of Marseilles’ “Quartiers-Nord” is very negative, as the area is commonly perceived as a poor and ethnicised area. The residents of the area are very aware of the area’s image and of the stigma attached to living here:

Mr. Guévir, former employee and union member (as he refers to a survey he did on the shantytowns that existed in Quartiers-Nord until the 90ies): *She expressed such views! It felt as if she were speaking about animals. I told her: “Are you aware of the fact that several young people there got their A-levels, and everything”... She answered, “Yes, I believe that one of them did. But they are different from us, they eat off the ground”. That attitude! “They eat off the ground”, etc. things like that!*

The same person tells of his experiences in local politics:

I can assure you that even the communists, well, when they do not realise what my origins are, it can go really far. As at a 3rd arrondissement meeting, when I said that I came from the 16th arrondissement, a man who didn’t know me said: “Oh, that’s where the party has a lot of Arabs!” So, even there, they make a distinction. And I thought that the communists, at least... but even among them, there is discrimination!

As a matter of fact, most interviewees see the socio-economic and ethnic characteristics of this area as being superposed, and even merged. There is a consensus on the social and economic difficulties that residents of Quartiers-Nord suffer from (these residents are interestingly often referred to as “THE Quartiers-Nord”). However, the interviewees do not systematically mention the ethnic characteristics of Quartiers-Nord residents. Maybe the reason why some interviewees avoid the subject is due to the fact that they are afraid of being perceived as racists, more than it is because they wish to challenge a possible analysis that is not made in terms of social classes. The interviewees, who do speak in terms of ethnic characteristics, sometimes do so to denounce racism, sometimes, on the contrary, do so when they express a point of view on the residents that is highly stigmatising. Certain persons tell how they have been made to feel inferior:

Mrs. Bemighi, management staff: *When the store opened, we all came from the same area, and we were afraid to be perceived as half-witted people. Some of our superiors didn’t see us as colleagues at all, but more as a bunch of unemployed people who had been imposed upon them... people who were incapable of thinking, not very bright people. When the store opened, it was like that. I found it very hard (...) When the store opened, the supervisors came from the North, and they weren’t accustomed to seeing so many people of different origins in a work place. That was a shock to me... We felt stupid, and we have had to prove that we weren’t. It’s been really tough. They would speak to us using very simple words, as if we wouldn’t understand them otherwise. To them, we didn’t have anything, even if some of us had a five-year university degree. This was the image we were stuck with. It’s difficult to change that. We were perceived as stupid people. But it rapidly changed. After a couple of months, it changed. They stopped being prejudiced and evolved in a positive direction. We could feel it. Our superiors were European, and 40% of us originated from Africa (...) Their perception of us was discriminatory. It was very difficult for us to live with that. We spoke about it, between us. Because we could see it in their eyes. We had to prove that we could do twice as well as anybody else.*

Mr. Benkhadi, union official: *They took... I believe that the municipality asked Continent to recruit staff on the basis of a local preference policy. And when I arrived, they told me that they had recruited social misfits.*

The managers blame local resident committees for the specific problems that the managerial staff met:

Those people, many of them have never worked, they have no experience whatsoever, and we have to adapt ourselves to them. Because we realized that, as opposed to what is commonly believed about them, they are able to work... they are able to work if you do half of their work for them and if you do not ask much from them!!! They show no initiative.

(...) Another major problem for management is the lack of gratitude that we meet. All the efforts that (...) the managerial staffs make, they give us nothing in return. The problem is all the resident committees who

revolve round our staff, and who do a bit of everything, but who never give us any support in return. It's really unrewarding, because you find yourself having to make a lot of efforts that you wouldn't have had to in other circumstances (...) Once again, it's... It's true that you have to be careful if you don't want the managerial staff to give up. It's hard for managers, because it is really unrewarding to try so hard for these people and get nothing in return. I do understand, I don't blame them, they are caught up in their own problems, the resident committees, poverty... They will always be able to get by, to find something to eat – but somehow that prevents them from sorting out their problems by themselves.

“Young people” in particular are, as always, described as un-disciplined:

What was really difficult was that that we had all these kids who had never worked, and had no points of reference. They came from difficult, poor neighbourhoods, and we would ask them... We would say: “Be here tomorrow morning at 5 a.m., fill up the shelves, and I don't want you coming in at 4 o'clock, nor at 8 o'clock, but at 5 o'clock sharp”.

This is a very widespread stereotype. “Young people” – of disadvantaged backgrounds, who live in public low-cost housing and are descendants of immigrants – are regularly represented as misfits and troublemakers (c.f. above 2.3)

A FO federal official: the older employees, whatever their origin is, do not understand why certain young people do not know how to - or have lost track of getting to work in time, they do not show respect for anything anymore, like saying hello and goodbye. I'm not asking them to lower their pants! But to come into a delicatessen... I've seen one of them who works in the store's delicatessen, and his supervisor said to me: “How do you expect me to train him? He arrives with his head down, an hour late, he doesn't care about anything, and he doesn't even try to explain why he is late. When I try to talk to him, he sends me packing”. One shouldn't forget that an employee who accepts to train another employee is not paid more. You have to really like training people to do it. It can happen once or twice, and then you give up. There have been quite a lot of frictions.

The stereotypes regarding young people in general and youth from Marseilles' Quartiers-Nord in particular are even shared by trade unionists:

Mr. Siles, CGT union member: Many of them just give up after one or two days. I sometimes ask myself if they really want to work... They don't like it, or they find the work exhausting, or they don't like getting up early, they don't want to get up. You know, young people – I don't want to criticize young people – but getting up in the morning, that's not much to ask, is it... (...) They are featherbrained...

Mrs. Khemissi, CGTR union member: I tell you, they are not motivated anymore. This year, we didn't get a productivity bonus... people...

Mr. Siles, Motivated or not, if you don't have something else on the side, you don't just give up a job like that...

Mrs Khemissi: Of course, of course...

A certain number of criminal acts have taken place in the Quartiers-Nord area. We will get back to these events later. However, these have reinforced the negative image of young people who live here. The area is often perceived as a nest of juvenile delinquents, and it is often believed that young people from the area are bound to turn bad sooner or later: “*The bad ones ruin it for the other people in the neighbourhood*”, says a local union official.

Management expresses these matters in an ambivalent way. On the one hand, they recognise that there have been problems of theft and shoplifting since the hypermarket opened⁴⁴:

The problem is that at a certain point in these kinds of environments, you tend to forget ... The social environment wears you out and you forget that the aim of an enterprise is to make money, a lot and fast, not necessarily by exploiting its employees, but, well it's normal to want to make money. And the tragedy of this store is that it lost a lot of money, and the problem is that, once more, we said: “Well, it's normal, this is Marseilles, and you can see that they are light-fingered, that when you do the stocktaking a lot of goods are missing, you have to admit that they are thieves, that your employees are lazy, that they are always absent from work”. But then I was lucky, because the whole team working under me changed, and

⁴⁴ Theft and damage represented 2,20% of the store's turnover in 2004, which was a 17% decrease as compared to 2003.

the new employees really wanted to work. I also changed the supervisors because I had realised that if there were good supervisors, there were no problems with the employees anymore

On the other hand, management criticizes the tendency to criminalize Maghrebi employees:

You shouldn't paint too black a picture nor be racist. Because as a matter of fact, what often happens in this kind of environment is that an employee of non-maghrebi origin (...) if he works under duress, he will either work really slowly or not very much, or – this is what struck me when we had a lot of thefts – the employees of Maghrebi origin are the one who cause us the least problems, globally.

Even though they find the social environment “a bit particular”, both supervisors and management say that “they have no choice” and that it is their responsibility to adapt to the surrounding environment:

Continent (the original name of the hypermarket, before it was bought up by Carrefour) – well, it's always easy to criticize others, but I say it like I think it – they didn't really understand what they were getting into when they opened this store. I think that to them, it was just “Great! We have a permit to open”, because it was really difficult at the time, in 1997, to get opening permits. 17,000 m². I think that at the time you would take it at any cost. However, what they didn't really realize was that we found ourselves facing kids who had never worked, who were a bit lost. A difficult neighbourhood, a poor neighbourhood, but we were demanding, we wanted it to work. We had to adapt to that environment! And Promodès (the former group, before Carrefour) didn't see that coming. I'm not sure that Carrefour would have done it differently, I mean, it is possible, and I think that we are about to succeed, but it is really demanding for the management who has to make great efforts to succeed.

And, finally, in a “fatalist” attitude, the management ends up admitting that the wages do not correspond to the difficulties and the harshness of work:

I don't know if I myself would be that keen to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to fill up fridges with deep frozen food for 700 euros a month.

Certain supervisors emphasize the fact that the shop needs to appeal to clients from the surrounding area:

Mrs. Torti, departmental head: It's true, I often hear about the Quartiers-Nord... Well, we have customers about whom one can say that... You often hear about Quartiers-Nord, but they are our clients, we just have to accept that. I mean, we are the ones who should adapt to them, who should bring them... Maybe by installing more... maybe that could... well, maybe if there were more security, maybe more cleaning, maybe more... But we are lucky, they are our clients, we just deal with it. That's why I don't really pay attention to it.

The reputation of the Quartiers-Nord and of the shopping complex has been forged by a series of rumours. These started when the shopping complex was built in 1994-1995. When the site was still under construction, there was a landslide. Rumours say that the shopping complex is still threatened by landslides, and the closing down of a part of the shopping complex, followed by the destruction of a cinema for security reasons, seem to confirm these rumours.

A rumour in Marseilles would even have it that the next day, the store would slide into the sea!

A very persistent rumour, that started well before the opening of the hypermarket, had it that thousand of jobs would be opened to Quartiers-Nord residents. This led to thousands of unsolicited letters of applications to the *arrondissement's* town hall.

As soon as the Grand Littoral opened, rumours had it that thefts, muggings, damage on cars, ... took place on a daily basis around the shopping complex:

Mrs Patrat, union official: Right from the beginning, people would spread gossip about the store. Even the clients would tittle-tattle about it. At Grand Littoral, supposedly, people got mugged, people were...

Mr. Ben Khadi, union official: It had a really bad reputation

Mrs Patrat: *Cashiers were supposedly raped at night on the parking lots where employees would park their cars. Rumours had it that it was unsafe to walk through La Bricarde*⁴⁵. *I have never been afraid of walking through La Bricarde*

These rumours obviously add to the stigmatisation of the area and its residents, and follow the logic of criminalisation of the “dangerous classes”, that are both underprivileged, and, more and more frequently in France, racialised.

3.1.3. Reservations Expressed by Trade Unions on the Recruitment process at Continent-Grand Littoral (1995-96).

When trade union officials are asked about the local preference recruitment policy that was applied at the opening of the Continent hypermarket in the Grand Littoral shopping complex in Marseilles, they show great reservations. Even interviewees, who are not very well informed about the local preference recruitment policy, do not welcome the idea and show no enthusiasm. They tend to see this policy as a preference for “young people of migrant origin”, or even for youth delinquents. And even though they do not question the success of the project, they are always expressing a wish to put things into perspective, and recall, once more, that the context in Marseilles is very peculiar...

Q. A couple of years ago, there was a series of negotiations concerning the issue of recruitment

A FO federal official: This often happens in urban area with many social problems. I myself have always been against it, because to me, it does a disservice to immigrants. To me, there is no question about it; only people who have the requested qualifications for a job should be recruited. As soon as you say “well, I’ll take that neighbourhood... where there are gangs... (That’s) negotiating with the gangs and employing bandits. What you could also do, if you want to do it like that, would be to simply let them have the key to the store and tell them to start looting! A store’s management does this because they think they’ll be left in peace! But two months later they are surprised to see that they have been looted, and then, they can’t just fire them like that. The problem is, that afterwards, the normal, honest employee simply doesn’t understand what’s going on anymore. Roughly, the public authorities say: “You wanted them, now it’s your problem, you should find the solution by yourselves”. I don’t see how it could be a solution. Honestly, I’ve never seen a successful case without there having been a big compromise. Like certain stores in Marseilles, where the management says” We just want peace, and we’re ready to accept a certain percentage of stealing. They accept it just like people accept that when you want to bring humanitarian help out to certain countries, you know you’ll have to leave one of the trucks behind to get the others through. It’s exactly the same thing. I believe that young people from these areas should be recruited in a normal way, and that no thieves should be accepted, because that ruins it for all the other immigrants. Otherwise, you choose to deal with Mafia-like gangs, but it is impossible to negotiate with people who steal (...)

Q. Now that you mention Marseilles and the Grand Littoral shopping complex, what is your opinion on their recruitment policy at the time of their opening, based on local preference and the recruitment of residents from the neighbourhood...

It wasn’t a very successful decision. We actually had to fire our union representative, as he had started stealing and racketeering immigrants. That is actually a major problem, too; some are shrewd and claim that...For instance, there was a warehouse where they made people pay in order to get the permission to work there! You know, certain of them are really well-organised, and they take advantage of...

But what happened at the Grand Littoral shopping complex? Management wanted to do well, so they decided for a set of criteria... They really wanted to do well, they really wanted to hire people from the neighbourhood because it was a tough neighbourhood, well... and they didn’t want to hire youth from the local gang, but really youth of migrant origin...

What happened was that most of them couldn’t take the working conditions, maybe for reasons similar to what we see in Paris. Sometimes, they found work elsewhere, sometimes at Carrefour, but that store didn’t agree with them, and some left because they felt that they were always in our neighbourhood. They felt that they weren’t getting anywhere: finally, they employed us but only to work in our own neighbourhood, it’s the same, it’s another rotten job, created especially for us. Certain people want to prove that they are capable of doing something else, but you have to go somewhere else. And on the

⁴⁵ Council housing estate located near the shopping complex.

whole, that is not really a way of succeeding, either. I don't think that there are any miracle solutions if you don't do things in a regular way (...) Then they go and change the manager, and we're back to square one. If the guy doesn't believe... If he doesn't care, or if he's a racist, he changes everything, and it's as if you're back to where you were five years ago.

Q. Is that what happened at Grand Littoral?

No, no

Q. Is it a priority for them to continue to recruit in the neighbourhood?

No, that stopped because they found out that it wasn't worth it, that the neighbourhood didn't even answer (...) that if you confine yourself to the neighbourhood, I think that it will cause problems. Overall, it wasn't a failure, either, I mean, there wasn't... It was me who had a problem because the boy started racketeering everybody. That... I didn't tell you, but we fired him, because from the moment where we have a union representative... You never know in advance, and the problem with these gangs is that they are very, very shrewd. They know that a trade union can give them a certain notoriety, and that it can become a cover for doing "business", as they say. They don't give a fuck about the trade union (...) It's crazy how... even though the management fired the thief, the trade union is still stuck with a bad image.

A CGT federal official: I don't have anything particular to say about it. But here, we are in a very particular region, it's hot in Marseilles, you know. Conflicts in Marseilles are not the same as elsewhere. I believe that there are two or three regions in France, where there are circumstances that make it easier to let foreigners in, whether they are "Black", "Maghrebis", anything you want... because there is a history here, an experience. Marseilles is one of these regions, with all the problems that go with it.

The reservations expressed by the union officials above, are related to the stereotypes about "youth from suburbs", in general, and the stereotypes about Marseilles and its marginalised neighbourhoods, in particular.

This criticism is a strong contrast to the satisfaction expressed by representatives of public labour and employment bodies when the shopping complex opened nine years before. At the time, trade unions took little part in the mobilization of a local preference policy in the recruitment for the shopping complex and its hypermarket. The only exception is the active mobilization of unemployed members of the local CGT branch. The method that was used at the time was completely new and consisted in recruitments based not on qualification levels but on a clear description of the skills required. The method has become widespread, and is somewhat trivialized by the interviewees. As the unions they represent were not present at the time of the opening of the hypermarket, union officials who were not involved in the local preference recruitment policy have little knowledge of the political and local mobilization that took place. Even though the project was widely recognized as a success at the time, the union officials seem to be more critical of what they identify as "inconveniences" and to look less at the positive aspects of this recruitment policy.

There is thus a major discrepancy between union officials and employees of the hypermarket. Union officials tend to see the hypermarket's initial recruitment methods as an obstacle to the "normal" way that an enterprise should be run, whereas, as we shall see below, these methods and the "ethnic" composition of the hypermarket's staff are perceived positively by the employees themselves.

3.2. Workers' Demands at Carrefour-Grand Littoral

3.2.1. Local Preference Recruitment Policy in Quartiers-Nord

Whether they are members of trade unions or not, all workers at the hypermarket know the local preference recruitment policy. Those who were recruited at the opening of the hypermarket remember it well. Those who were recruited later all have a more or less precise idea about what happened. Nobody is opposed to a local preference recruitment policy, and

even the persons who criticize the procedure are all very favourable to the notion of working in a “cosmopolitan” staff.

No figures exist on the “ethnic” composition of the hypermarket’s staff, which gives, once again, lots of rumours about new recruitment criteria, both within and outside of the hypermarket. This leads to many discussions and barbed remarks between the hypermarket’s management and trade unions.

The hypermarket’s present management staff recognised that they had been planning to modify the store’s ethnic composition. However, they quickly backed out from it, not as much because they feared a conflict, as because it is difficult to find check-out assistants or workers for the warehouse who are as motivated, reliable, and stable, as the workers who are recruited in the neighbourhood surrounding the hypermarket:

I haven’t really asked myself whether we should continue recruiting in the surrounding neighbourhood or not: I don’t really have a choice! I’m not better than others, if I had had a choice and had been able to get a better balance between Maghrebis and I don’t know... people from other neighbourhoods, I would definitely have done that. But I didn’t have a choice. And the funny thing is, the only employees who cause us problems are actually Whites, for the simple reason that this is the Quartiers-Nord, and if they accept that kind of work, it’s because they are forced to it, that they have no choice. And that makes them feel ill at ease.

The employees who were among the first wave of recruits were not chosen on the basis of their ethnic background, but on the basis of their “belonging” to Marseilles’ Quartiers-Nord. Their initial professional qualifications were not a criterion for recruitment, either. During the interviews that we did in April 2005, we discovered that to all employees if a person is a resident of Quartiers-Nord, he also belongs to a minority (“Maghrebi”, “Comoro Islander”, etc.). They would also all speculate in a potential “whitening” of the staff, notably by the widening of the geographical recruitment area from the area surrounding the hypermarket to the entire region:

Q. Do they still have a local preference recruitment policy in the Quartiers-Nord?

Mrs Khemissi, union official: *Not at all, it’s quite the contrary. It is something that everybody can feel; you can just ask the staff...*

Mr. Triolet, MRAP-Marseilles: *A lot of people say that they want to whiten the staff, I’ve heard that a number of times. I don’t remember who told me recently.*

As a matter of fact, several union officials whom we interviewed and who had been recruited by the ANPE (*National Employment Agency*), or by FACE (*Anti-Exclusion Foundation*) have completely accepted the idea that this initial wave of recruitment was very unusual. Today, union officials consider that the criteria that were used to select recruits at the time are irrelevant today. The dialogue that we present below shows it very clearly. It took place between three employees who belong to the same trade union:

Mrs. Osis: *It’s true that in the beginning, there were more people from the Quartiers-Nord.*

Mr. Chaïb: *Yeah, that’s what they wanted at the time. They had this project with the municipality, the ANPE (National Employment Agency) Since the merger (Carrefour-Continent) and all that, they find that qualifications matter much more...*

Mrs Bendam: *More than people’s situation does...*

Mr. Chaïb: *Then there are people that they chose because of their reliability, if they are there or not, if they are on time or not, if it’s back and forth, if they come to work or not... These are the criteria that they take into account. I believe that they have started recruiting everywhere in Marseilles, and even in the rest of France*

Union representatives, who suddenly find their own personal professional experience validated, welcome the switch from a recruitment process that was represented as “political”

to one which is supposedly based on “professionalism”. There is, however, a sense of suspicion that there has been a tendency to choose to recruit a more “traditional” workforce these last couple of years. Thus, one of the CFDT representatives that we met insisted that *“For the last one or two years, only “French-French” people are hired here”*, and his colleague explains that *“As they (management) had been forced to recruit locally, there was a bit of everything, and it’s was exhausting (...)”*

As a matter of fact, most workers that we interviewed, whether they were members of trade unions or not, made it clear to us that they were or had been uncertain at some point of the criterion on which the hypermarket’s was recruiting new employees. This uncertainty, that was often expressed individually, was, however, not an object of discussion between minority union members.

Q. Do you discuss the question of the modification in geographical zones of recruitment among employees?
Mr. Ben Khadi, union representative: *It’s more a discussion we have among ourselves, as union representatives, but among employees, no they don’t really discuss it.*

Q. Between different unions, too?
Yes, at a certain point, yes. We really thought we had reasons to believe that they were aiming to recruit workers who were of French stock. It’s a really complicated problem and it’s difficult to find a solution... we decided to let them do it, see what happened... but then it changed again, and they recruited several persons of foreign origin. Maybe we were just imagining things.
Every month we have a staff representatives’ meeting, and afterwards, we present the workers’ demands

Q. To the general manager?
Yes, to the general manager. And once, without it being a demand from the workers, we asked them questions about recruitment, whether they were targeting certain people in instead of others. They assured us that they weren’t, that recruitment was based on a worker’s qualifications. We have a feeling that they changed their recruitment strategy since then.

However, in spite of being such an important question for everybody, it has only been debated in very informal discussions. The only exception to this rule is when it was once debated at a weekly session between staff representatives and the general manager. A CFDT representative told us that he had had a discussion with representatives from another union (FO). These however, maintained that they had never had such a discussion with any of the other union representatives. When Mr. Benkhadi speaks about the day he asked the general manager whether management intended to change their recruitment strategy, he himself presents it as a personal initiative.

The fact that workers stay relatively discreet in this matter is probably due to a wish to be recognised professionally. That is, the workers who were employed during the first wave of recruitment are aware that they suffer from a reputation of incompetence, and they are very eager to change this image (*“We had to prove twice as much as the others”*). They are particularly keen to use a “politically correct” vocabulary and to speak in terms of “professionalism”, as they themselves use this same argument to avoid stigma and have their professional experience acknowledged.

Management is sometimes suspected of “cheating” by disrespecting regulations that have been made to prevent favouritism, as the following exchange between union members shows:

Mr. Siles, union member: *At Carrefour you are not allowed to recruit somebody from your own family... If you are married, for instance, a husband and a wife are not allowed to work in the same store. Of course, certain couples have met here, obviously you cannot prevent that... But it is no longer possible to employ your son, your sister...*

Mrs Khemissi, union member: *But sometimes, you discover that it’s actually somebody’s brother-in-law, cousin, sister-in-law... Many persons are recruited by... I know...*

Q. Networks?

Mrs Khemissi: *It's the supervisors... he will meet four persons, but will get their C.V.s first. It's the manager who chooses, it's not the middle that chooses, never the general manager. All he does is sign.*

Mr. Siles: *The general manager doesn't read the future in tealeaves, he cannot be sure that the worker is not a thief or a lazy person. That's something that you see afterwards.*

Mrs. Khemissi: *I've got my doubts on recruitment... they always know the person somehow.*

The general manager is represented as somebody who is “human”, who is open and listens, and who is ready to satisfy the demands of low-ranking employees. He is even told to have anticipated demands that employees hadn't put forward yet, such as we will see it later in the case of the Ramadan. One of the interviewees even criticizes him for being “*unable to say no*”.

Thus, there doesn't seem to be any mobilisation by trade unions that explicitly supports recruitment based on a local preference for residents of Quartiers-Nord. The store's employers however seem to keep a very close watch on the evolution of the staff's ethnic composition, even though they only have very imprecise information on the subject. As a matter of fact, management produces statistics on the number of workers who are Quartiers-Nord residents (311 on 494 in April 2005, or 63%), but union officials seem to be either unaware of this, or uninterested.

3.2.2. Career prospects

The retailing and distribution industry employs many un-qualified workers, but it offers certain possibilities of promotion (cf. 1.3.3). However, a person who wishes to be promoted has to accept a certain geographical mobility. This is a well-known problem for women who are in charge of a family.

Mr. Siles, union member: *There are people who started at the bottom and who have been promoted progressively, and who left when they became supervisors. As soon as you are promoted, you have to move, you cannot stay in the same store anymore, because supervisors should not represent more than 5 or 10 % of the work force of a store...*

According to trade unions, promotions are rather rare:

Mrs. Khemissi, union official: *A couple of young people have been promoted... It doesn't happen very often, but a couple of young people were promoted and went to work as executives in other stores. Some even moved to the North (not only in Marseilles), and not just in the region. They are not many, five maybe.*

When Continent-Grand Littoral opened, all executives were transferred from other stores in France. In the initial recruitment of un-qualified workers, the store chose not to take qualifications into account. As a result, the group of unqualified workers at the store is characterised by a great social heterogeneity. Some have very little schooling, while other have a BTS (vocational training certificate taken at the age of 18) or a university diploma. Most of the workers who had qualifications thought that if they accepted an un-qualified job at the store, their qualifications would ensure promotions and interesting career prospects. However, most of them were disappointed. An ex-employee describes how there was a total lack of recognition of qualifications at the store:

Mr. Guévir, former employee, union member: *D. (a former colleague), he was such a genius, and so competent. He had a BTS with a specialisation in trade.*

There was another thing that struck me. We had a person training to be a supervisor who came to work (...) She couldn't understand what I was doing here, with my diplomas, working at a self-service⁴⁶. And

⁴⁶ Mr. Guévir has a post-graduate degree, taken after five years of university studies, a DEA (cf. Annex 2)

that used to make me laugh, because there are many people here who are different... - but it's symbolic of French society as a whole too, isn't it – that discovers that... obviously... with... There are not just origins, are there, well, when I speak about origins, I refer to social origins as well, class, etc. But certain doors are not opened to everybody. She didn't understand that. She said "but what are you doing here, with your qualifications? You shouldn't be working in a self-service." And I answered: "I have to eat, don't I? How am I supposed to do?" (...) As if it was easy! And I told her "Maybe you had a mother, a father, who helped you financially while you were studying, and when your studies were over, you started working. That's how it usually happens, but not for everybody. Not everybody can do that. I had to work while I was studying in order to pay for my studies, I didn't get any help, I always... Like a lot of other people..."

Certain employees in this situation have become very bitter, such as a former project leader from Quartiers-Nord who is disappointed that nobody wanted to use his knowledge and experience in negotiation. At "headquarters", he says, "*Nobody asked me anything*". And he not only felt undermined, but also, "depersonalised", as if he had become transparent to his colleagues and to his superiors, a transparency that minorities know to signify isolation and underestimation.

To others, their experience is among the reasons why they became union militants: "*Frankly, I tell it to you like it is, I became a union member because they never gave me a chance*", says a staff representative.

Others, who had no qualifications whatsoever when they were recruited, and who knew that they were considered as "unemployable", do not criticize the absence of career prospects and promotions within the store, as they are grateful to have escaped unemployment, and to have found a certain job security, and social interaction at work.

This attitude is perceived as "resignation", by many executives, who may be of immigrant origin themselves and who have chosen to move upwards. Colleagues can also perceive this as a fear of change and advancement:

Mrs Bendam, union official: People are not promoted because of their seniority, but because of their place in the hierarchy and their level of activity. Seniority is not a criterion for promotion in the collective agreement.

Mr. Chaïb, union official: Not everybody wants to advance in the firm...

Mrs. Bendam: In the beginning, I didn't want to advance; I wanted to stay a CI. None of us is ready to change stores just for a promotion.

Certain interviewees state that this might contribute to the freezing of promotions within the group.

Mr. Siles, union member: The C4s are supposed to get promoted, but a lot of them refuse, they stay there and block it for the others. There are C3s that would like to get promotions, but they can't because there is somebody who doesn't want to be promoted, who stays there and who doesn't want to go anywhere else. The department manager stays one or two years and then he changes stores. As a lot of them prefer not to move, they pay his removal expenses or Carrefour keeps them in the region. The last department manager from Continent has just left. He was transferred to another shop in Aix en Provence.

Certain employees who were recruited when the store opened prefer not to be promoted because they are attached to the store they work in:

Mrs. Khemissi, union official: They need to recruit more people in certain departments. But the older workers do not want to move... They are not motivated. On the other hand, that's where the store's strength lies, the older employees love it. Today, they may moan about it, but tomorrow... They simply feel an attachment to their department,

The employees often put forward their attachment to the store, whether they are union members or not. They often refer to "their" store as a work place where social interaction between colleagues is much better than in other Carrefour stores.

Apart from personal reasons and the attachment to “their” store, another reason for not wanting to be promoted and leaving the store to start working in another one, is probably due to fear of having to start all over again. Many employees remember their first months at the store as an obstacle course, such as Mrs. Bemighi, who was already quoted above, and who recalls, with bitterness, how she and her colleagues felt looked upon as “*half-witted, stupid people*”, and how they had to work “*twice as much as the others did*”.

Certain interviewees fear that if they work for other stores of the Carrefour Group, they may lose some advantages and opportunities for promotions:

Mrs. Bemighi, employee, not member of a union: At Carrefour, qualifications are important. They made us do vocational training in order to be able to manage the departments. We did evaluations once a year, depending on our level, and if we gave them a written demand for vocational training, they would accept it. It was a mutual exchange (...) I saw colleagues who advanced in my sector (...) Others became managers in other stores. Some colleagues became executives in other stores. They also came from other sectors. For many, it was a chance. With or without qualifications... (...) There are more executives of foreign origin today than there used to be at Continental. At Continental, there were none. Here, it's the equality of chances. My current manager (she specifies that he is of the same origin as she is) has been at Carrefour for twelve years, he has been promoted like anybody else would have been. That's what people want. Here, there is no discrimination on the basis of origins, whether you're French or of this or that origin.

There are very few descendants of migrants among the thirty-five executives, they are “*not many*” among supervisors, but they are a majority among workers. However, no interviewee spoke to us about a possible link between lack of advancement and ethnic discrimination.

The interviewees told us of only one case where there had been a suspicion of discrimination, and they seemed to tell us almost by accident, and with some hesitation. The militants from CFDT state that as soon as they learnt one of their colleagues had not been promoted, they didn't hesitate to ask the management for an explanation:

Q. Have you had many cases to deal with?

Mr. Ben Khadi, union official: No, not since I started in the union.

We noticed it. A. told me that he noticed it, that he shared our interpretation of what had happened, but it's complicated (...) But then, we dealt with it little by little: we went to see the executive manager to tell him that he should do everything in his power to prevent it from happening again (...) The employer came to see us, and we were the ones to ask to meet the management to explain them that that's not how it's done, that they're not allowed to do it. She deserved to be promoted just like anybody else.

3.2.3. Contracts and Working Hours

Trade unions in the trade and distribution industry are making demands on issues such as wages and contracts. Wages are re-negotiated only at a national level⁴⁷, but contracts are negotiated at a local level. The Grand-Littoral store in Marseilles was concerned by the April 2005 strikes, and as a result, sixteen contracts were improved (the workers went from non-chosen part time work to full time work).

Officially, a working week is 35 hours long, but it seems to be established that that corresponds to 33 hours and 50 minutes work. Adjustment makes it possible to ask workers to work more certain days and less others, but only four hours extra per week. It also gives the employers the possibility to send workers home after three hours of work in cases where there are more workers than the store needs, for instance, when there are few customers. Certain

⁴⁷ The store managers have no influence on the payment, whether it is wages or bonus. Some of them regret this, as a certain freedom of action would be a means of managing.

weeks, a worker may work 36 hour. This makes it impossible for workers who are working at a part-time basis to have a second part-time work in another store.

The adjustment of working hours does not concern every sector. Check-out assistants are more concerned by the problem than any other employees, and their problems are often perceived as being different from other workers, as the following dialogue shows:

Q. On the adjustment of working hours

Mr. Siles, union member: *Adjustment of working hours... I don't know... It's especially the check-outs... the adjustment...*

Mrs. Khemissi, union official: *No, not only, in certain departments they have weeks with more or less working hours (...) like 30 instead of 35 hours...*

Mr. Siles: *If there's no work we are asked to go home.*

Mrs. Khemissi: *They can't ask employers to come to work for less than three hours, but afterwards, they can send them home...*

* *
*

The Carrefour hypermarket at Grand Littoral is not different from other stores with regard to contracts and working hours: the same part-time contracts, the same adjustments of working hours and a flexibility in employment that make it difficult for workers to make a proper living. For instance, the management pushes its employees to work on Sundays and on holidays.

The Carrefour hypermarket at Grand Littoral in Marseilles has certain specificities that are due to its particular history. There is still a preference for local recruitment of Quartiers-Nord residents, even though qualifications and experience are taken into account. This is welcomed by the workers who were recruited on the basis of local preference when the shop opened and who wish to be acknowledged for the competences they have acquired through the years. The employers keep a close eye on the recruitment policy, as they do not want to see the staff's composition altered. Even though they do not demand it explicitly, there is a generalized wish among workers at the store that its staff stay "cosmopolitan" (essentially French of Maghrebi background, as a matter of fact).

Demands are made more explicitly – and very often individually - when it comes to the issue of advancement, especially when they concern workers who were recruited "at the base", in spite of having qualifications such as technical or graduate degrees. A major obstacle in terms of advancement is the obligation to accept a certain geographical mobility. In this store, as in many others, it freezes the career prospects of workers for whom it is impossible to move for private reasons, such as women who have children. However, as we will see later, the fact that many workers refuse to accept a promotion because they do not want to change stores, is also due to a strong feeling of commitment to the store.

4. INTERETHNIC RELATIONS AND RACISM AT THE CARREFOUR-GRAND LITTORAL HYPERMARKET IN MARSEILLE

4.1. Minority Experience

The residents of Quartiers-Nord that were interviewed in this survey systematically refer to their nationality, their place of residence or simply to the fact that they are, first of all, a “Marseillais”. All of them, whatever their origin is, have a distinct accent from the area and speak in the way commonly referred to as “la tchache”⁴⁸.

In spite of this, they are all very aware of the fact that feeling “Marseillais” does not protect them against racist or scornful remarks in their everyday life. Many gave us examples of such remarks, even though it was difficult and painful for them. Also, they all emphasized that these incidents are very rare. An interviewee told us about the racist remarks of an elderly woman she met at the clinic where she gave birth:

Mrs Bendam, union official: *There was a “grand-ma” who was waiting for her daughter, because her daughter was also going to give birth soon. My husband had gone outside to smoke a cigarette. And physically, it’s difficult to tell whether he is... if he is a Muslim too... and she didn’t know if he was... She must have thought that he wasn’t an Arab and she started telling me that she didn’t want her daughter to give birth in Vitrolles because there are only Arabs there, that this and that... that she had arranged it so that her daughter didn’t have to share a room with an Arab woman with a veil! When I saw that... Pfff... It’s the only time that... Afterwards, I went to see the gynaecologist... after I had given birth I didn’t want them to put me in the same room with that woman... Even when I speak about it now, I... She didn’t know that my husband... Well, he didn’t say anything to her because she was an elderly woman... But it got on his nerves, too... But that’s the only time.*

Some interviewees told about the condescending looks they get when they are in public places with their families, especially when one of the women of the family is veiled:

Mrs. Osis, union member: *When you are with your mother, me, when I take a walk with my mother, she is veiled... We get looks or...*

Mrs Bendam, union official: *Looks, they can look, but I...*

Mr. Chaïb, union member: *In a way, that’s good, if you’ve been spared of discrimination*

The interviewees all insist on the fact that these experiences, that are very damaging to their sense of self-worth, are very rare. They speak feelingly as they stumble their way through their stories, without finishing their sentences, in low, broken voices that betray a strong feeling of humiliation.

The following extract of a collective interview is a perfect illustration of this. As it is so often the case when sensitive issues are debated, the interviewee brought the subject up at the end of the interview. His colleagues stopped talking, as he told his story in a hushed voice. At moments, he was practically inaudible, and he hesitated on words and phrases, making long pauses between them... whereas it had been necessary earlier in the interview to discretely ask him not to interrupt his colleagues while they were talking:

Q. Have you ever been exposed to discrimination, to racism?

Mr. Chaïb, union official: Who wishes to answer?

Mrs Bendam, union official: Hold on, let me think about it...

Mr. Chaïb: I have had that... [he lowers his voice and becomes almost inaudible at moments, he hesitates a lot and struggles to find the right words...] For instance, when I was looking for a job... Fortunately, it was long before I started working here. They did not look at my qualifications at all or at the contribution

⁴⁸ « Tchache » is a term that designates a casual, imaginative, and rapid way of speaking.

that I could bring... Even though they never said it clearly, they really made me feel... as if they put me at a disadvantage

Q. When you were seeking a job as a baker?

Mr. Chaïb: Yes, my career profile was right for the job, as they were looking for a baker with experience. I was more than qualified for the job, and they said “we’ll call you” and I never heard from them again... Afterwards, I saw that the add was still there, that they still hadn’t found... I understood that... Perhaps I didn’t fit the...

Q. Being of Algerian descent, you couldn’t make a proper “French traditional baguette”?

Mr. Chaïb: Yes, even though I am fully trained to do so, I have all the qualifications required... I am French, first of all! And, ... er... they didn’t give me a chance to... to prove it... They just had me in for a normal interview and then they never contacted me again for the job...

Q. Bakers or supermarkets...?

Mr. Chaïb: No, it mostly happens in smaller baker’s stores. I find that it’s a bit of a shame... Because of my origins... They could have looked at my qualifications... Maybe, physically, I give the impression that I am aggressive or cold, but once you know me, I think that I am a rather pleasant person – I don’t want to seem pretentious or anything... But then I felt that they put me at a disadvantage... I wasn’t shocked, but... Afterwards, unfortunately, you just get used to it, but er...

Mrs Osis : You get used to it?

Mr. Chaïb : Well [he speaks in his normal voice again]... It was, well ... do you want to come in for an interview? When are you free? I had... er ... all the requirements to get the job... but nine times out of ten the interview ended by “Well, we’ll call you”. But, well, they didn’t always call me back...

Q. Did it happen to you several times?

Mr. Chaïb : [lowers his voice] Yes, frequently. [speaks in a normal voice again] there was a labour shortage, and I think that when you are looking for a baker, you’re looking for a baker... You’re not looking for your culture, your... religion or your... [lowers his voice] You’re looking for a baker, first of all. They put me at a disadvantage... But it doesn’t really matter. I got over it (...) and maybe it wasn’t too bad for me after all... [speaks in a normal voice again] Today, I’m at Carrefour.

The initial recruitment of employees at the store based on a “local preference” policy can be analysed as a minority experience, as everybody know that a “local preference” implies the recruitment of persons who are stigmatised twice or thrice (because they are “poor”, because of their ethnic origin, and because of their place of residence). This may explain why the interviewees chose to tell stories of humiliations and discrimination that they had encountered in other settings than at Carrefour, and also why very few stories concern work relations within the workplace.

Also, as a general rule, the interviewees didn’t analyse problems or incidents that they had experienced within the store in the same fashion as they did when these had taken place in another setting.

When these stories concern employees in the store, an analysis is often put forward that explains the incident by an individual person’s choice or behaviour. This is the case, for instance, when interviewees speak of check out assistants who have insulted clients, as if they had lost their self-control (“*she flipped her lid*”).

On the contrary, when interviewees tell of experiences that have occurred on the “outside”, these incidents are often analysed, sometimes implicitly, as having been caused by collective behaviour. This is the case, for instance, when interviewees tell about the retaliations of check out assistants by groups of residents from Quartiers-Nord. We will come back to the issue of relations between employees and customers later (c.f. 4.5 below). However, it should be mentioned that we believe that the distance to the surrounding “environment” expressed by all interviewees, including trade unionists, can be compared to the distance expressed by groups who consider themselves to be “established” as opposed to those that they consider as “outsiders” (Elias and Scotson, 1997). The “us” that shows through indifferent ways throughout the interviews seems to be based on the grounds of a common history that includes

the “generation” of employees who were recruited in 1996 (as is the case of practically every union member that we interviewed). The “cosmopolitanism” that is often put forward in the interviews and the feeling of a shared future seems to bind the employees together.

4.2. Relations Between Colleagues

Most of the interviewees who were employed when the store opened consider that this shared experience laid the foundation for the good working relations that characterize the store today. In spite of certain problems with the management that we’ll come back to later, the very first recruitment and training period at the store opening gave the employees the impression that they were surmounting difficulties together. In the beginning, none of them would spend their breaks in the surrounding shopping centre, and that may have helped create a strong bond between employees and could be another reason why they are on such good terms with each other.

Q. Do you find that the employers are friendly to each other in the store?

Mrs. Bemighi, employee, not a union member: Yes, everybody in the store gets along, and mixes with one another, even between different departments. We share a room where we all have our breaks together(...)

During four years, we never left the store during our breaks. We would have our breaks here because we weren’t insured in case of an accident outside the store. So we never spent time in the shopping centre during our breaks.

Everybody see each other at some point during the day. But if you go to Carrefour Vitrolles, the employees don’t speak to colleagues who work in other departments. I did an internship there for a month, and I spent time in another store, too. They had canteens there so they would not speak to each other. Here, the baker takes a break with his colleagues from the grocery counter... They would never do that over there.

Trade officials from FO explained how important it is for them that working relations are good at the hypermarket, and that they aim: “...to make working hours and so on evolve so that people get along well at work. After all, we spend one third of our life here, so it might as well be in the best conditions”, and they recalled in passing that the divisions between trade unions were due to “people talking about it all the time, which is a shame”.

The strong sense of belonging is, of course, linked to the fact that a high proportion of workers live in Quartiers-Nord. It is, without a doubt, reinforced by their relative ethnic homogeneity. According to the interviewees, in spite of there being some “Black” or “Asian” employees, these groups are minorities at the store. “Mahgrebis” however, are perceived to be a majority group, and they are evaluated by interviewees to represent 20 to 90% of the employees! As they do not have any official data, the interviewees make their own estimations, and often specify “I couldn’t tell you precisely”. However, all speak of important variations according to the departments, to the technical skills that are required, to their prestige or the number of packers employed (these also influence the interviewees’ estimations on the number of women and men).

None of the employees that we met during the survey mentioned racism in their work relations. Quite to the contrary, they all claimed that they had never been victims of racism. The incidents that they told us about all relate to relations between employees and customers. We will get to these later. Both trade officials from CGT and CFDT have been informed about discrimination through national trade union campaigns, and they are all trained to pay attention to these issues. The CFDT unionists say that they work in a store where they have never encountered “any racism, and no sexism” in working relations, and that they “never

heard anything from the staff” about it. However, they say that they often have discussions about these issues:

Mr. Ben Khadi, trade unionist: “At the trade union they fight racial discrimination. There is no question about it.

Q. At a national level ?

At a national level and at the level of the region and “département”. If they hear about any cases of discrimination, they are ready to intervene in order to... stop the... For example (...) if they really hear about cases of racial discrimination or of non-respect of the equality between men and women (we can ask them) how to react in order to find a solution to the problem (..) At the store level, we don't really know how to handle these kinds of situations. We always ask the union for help, in order to get advice on how to react.

FO unionists, however, did not seem to know whether their federation or confederation were leading campaigns against racism...before catching sight of a poster from such a campaign on the trade union's wall (Mrs. Osis: *We've got the guy they need for the photo!*”). They also claim that they have never had to deal with these kinds of problems:

Mr. Chaïb, union official: As I already told you, most of the time we deal with issues that concern the law, and regulations, and so on.

Mrs Bendam, union official: These kinds of... It just never happened here, fortunately! (...) On the contrary, we are all on really good terms together.

4.3. Experience of management

4.3.1. Stereotypes and management “who are not from here”

At the opening of the Continent hypermarket, all managerial staff came from other shops in France, and they had all volunteered to work at the store. When we did our 1996 survey, all the managerial staff that we met spoke with enthusiasm about living an “unusual and enriching experience”: the opening of the group's largest hypermarket in the heart of a poor neighbourhood with many immigrants, and known to be one of the most stigmatized areas in France. They told us that they were particularly interested in the special training offered on how to “manage populations that are a bit more difficult than the ones we usually meet in more traditional stores.” [De Rudder, Poiret, Vourc'h, 1998].

The confrontation between the managerial staff and the newly recruited employees from Quartiers-Nord didn't always go as well as they had hoped, as many workers, such as Mrs Bemighi felt that the managerial staffs was prejudiced. As we saw earlier, she felt that she could “*see it in their eyes, that they thought we were stupid*”. Another employee analyzes the situation as one that brings to mind the colonial era:

Mr. Guévir, a former employee of Continent, union member: *They stuck me with a department manager who was a young shark freshly out of business school, you know...and he was just awful (...). Sometimes I had the feeling that I was living in the colonial era, just how my father had described it to me. That is, we called him Sir (the departmental manager), and he would call us by our first names. So you see, we weren't equal at all. They would feed us with all this pseudo corporate culture, to increase... I believe... I am convinced that when I work, I really believe in it. I know that there are managers and that I should respect them and so on. But they should not treat us like dogs.*

A union member who was initially recruited through the Face Foundation also speaks of the managerial staff's prejudice. However, she firmly believes that there isn't more racism in the store than there is anywhere else:

Mrs Khemissi : *Let's say that in the beginning, it was mainly managerial staff that came down from the North (of France) and so on....and with the reputation that the Quartiers-Nord have and all... That's the main reason... It's a shop... well, the place where we're located... they imagine that we are a shop where... well... but we're not different from any other shop... The clients are all the same... So I don't*

think that there is any more racism here or anything... but it's true that in the beginning, we would really feel that with department managers.

The fact that it was forbidden for employees to speak their mother tongue to clients was perceived as another vexation by one of the interviewees. She believes that the rule was all the more absurd as certain clients in the store could perceive her language skills as an important resource:

Mrs Osis, union member: *And in the beginning when it was still Continental, they told us this thing, that we were not allowed to speak er... our mother tongue. But I wouldn't respect that, because we would have family fathers who would come to the store and who would really not know how to speak French and they would come and ask us for pieces of information...*

Q. clients?

Mr. Chaïb, trade unionist: *But it's important to know how to speak English...*

Q. Yes, it is considered as a relevant skill...

Mrs. Osis : *In the beginning, at Continental, that was forbidden.*

Most interviewees, with some rare exceptions, look positively on the manager that has been in charge of the store for the past two years. One of the rare interviewees to express criticism is one of the persons who acted as a mediator between, on one hand the public powers and the private investors, and on the other hand resident organisations from Quartiers-Nord in 1996. He believes that the new management has no social consideration. To him, the new manager has no interest whatsoever in the living conditions in the neighbourhood. The choice of hiring a psychologist to help employees who have difficulties is analysed as a way of transforming issues that are due to social problems into individual responsibilities.

The manager clearly says that he doesn't wish to put a lot into the neighbourhood:

It's important that these sites do not turn into charities. I believe that that is a huge mistake: to me, success is earning a lot of money. If I continue to loose money, then I am a failure. Otherwise, I'll turn into "Resto du Coeur" (Restaurants of the heart, French charity organisation that serves free meals). The problem is that at a certain point in these kinds of environments, you get trapped, and you forget that. The social environment eats you up to a point where you forget that the aim of any enterprise is to earn money, a lot and fast, and not necessarily at the employees' expenses, but that's normal.

4.3.2. "Expending a lot of effort" : Management and Absenteeism⁴⁹

The manager however claims that it is important to be understanding of the staff and their everyday problems. This way, the enterprise will run better:

There are real social problems, it's true, and I live with it every day. That means that when you are a manager, you have to be able to imagine things that you don't believe even exist. I'm not trained to do it, and it's not my job to take care of a woman who gets beaten up by her husband or to find a solution if an employee finds himself on the street without a flat... I don't know how to deal with that, it's not a part of my job. What my job is to get the machine running, whatever happens. I'm forced to hire the kids. I tell you, it's because I don't have a choice, because that's all that I get, I have to adapt to the environment! (...) What I mean is, we can do it... I believe that we are on the right track, but you have to expend a lot of effort as an employer... extraordinary efforts! It's not easy because at first, you have to understand it, to accept it, and then take it from there. And that means being able to imagine new ways of dealing with it.

The manager explains that he chose to hire a social worker (and not a psychologist!) in order to bring down absenteeism. Also, the social worker deals with a certain amount of problems that department managers, who often do "120% social work", were faced with before:

For instance for the past three months I've had a social worker working here because I realised that we have to do something about workers who just don't show up for work. It's a major issue here. At a certain

⁴⁹ In 2004, there was an 11,6% absenteeism, an increase of 6,4% as compared to the year before.

point it was 12, 13 or 14% of the workforce. And I don't want to fall into the trap that says: "Yes, but that's normal, we are in Marseilles, this is the South". We have this tendency to... (...) So a coach helped me. The first thing that the guy said to me was, "You are 100% responsible for absenteeism". I am ready to acknowledge that, but if you say that to young managers they'll reply "Hold on, on, why are you saying that? It's not my fault if an employee suffers from a gastroenteritis (...) it can happen, but it lasts only one night. The next morning, I may be tired, but it doesn't last a week. If it does last a week it means that they feel better at home in their tower blocks, and that means that the management should work on it so that the employees feel better here than they do at home. It gives its results, not everywhere, but globally, once you understand this.... It means that we, as managers, should think differently.

The manager has made quite a lot of changes in staff management. The human resource department has been closed and today, recruitment procedures are "decentralised", as department managers are responsible for recruiting new staff. Most interviewees welcome these change, even though they give a bigger workload to department manager and supervisors.

According to one of the interviewees, a CGT representative, the department managers and supervisors used to "*have a monopoly (on the access to the top management), but they have lost that now*":

That's what's bothering them. We can go and see the manager directly now, and we don't have to respect the hierarchy and ask the department manager first anymore. We can do without them.

We saw earlier how some managers are suspected of favouritism when they recruit staff. When interviewees speak about management, they are more inclined to criticise department managers and supervisors than they are to criticise the top management:

Mrs Khemissi, trade unionist: It's the middle that gives us trouble, it's what I call the middle, the department managers. It's the middle that bothers us. They are all young wolves, and they are overambitious.

It's the way that the current manager has dealt with the issue of the Ramadan that has earned him his popularity with the interviewees.

4.3.3. Dealing with Ramadan... Giving and Returning the Gift

The Ramadan has been a recurrent issue each year since the opening of the store. Until last year, the only adaptation made by the store was to allow an adjustment of working hours during the Ramadan. Thus, the workers who had declared that they were fasting could have their breaks at more convenient moments. This year, the manager was asked a favour by the workers who were fasting and who wished to eat a snack in the morning, just before the beginning of the day and before they start fasting. They asked the manager whether it would be possible for to get a croissant at the store's baker each morning that they would pay later (at the end of the Ramadan). After having given his authorisation, the manager changed his mind and decided that each day, early in the morning and late at night, a free snack should be offered to all employees.

At Ramadan, that's a thing that they were really happy about. Well, one day a worker came to see me and said: "Sir, for Ramadan, we have to get our breakfast just before seven o'clock. Would you authorize us to get croissants at the store's baker at the opening hour and pay them later?" "Of course", I answered. It was only afterwards that I realised how stupid I'd been! Why not give them free croissants? However, it was obvious that there should be free croissant to everybody, to all employees".

According to the management, however, this initiative that started as a request from practising Muslims, was only possible because of the specificity of Marseilles. In this particular context, minority groups are on good terms with the majority and other minority groups:

That's something that always works out well here... It's not a problem. It would probably be more difficult in Paris or in Lyon because, unfortunately, communities do not mix a lot there. If I'd been a manager there, I might very well just have answered "OK, you can have your croissants and pay later".

The Ramadan in 2005 became an opportunity for employees to share food, to get to know each other better and to increase good working relations. Department managers and supervisors carried out the manager's decision. This is the opinion of FO union members about the management's initiative:

Q. Did any individual or collective demands regarding cultural or religious practise that emerge during conflicts?

Mr. Chaïb, Mrs. Bendam, Mrs. Osis : *No*

Mr. Chaïb : *If you look at those issues you'll find that the management is very social... As regards the Ramadan...*

Mrs. Bendam : *He lets people take breaks... He makes it possible for everybody to practise their religion, etc.*

Mrs. Osis : *He had special cakes made for the Ramadan*

Mr. Chaïb : *And we shouldn't forget that he would ... and that was really great: Between the last meal and the breaking of the fast, the boss offered a meal to all the workers who would be working at the store at this hour.*

Mrs Bendam: *It lasted during the whole month...*

Mr. Chaïb : *He has no obligation to do it, he was just being nice without us having to make any demands or anything. It was at his own initiative...*

Q. Did the believers bring their own food to the store?

Mrs. Bendam : *No, the check out supervisor would prepare the meal so that we could take a break at the moment of the breaking of the fast. A table was set for us...*

The cosmopolitanism that management referred to is also put celebrated by minority union members:

Mr. Chaïb : *At that level there are no problems here, and I hope that it will stay like that... We are a very cosmopolitan store, and they respect that.*

Union members from CGT also express their satisfaction with the initiative that was initially taken in consideration of the store's practising Muslims but that was soon "universalised" to include all employees at the store:

Mrs Khemissi : *One should take into account that this year, the manager, during the whole month of fasting, during the Ramadan, the manager offered us breakfast.*

Mr. Siles : *He asked them to come...*

Q. the Muslims?

Mr. Siles : *Yes, the Muslims*

Q. That is, Muslim employees would declare that they were Muslims?

Mr. Siles : *Yes, yes, before the break of dawn, they would... take their break here, and he would give them breakfast.*

Mrs. Khemissi : *And at night, the check out assistants, as well. One could say that throughout the Ramadan, the management was very generous to both believers and non-believers, you know? It was for everybody, non-Muslims too, for everybody.*

The management's initiative was widely welcomed by the staff, which decided to give something in return. The check out assistants made cakes, especially oriental pastry, that they brought to the store and offered to everybody, and the Muslim employees decided to club together in order to throw a party for the store's entire staff at the end of the Ramadan (Aïd el firt), with beverages and pastry.

It is, of course, highly significant that neither the management neither the supervisors nor

departmental managers mentioned to us that employees had joined collectively to “return the favour”. It is as if the gift that was returned by minorities in the store and that allowed them to find themselves in an exchange on more equal terms has been largely ignored by management (cf. below, 4.6).

4.3.4. The “Islamic Veil”, A Sensitive Issue

None of the four trade unions have made the slightest demands concerning this issue. The interviewees, whether they are Muslims or not, believers or not, refuse to make claims or start conflicts because of religious matters – even though certain union officials are practising Muslims. The case of a woman who chose to hand in her notice after having decided to start wearing a veil is represented as an impulsive action by FO union members.

Q. We’ve heard about this young woman who wore a veil outside of work and who had wished to start wearing it at work...

Mr. Chaïb, union official: *Yes, that did start quite a rumour at the store, but I can’t tell you more about it because I never knew her...*

Mrs. Osis, union member: *She was a friend, she used to work at the check out counter, but she left work because she wanted to. She didn’t want to continue working anymore, she did wear a veil, but she wanted to stop working, too.*

Q. Did she ever get any remarks when she left the store at night and put on her veil?

Mrs Osis: *No.*

Mrs Bendam: *She’s not the only one. At the check out, there are two other women who wear a veil. It was a bit of a shock at the beginning, because it just happened overnight.*

Q. At the check out counter or outside the store?

Mrs. Bendam: *Outside. As soon as she left work, she would put her veil back on.*

Q. And at the check out counter, would she wear something?

Mrs. Bendam : *There was a student who used to wear a veil all day. She would wear a bandana, as they were in fashion, she could get away with it.*

A member of trade union CGT expresses a standpoint that refers to a rigid ideal of secularity, in which he denounces public expressions of religious belief (the famous “ostentatious signs”) and calls for a strict obedience of law and rules⁵⁰, as he shows that to him, wearing a veil is a “defiant” behaviour, that should be punished in the same fashion as stealing or smoking outside of the store’s designated smoking area:

Mr. Siles: *The store’s policies and procedures say that you are not allowed to wear a big cross... They should not come to the store wearing a veil. It says so very clearly in the store’s policies, there are things that you should respect... There is only one place where you are allowed to smoke. In the rest of the store... it’s forbidden. You are not allowed to steal. You are not allowed to eat the groceries at the store. If you do not respect these procedures, you’re committing a mistake.*

As the manager sees it, there is not really any “risk” that the store may one day be confronted with a “veil issue”:

I once had a problem with a veil, a check out assistant started covering her head, but then she left by herself. But I don’t think that people appreciate it, especially Muslims, they are “Marseillais”, and they suffer from it, especially the second or third generations...

I believe that only one thing would really shock me, if they came to work wearing a veil, maybe, but I have never experienced it, and I wouldn’t know how I’d react, but it’s true that it is a subject that concerns everybody in France. But I believe that as a sign of respect, they would never chose by themselves to come here wearing a veil.

Q. *Somebody told me that an employee used to wear a veil to work, but that she left...*

⁵⁰ The rules of the store, signed April 22nd, 2005 state: “As a sign of respect to our customers and in order to avoid offending anybody’s sensibilities, the employees who are in contact with the public are required not to wear any ostentatious signs of belonging to a political group, a trade union, or a religion. See annex 3, on the case law concerning religious practise at work.

Yes, that's true, I heard about it too. It was a person who used to arrive to work wearing a veil, but before she went to the check out, she would take it off, she would be dressed normally. When she left work at night, she would put it on again. So she understood the system, that was her private life, and she knew that within the store, she couldn't be dressed like that.

4.4. Experience Among Trade Unionists

The four big confederations CGT, CFDT, FO, and CFTC are all represented at Carrefour-Grand Littoral⁵¹. No union member, from ordinary members to union officials have mentioned difficulties that they've met, neither in terms of trade union activities, neither in terms of racist discrimination. Their descriptions are similar to the ones concerning relations with colleagues

An incident that many interviewees mentioned could, nevertheless, have caused some tensions, if it had occurred elsewhere or under different circumstances. A theft that had been organised by CGT union members was discovered, and at the time, the local CGT union official was an employee of Maghrebi origin. Everybody agree that she was an honest woman who would never have taken part in these deeds, but they also talk about her as of somebody of "a difficult character". Nobody seems to want to discredit her personally, nor to draw any general conclusions of a racist nature.

The manager merely expressed satisfaction because the CGT has been losing ground as a consequence of the incident:

Around 2000 or 2001 (...) a major event occurred. We discovered – I say "we", even though I hadn't arrived at the store yet - that major thefts were taking place, and that a number of CGT union officials were mixed up in it. It was an important event because the CGT union official, an honest woman, she is a virulent, but honest woman, threw in the towel, and two years and a half ago, the CGT was eliminated at the elections. People would think: these are the people who are supposed to be fighting for us, who claim to be fighting for us, but really, all they did was steal things from the store. So this event ended up putting things into the right perspective...

Today, only one person represents the CGT at the workers' council, where the union used to have four representatives. The union recognizes that this event had serious consequences for their credibility, but they believe that they will soon succeed in surmounting this crisis that they consider as temporary:

Mrs. Khemissi : the CGT used to be in the majority, before the new manager came.

Mr. Siles : But then there was a major problem and the union was shattered. Four or five of our representatives were involved in some thefts, and it ruined everything for us. It was difficult to explain to people that just because some people were thieves, we weren't all involved in it...

Mrs Khemissi: Today, we are going uphill again, but it's difficult, It's really, really difficult.

Mr. Siles: And on top of that, even though there was clear evidence against them, they wouldn't admit that they had been stealing. It's really a shame, because we used to be in the majority.

Mrs. Khemissi : They just carried it out so as to dismiss the CGT... The management didn't really bother to make things clear, it wasn't clear at all with management, at the time, the former manager was still here.

Mr. Siles : With (the new manager) there is a better dialogue.

Mrs. Khemissi : He has good skills: he listens to us, which was not the case of the other. That's already one good asset we've got. I wouldn't say that he gives us everything that we ask for, but it's much better than it used to be.

⁵¹ There is also an independent union, CAT that has little influence in the store. Considering the subject of this survey we chose not to interview the representative of this union, as we preferred concentrating our work on the organisations that are involved in combating racism and discrimination at a European and national level.

Trade union CFDT didn't have any seats at the worker's council before, but today, the union has gained two seats as a consequence of the aforementioned events:

Mrs. Patrat: At the time where the store was still Continent and not Carrefour yet, the CGT union representative was a Maghrebi woman. She was really something! Really something! Once she put the store upside down for a week, she instigated a seven days strike... She was really....

Mr. Ben Khadi : Well, she carried a lot of weight. Even at a regional level at the union, what do you think?

Mrs Patrat : Yes, yes, yes, at a regional level, too. She even carried a lot of weight at the central worker's council. Because when she showed up at the central worker's council she would get all fired up! When I went there the first time and I told them that I was from Grand Littoral, they all gave me these looks, you know... I said that I didn't have anything to do with... that it was somebody else who...

The further up one looks in the hierarchy of any of the union federations, the less one is likely to find persons of Maghrebi or African origin. Both CFDT and CGT recognize this as a fact. FO, however, say that they aim to recruit and promote more people of these origins in their federation. Certain union representatives are nevertheless of foreign origin, as their parents or they themselves have migrated to France from other European countries. They never miss an occasion to point it out, and sometimes use their own background to legitimate criticism of migrants from third world countries or criticism of the latter's children.

Thus, it is a recognized fact that few minorities are promoted within trade unions:

Mr. Ben Khadi, trade unionist: At the level of the store, our superior is Maghrebi. So there's nothing to worry about there. At a trade union level, however, er... I mean, I've only been at the trade union for a year, and I don't know a great many people there... I just know the general secretaries. And they are not... They are not Maghrebis. But at a Federation level, at an interethnic level, we are not well represented. It's really just union representatives. It's just the average union members. It's not people who have really high positions. If you have a look at the local level, only, you'll find that there's nobody.

A federal unionist from FO considers that the core of the problem is to be found in the recruitment of members. He believes that the reasons why few migrants become members of trade unions are to be found with the migrants themselves (because of fear, or ignorance), but he has faith in the idea that efforts made by trade unions and the passing of time will eventually solve the problem:

I don't know, but I'm sure that if you take 2000 union members, you'll find that at least 500 of them are immigrants. And the number is constantly increasing. The more awareness there is, the more we try to recruit them, the more they are ready to become members... Because the thing is, that a lot of them are afraid to become members of a trade union, because of ignorance, because of historical reasons, because some of them have known extremist trade unions or state trade unions... or I don't know what, or maybe it was frowned upon in their home countries, or maybe it was even dangerous to be a member of a union. But as soon as they understand how the system works here or as soon as they see that an immigrant is their union representative, then it changes everything. In our lists, you'll find that there are more and more foreigners.

At a local level, the interviewees often hesitate when asked what seems to explain the low participation of minorities in union work. The following exchange between two unionists is revealing. One of the interviewees is of French origin, born in Algeria, and the other one is of Maghrebi origin, and it is clearly very difficult for both of them to speak openly about racism. The fact that we insisted on bringing up the issue made them adjust their points of view to one another's. At the end of their exchange, they do not totally dismiss an interpretation that implies racist discrimination. However, both insist on the idea that minorities are "not very involved" in unions:

Q. Do people present themselves or... Do you believe that there is a certain level of self-censorship?

Mrs Patrat, trade unionist: You know, we are only aware of what's going on at our own store. We don't always know what goes on at the federation and all that...

Mr. Ben Khadi, union member: Yes, yes, that's true, we're not very interested in...

Mrs Patrat: I actually used to be a representative at the central worker's council, and I would go to monthly meetings there, and you would see some Maghrebis there, even though they were a minority. Pfff... I think that out of fifty persons, there would be one Maghrebi. At Vitrolles there are none.

Mr. Ben Khadi: I sometimes go to meetings at the Carrefour coordination, where you get to meet all the representatives from all over France. We are three or four. There are, we are, two Maghrebis, two coloured people. Well, that's four.

Q. So it's rare that they are represented...

Mr. Ben Khadi: Yes, I get the impression that...

Mrs Patrat: But maybe it's also because they don't get involved...

Mr. Ben Khadi: Yes, or else it's... There are several possible explanations...

Q. Yes, that's part of what we're looking for...

Mrs. Patrat: Anyhow, I don't think that that's the answer. Whether you're white, black, yellow, green... when you're defending somebody else, people don't look at your colour.

Q. Yes, but doesn't it mean something? When people aren't represented in the hierarchy?

Mr. Ben Khadi: If it's something that they want, it does have a meaning. But if it's something that no one wants... If people who are of immigrant background do not want to get involved or are simply not interested by...

Mrs. Patrat: You know, at the union you have to get really involved, there is a lot of work to do, and we often get disappointments... We often have to fight the people we are supposed to represent, too. Because, well, once you've defended someone, they don't need you anymore, and they start seeing you as somebody who is worthless. And if it doesn't work out as expected, then! That's among the reasons why so maybe people are not interested in getting involved in that kind of work.

Q. Yes, but why would people of Maghrebi or African origins be less inclined to take on responsibilities within trade unions? I'm not thinking of people who have just arrived but of people of the third or fourth generation?

Mr. Ben Khadi: That is the question...

Mrs. Patrat: I'll ask the question, I'll answer it (laughs)

Q. Well, we'll come back in another ten years and take up the survey again (laughs)

Mr. Ben Khadi: (laughs) maybe there'll be a little more...

Q. No, but I was wondering if people may have mental blocks?

Mrs Patrat: No, to us, the mental blocks they may have are due to the fact that they don't feel like getting involved.

Mr. Ben Khadi: I admit that I wanted to get involved, so that's what I did, I got involved. I started a year ago. I don't know if I'll continue and make a career, but...

It's very revealing that in another interview, during which Mr. Ben Khadi was alone with the interviewer, he gave another explanation that was much more clear-cut than the one he gave when he was interviewed with his colleague:

Mr. Ben Khadi: I don't know whether it comes from society or the trade union - this thing that prevents people of foreign origin from evolving. I believe that it probably stems from French society that is more... I always compare France to other countries such as Great Britain or the United States of America, where you see people of foreign origin who are high up in the hierarchy. There are no... preconceived ideas about that... It's true that in France there is no... It's French society that isn't ready to accept these kinds of... changes.

Above all, certain interviewees believe that whether it is at the trade union or elsewhere, expectations are always much higher to "immigrants" than they are to others:

Mr. Arhat, union official: It's always the same, isn't it? You just have to be much better than everybody else. You have to kill yourself at work, prove that you're good, that you're efficient. You have to be the best, those are the conditions.

The union members who do succeed in going up in the hierarchy and getting over the "invisible wall" of promotion meet other obstacles, such as the story a national union official told us. He once met another union official of French or European origin. Without knowing anything else about the interviewee than his phenotype, and, maybe, his last name, she asked him if he had any daughters, and if he had the intention of "making them wear the veil" and whether he would accept that they'd "marry non-maghrebis".

4.5. Experience of clients

Federation representatives often tell of violent clashes between clients and employees, particularly at check out counters, and they do not hide that “immigrants” are frequently victims of these incidents. Federation representatives find that the specific training that the Carrefour group offers to their employees that teaches them how to deal with conflicts on their workplace is insufficient.

Check out counters is strategic places for the store as well as for customers, as this is where customers pay. The wait at the check out often irritates customers and check out assistants are often under a lot of stress. The check outs are often the only place that clients and employees meet in a self-service store, and their contact is important to the store’s image. The check out counters are also under special surveillance as they are the main exits of the shop, and as they are the most strategic place to control theft and violence.

At the Carrefour-Grand Littoral store, however, the interviewees do not describe an aggressive environment, and they never analyse any events in terms of racism.

It seems as though incidents between clients and employees in the store are rather rare. However they occur more frequently with check out assistants than any other groups of employees..

Q. Have there been any specific demands from check out assistants within the union?

Mrs Khemissi: Concerning security, we did ask that a button be installed at each check out counter, so that if there is a problem, she simply presses it, the cash register is locked, and she can leave. There are no problems with that. No, they have arranged it so that... But I can tell you, it's impossible to control everything!

The conflicts that have been described to us by the interviewees have either been provoked by a customer or by a check out assistant who refused to put up with the way she was treated by a client. None of the unionists that we met at the hypermarket have witnessed any of these incidents, not even the unionists who are or used to be check out assistants. The stories that we were told were always vague, and it was rarely specified at what time the event occurred (“once, an employee had...”, “sometime, it happened that...”). The impression that we got from these stories was that the employees feel that there is a real potential threat at work.

Q. Have you had to interfere in conflicts with clients, for instance?

Mr. Siles, union member: But we don't handle security matters. That's not us...

Mrs. Khemissi, union official: Check out assistants do interfere in conflicts, as you mainly see conflicts with the clients at the check out counters, you sometimes get very aggressive clients. Some check out assistants have been subjected to physical abuse.

Mr. Siles: When a customer waits too long... Or you believe that she hasn't paid for something, or if you suspect that she's been stealing... When the client doesn't want to admit it...

Q. Suspicion of stealing?

Mr. Siles: Suspicion of stealing, it can be many things... The client is not satisfied... the check out assistant can get that too... If there is no price in the item, well... You can have ten clients waiting (...). And the clients can get very aggressive....

Mrs Khemissi: They just leave the trolley there, and go away, and the customers who are behind are kept waiting, and they start to complain....

Q. Have there ever been any racist abuse from clients on the pretence of having been kept waiting or having been accused of stealing?

Mr. Siles: Yes, yes, that already occurred...

Mrs. Khemissi: There was even a client once, she took, you know the stick that we put between the clients' purchases. She took that and hit the check out assistant with it (...) another one was hit on the head with a coat hanger! (...) And yet three gypsies attacked another colleague. There have been cases of abuse.

Q. Physical abuse?

Mrs. Khemissi: Yes, physical, a lot (...) A woman was hit in the eye. She has a problem with her eye because a customer hit her... The check out counter is a hard place to work, really, really hard.

Mr. Siles: Here there are... In the neighbourhood that are capable of coming back with ten others and then...

Mrs Khemissi : Well, I don't blame it on all the clients. The check out assistant may have provoked it too, but I mean, at the check out, abuse is...

In spite of the great number of stories that we collected during the survey that told of abuse from clients, most interviewees would tell us that these incidents are very rare (“*Once*”, “*It was the only time*”, ...). The interviewees also often express doubts when they tell these stories (“*I couldn't tell you*”, “*We don't know everything*”, “*we remembered it after it happened*”. Also, the racist aspect of abuse is generally played down, or even questioned (“*There was a slight... but it's nothing important, really, no*”, “*just for fun, that's all*”):

Mrs. Bemighi, employee, not a union member: Yes once (shortly after the opening in 1996), I was insulted by a client: “You're stealing work from the French”...

Q. Did you mention it to your superiors?

Mrs Bemighi : He was with his wife and she was pulling his arm. He was drunk. There were clients around us, but there were no colleagues. That was the only time. But you see other aggressive attitudes like throwing clothes on the floor... without any racist comments, but... No, it only happened once... between colleagues we often speak about the clients' attitudes, but it's the same thing everywhere. In other shops it can get worse. Here, it's a self-service store, sometimes the clients take things and leave them on the wrong shelves.

The interviewees are very cautious when they tell us about these incidents:

Q. What kinds of conflicts?

Mr. Ben Khadi, union official: *Nothing to do with discrimination. They were just conflicts at the check out counter, related to purchasing and paying.*

Q. and does it ever lead to racist abuse: “your cashier is slow because ...?”

Mr. Ben Khadi : *No, I never heard about that kind of conflicts. Mostly, it's because the client is irritated and then it escalates. Clients that get all worked up. It never came to racist abuse. I've never heard about such a situation turning into racism.*

Employees who are involved in union work share this analysis, whether they are ordinary members or union representatives and whether they belong to a minority or not:

Mrs. Khemissi, union official: No, I couldn't tell you. You know, when you hear about it after it happened, you don't know if it was really racism or not. You can't tell if that girl was a victim of abuse or not.

Mr. Siles, union member: And you get different versions of the same story, so you cannot...

Q. you get several versions?

Mr. Siles et Mrs Khemissi: Yes, yes, it can go really fast.

Mr. Siles: It's a shop where there are many rumours and a small rumour quickly turns into a major tragedy!

Mrs. Khemissi: Recently, a client attacked a young girl. But we later found out that this young girl had insulted the client in the first place, so you see...

Mr. Siles: They don't tell us everything....

Mrs. Khemissi: You know, we try to get as much information as possible, to know what really happened before we take sides.

Mr. Siles: We see that with the employer, with the manager, etc. But we do not know everything... We learn that there is this and that and that. So why didn't you tell me?

As we already mentioned earlier, the behaviour of employees is often related with many details and is often explained by personal traits, while the behaviour of clients is described in a general, global, fashion. One could analyse this as being the spoken expression of a distinction between the “established” and “outsiders, that reinforces the feeling of staff solidarity and a feeling of security within the hypermarket.

However, the fact that the interviewees refuse to identify certain acts as “racist” or certain groups as “troublemakers” seem, on the contrary, to stem from a wish to avoid further stigmatisation of the residents of the surrounding neighbourhood. Many of the interviewees originate from this neighbourhood, and others still live in it. Thus, the image attributed to the Quartiers-Nord weighs heavily upon them. Quite at the opposite, employees from many other hypermarkets tend to wish to accentuate their difference from the residents of the neighbourhoods that surround their store in order to avoid any depreciating “contamination”. Employees at Carrefour-Grand Littoral, however, seem to have chosen a strategy characterised by a discreet solidarity. The fact that recruitment is still made at a local basis, in spite of the fact that the store’s changing management have tried to recruit their workers elsewhere, has contributed to solidifying the staff’s cohesion and has given the workers a feeling of belonging that is both territorial and social.

4.6. When There Is No Racism...

As we’ve seen throughout this chapter, the employees at the hypermarket are keen to express that their working relations are never tainted with racism, neither between workers and management, nor among colleagues. None of the three store managers who have been in charge of the store since 1996, whether they were working for Continent or Carrefour, have ever been suspected of racism by any of the interviewees, either because of the circumstances or because of the manager’s own origin:

Q. Have there ever been any racist issues that were attributed to the manager?

Mrs Khemissi, CGT union official: But even our manager is of foreign origin... He couldn’t say things like that, it wouldn’t set an example. You might accept it from a pure French person, I’ll tell you... that kind of comments... But from a stranger... You’d tell him : “but you’re a foreigner yourself”, so it’s difficult. You have to be fair, he says it himself, that he is the son of immigrants, of foreign origin.

Mr. Siles, union member: He once that he would never tolerate anything like that, he would never accept it.

Mrs Khemissi: No, he wouldn’t like that to happen in his store. And also, I’ll tell you, it wouldn’t be good for the store if it came out. You know, rumours can get around quickly, people here know workers at other stores⁵².

The store’s “cosmopolitanism”, is both displayed as a fact (both indisputable and essential) and as a shared value (that should be promoted) and which is closely connected to a celebration of the harmony between employees (“we are all very close”).

Asymmetrical relations in the store are mainly presented as being due to class and to the department managers’ and supervisors’ prejudice towards employees (in the past or today):

MR. Guévir, former employer, union member: I felt as if I were ill. How can I explain it to you? I was unemployed, but I felt as though I had a disease and that it was my fault! That I was supposed to justify it, and that I should prove that I could stop being ill. I’m actually shocked by this, by this kind of way of looking at us as if we had a disease...

For many interviewees, the structural asymmetry between managers and employees is comparable to the structural asymmetry that characterize the relations between members of the majority and minority:

Mr. Guévir, former employee, union member: There are not just origins, you know, when I speak of origins, I also mean social origins, class, etc.

⁵² Mrs Khemissi is however aware of issues related to racism as she is member of an industrial tribunal

Some interviewees however reported situations that were stained by racism. In all cases, however, racism and “class-ism” are linked. The most characteristic examples took place at the opening of the store, as we already mentioned.

The fact that the higher up one looks at the hierarchy, the less minorities one sees – within the store as well as within the union – is, sometimes reluctantly, seen as an expression of “prevailing” racism, without an identified or identifiable “culprit”. (cf. above 3.2 and 4.4)

Mr. Guévir :It reveals something about French society as well, doesn't it?

Mr. Ben Khadi : I don't know if it comes from society or the trade union or anything (...) Maybe French society is not ready to accept these kinds of change.

From another point of view, it would be interesting to know how big the proportion of unqualified workers who have not been promoted is, while taking into account what their level of training and experience. Among the interviewees, several would complain that “they didn't get their chance”. They always use euphemisms and avoid clearly stating whether they believe that there is a connection between their origin and the fact that they are not promoted:

Mr. Hamsa, union official: I was experienced and I thought that might be useful. I worked here from the start, I know the neighbourhood really well, the residents... I thought that my experience was valuable and that they might be able to use it. But no. I was hired for the job, but I was treated as if I didn't have any useful knowledge.

Mr. Guévir, former employee, union member: What shocked me was the department manager trainees who have stayed department manager trainees since the opening of the store. And of course, they were all of Maghrebi origin, you see...

Even more subtly, the fact that no mention was made of the party thrown by “Muslim” employees at the end of the Ramadan (cf. 4.3.3.) also testifies that there is an asymmetry between the majority group and minorities at the store. All employees showed their gratitude to the manager for having given a free snack to all employees during the Ramadan. The manager shows that he is proud of the gift he gave his employees, but he simply ignores the fact that the employees returned the gift, as if he has forgotten it. He even goes so far as to complain of the lack of reciprocity that characterises the staff “*People are so ungrateful. When you make an effort they simply don't return it*”(cf. 3.1.2)!

In a similar fashion, as we saw earlier, the workers' linguistic abilities that could have been recognised as a resource and as valuable skills for successful customer relations, were completely discredited by management. When the store opened, it was even forbidden for employees to speak their mother tongue to customers. Management feared that if customers and employees spoke another language than French, it would create a “space” for exchanges between workers and clients that the management couldn't control. Hence, they suspected it to cover for connivance or collusion between clients and customers. Minority languages were thus not only disqualified but also linked to a criminalisation of minorities in particular. This was experienced as all the more unjustified as one of the interviewees actually “disobeyed” orders in order to help customers at the store who were elderly immigrants with a poor knowledge of French.

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When we carried out the first survey in 1996, we identified a very specific dynamic that characterised the first wave of recruitment at the hypermarket (Continent, that later became Carrefour) located in the Grand Littoral Shopping Centre. [De Rudder, Poiret, Vourc'h,

1997]. This dynamic made it possible for the various actors to find negotiation methods and transparent recruitment procedures that created a consensus between the various parties that had very different interests and who were sometimes even hostile to one another (the enterprise, the public powers, the residents, various organisations,...). What we identified at the time as “the Quartiers-Nord dialectics” allowed each party to evaluate the choice of a local preference policy and their implication in the project as a success. The recruitment policy was even identified as a legitimate form of “positive discrimination”, at the time. This legitimacy relied on the fact that no explicit references were made to ethnic criteria, which would have been unacceptable legally, politically, and socially. The criteria that was officially selected and on the basis of which the recruitment policies were implemented was developed on a socio-geographic basis that had been validated by various public bodies, and that of course, implicitly included ethnic categorisations.

Shortly after the opening of the store, internal interethnic relations were described as devoid of any racism. All managers had been recruited within the group and had come to Marseilles from other regions of France, and three out of four employees were recruited in Quartiers-Nord. In the beginning their adjustment to what was represented as a “shared adventure” seemed to work smoothly. Now that time has elapsed, the employees denounce the discrimination that they were victims of at the time of the opening, and the humiliation that they felt at the time. The management used to pride itself of the low level of absenteeism and of the check out assistants’ “desire to be trained, to progress”. The level of absenteeism has, however, steadily increased, and promotions are very rare, as we pointed out earlier. The manager, who is the third one to have been in charge of the store since the opening, however stays under the impression that he is doing pioneer work:

I’m struggling here, and I often tell colleagues: “Keep an eye on what’s going on at Grand Littoral because this is what you are going to experience in the future. When the older generations will retire, you will have to work with the same young people that I work with today, so you really ought to keep an eye on what we’re doing”. I’ve just got ten years of advance on them, that’s what it is.

However, one cannot dismiss that working relations within the store are unusual. We heard many stories that show that the employees at the store get along really well, especially if one compares the store to other hypermarkets. Power relations between the majority group and minorities seem to be less asymmetrical. The fact that interviewees didn’t mention racism and, when asked, assured us that working relations are exempt of racism also show that interethnic relations in the store are not tense.

Globally, and in spite of the many changes that the store has undergone in nine years, one can only conclude that the shared definition of the situation of the various parties hasn’t changed. The “contract” between the manager, the department managers and supervisors as well as the workers is based on a definition of “friendly” relations within the store, and on the promise that recruitment policies will continue to give a priority to Quartiers-Nord residents, so that the ethnic composition of workers will not “whiten” with time. “Cosmopolitanism” is represented as a shared value.

The workers are obviously attached to the store, to a point where some employees prefer giving up on promotions that would lead them to work in another store. The fear of “moving”, that many of the employees share, is connected to the feeling that they are protected against racism at the store, and that moving stores might expose them to discrimination.

The attachment that interviewees describe to the surrounding neighbourhood is similar. The majority of the employees originate from Quartiers-Nord and most of them still live in the

neighbourhood. The employees follow new recruitment procedures closely, as they fear that the local preference policy may not be respected.

Even though there is a tendency among employees to define an “Us” in opposition to a “They” characterised by customers who are different and more or less dangerous, the dynamic of border creation that one can observe in other stores is limited by the fact that many employees come from Quartiers-Nord, just as the customers do.

This shared definition of the situation however implies certain compromises. Everybody thus agree that wearing an “Islamic” veil in the store is a “menace”. Even before it was forbidden by the store’s rules, it seemed clear that there was a border that shouldn’t be crossed, and everybody seem relieved that the check out assistant who wore a veil decided to leave. (*“She didn’t want to continue working here, she was wearing a veil, but she did want to stop working here, too”*). The staffs make other kinds of compromises (*“she sorted something out”*), such as wearing a plastic bag as a glove when they handle pork meat.

The absence of any forms of racism is part of this definition of the situation. It probably acts as a break on the feeling of unequal treatment that is sometimes felt in the interviews, and makes interviewees see these inequalities as being the responsibility of anonymous actors (such as “French society”).

5. RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLE. CONCLUSION

The sector of trade and services occupies more than 5 million wage earners, that is 20 % of working population. And the rate of unionization is there extremely weak, is, to an estimate of DARES, 2,57 % [2001].

In an extremely competitive and comparatively depressed economic system, the big distribution with food predominance knows an erosion of its market shares. In the sector of supermarkets, the group Carrefour, leader in France, which faces up a « war of prices » benefits in discounters and contributes to the detachment of the " attraction " of its non-specialized stores.

It is in this context that the chain saw again its wage policy in fall: « *at the given moment it was necessary to recover at the level of the market!* », so notes a person in charge of a hypermarket. This reorientation had immediate consequences on the payments (salaries, premium of profit-sharing) and pulled(entailed). This reorientation had immediate consequences to remunerations (wages, bonus of profit-sharing) and drew away — extremely rare phenomenon in this branch of activity - a series of social movements in 2005 (local or national strikes, punctual occupations). All the trade union movements so makes of the purchasing power and the preservation of the related social advantages the heart of their claiming platforms, with the revaluation of the in time partial contracts.

The Carrefour hypermarket of Grand Littoral in Marseille does not escape this tropism of unions, and the main part of the demands is there hardly different of those the other stores of the group.

However, this store differs on numerous points of the other stores of the group. Not only it is the biggest of France and it is implanted that in the middle of popular cities of accommodation, but the conditions which presided over its installation in the Quartiers-Nord of Marseille continue, about ten years later, to mark profoundly all the local protagonists.

During all the period going of the construction to the opening of the commercial center, the population living in the big cities of social housing surrounding mobilized to obtain jobs arousing, in reply, unprecedented mobilization of the partners of the operation, from the public authorities (prefecture, services of the employment to the commercial promoters (real-estate investor, commercial group), including certain trade-union or associations. The economic necessity of realizing the center and the, policy one to maintain the law and order ended in the implementation, in 1995-1996, of a specific device of recruitment of the staff of the hypermarket intended to privilege the hiring of the local population, living in Quartiers-Nord and, more particularly, those of the XVth and XVIth districts.

These two districts, considered "difficult", were those in whom unemployment rates were among the highest of the region, and where live a very strong proportion of persons of foreign nationality, or, especially, presented as descendant of this immigration of workforce settled in these districts for decades. "Immigrants", " children of immigrants " or " young people of foreign origin ", unemployed persons, "socially disadvantaged persons", all seemed to belong to these categories of the population stigmatized as belonging to the poorest, the most dangerous classes, incapable to be incorporated into the staff of a company rather inclined to consider them as unfit and unwanted, as show of it the policies of recruitment of many other hypermarkets

Although the mobilization sharply decreased in intensity, the staff of this store remains very sensitive to the questions around the recruitment and promotions. Unions, which began to become established two years after the opening, took back in their account the requirement of a popular recruitment quite giving way to minorities. As we underlined it, although the subject is only approached rarely officially, they are very attentive to the "composition" of the staff. So, while being an acceptor the new speech of the Direction on the "professionalization" and the valuation of the skills, they watch that the geographic release(extension) of the pond of hiring, Quartiers-Nord in the quite whole region, even in the whole national territory, is not translated, according to their own expression, , by a "whitening" of the staff. This attitude shows the fact that these organizations integrated the idea, widely spread in Marseille, that to be "inhabitant of the Quartier-Nord" also means being minority ("North African", "Comoran", "Gypsy", etc.). However, the current tendency to the gliding of a demand of priority of hiring on territorial foundation towards a system based on the control of criteria of origin is delicate to handle, because it "converts" explicitly references socially and legally justifiable in legally and socially illicit references. In fact, for our interlocutors, it is less a question of promoting a " positive discrimination " to ethnic base that to forbid the appeal to such criteria "to whiten" the staff. For all that, to bring out a "ethnic" demand of the unspoken and the implicit contain the risk of breaking the tacit agreement at present current and of questioning that, after W.I. Thomas, we called a shared " definition of the situation ".

This obstacle explains partly that none of the unions tries to advance publicly a speech centred on the constitution of a minority solidarity within the hypermarket, knowing, by experience that, in the French context, profoundly marked by the denunciation of the "communautarism", such orientations would probably have the effect of turning around against them.

Another reason seems linked to the peculiarity of "cosmopolitanism " of Marseilles. We saw, in the chapter 3, that the affirmation, to our interlocutors, of a strong identity of Marseilles was conjugated with the affirmation of other memberships, French nationality, first, and national origin foreign or of minority religion, then. Françoise Lorcerie, regarding the secondary school students of Marseilles, underlines the same « plurivocity of identifications », supported on the promotion of « cosmopolitanism », as social reality and as value, which we found in the Carrefour-Grand Littoral [Lorcerie, 2005.2]. She takes back, regarding these young persons, concept of « pluralist integration » worked out by John Higham [1982; orig ed. 1975], which seems also adapted to the context of the hypermarket in which we led the survey.

These elements of context explain undoubtedly the consensual unanimity which succeeds to minimize importance and frequency of what could be, in other circumstances, interpreted as situations or of incidents with racist connotation, that it is in internal professional relations in the store or with the customers. Debates on these topics (hiring, promotions, racism) within the union organizations, between them or with direction, stay on an informal mode and make the object of no militant advertising. They do not stay completely in a silence imposed by unilateral relations of domination; they are not either published as major controversial stakes. This tacit convention also results, is also related to the fact that the great majority of the activists and union representatives for this hypermarket come from the peculiar process which was implemented during its opening. These activists, in spite of the divisions inside the French trade unionism, share with pride this common history which allowed them to overcome the stigma and to show that themselves and their colleagues were perfectly on their place and able of performing their job as any other employee of Continent, then Carrefour.

The "friendly" atmosphere of the store bases largely on a precarious balance between silence and attentiveness, which has nothing of an indifference, on the contrary. Two examples of recent events illustrate this very particular balance. The discovery, by the Management, of a theft organized by members of CGT, of which the local person in charge and a part of the protagonists was of origin from the Maghreb, would have probably, in the other circumstances, provoked a conflict or, at least important tensions. It was moreover the case, very recently (in May, 2005), in a hypermarket close to that where we investigated, where the person in charge of CGT met itself accused of defending a thief, its origin having been evoked as factor of complicity. In Grand Littoral, there was no skid. There was not manipulation of facts, neither to accuse the "Maghrebi", or else the union activists to be " all thieves ", nor to suspect direction of being racist. And if the CGT paid these criminal facts by the loss of three delegates to following professional elections, all our interviewing, whatever is their hierarchic position or their union affiliation, agree to acknowledge on one hand, the seriousness of facts and, on the other hand, the perfect probity of the ex-representative.

From the opening of the store, the timetables of the pauses of the wage earners who fast during the period of Ramadan made the object of developments negotiated case by case with the management, without Direction adopting an official position therefore on this subject. The meal offered by the Direction to the entire staff during the last Ramadan is, from this point of view, a "premiere", as far as it shows publicly the taking into consideration of the cultural characteristics of a part of the manpower. It is not certain that this initiative would have received the same enthusiastic reception in another hypermarket, and the persons whom we met are often conscious of it.. It's the same for the initiative of the "Moslem" employees to invite in turn the staff to celebrate together the break of the fast. This one did not strike certainly so much the spirits and is little mentioned. For all that, it was able to be publicly taken and realized.

It remains some delicate points which could threaten this balance in the professional relations. The one who was mostly evoked by our interlocutors concerns the " Islamic scarf ». This question has nothing specific in the Carrefour of Grand Littoral, because it makes debate, in France, in particular in public service, and that the jurisprudence is not totally arrested as regards private companies. The internal regulation of Carrefour, negotiated and signed by the Direction (and the trade » unions, stipulates: " it is called back that by respect for the clientele and to shock none of the sensibilities that it can represent, the staff in touch with the public would not wear of manifestly ostentatious signs with political, trade-union or religious character ». However, the exact appreciation of the fact that is " an Islamic scarf " and of its "manifestly ostentatious" character is far from being fixed. In the hypermarket of Littoral it exists until now, it seems, a laic consensus and, in a lesser measure, a practice of the compromise. Until now, there was no conflict on this subject

It remains a shared fear that a conflict on this subject can appear if a person decided to break deliberately the tacit agreement, fear the more important as of the question could divide the staff and, probably even, the syndicates, according to not conventional ethnic and political lines of division in the working relations.

Another delicate point concerns the promotions and the qualifications. The offer of current training allows to reach the functions of supervisor or management only on the condition of geographic mobility. According to the poverty and precariousness of their living conditions, a

good part of the employees cannot envisage a mutation without risking a considerable deterioration of its economic and social resources (move, rehousing, networks of entr' mother's help and amicable, etc).

Besides, this store is still relatively "young", and the staff is manifestly attached to it — attachment which comes to be transplanted on the feeling of membership in the "Marseillaise community ". These obstacles, are only partially specific to this hypermarket, but they are doubled because of the history and of the current reality of its recruitment there. The employees not or little considered, mainly stemming Quartiers-Nord, accept *nolens volens* for soon ten years, not only of hard constraints in schedules, in contract, etc., but also a "rules of the game" which imposes them a hierarchy systematically " come moreover ".

Largely, these employees conquered a "normal" social and occupational status there which they could consider rightly previously inaccessible. They have good reasons for dreading a transplantation which would oblige them to begin again a real "assault course", in a social universe possibly even more hostile, in particular in racism. In Marseille, in the Quartiers-Nord, in very hypermarket, they acquired a fragile, but real position, of " established ". Nothing allows them to believe that by going away to progress hierarchically, they would not meet themselves again, and in a even more violent and possibly durable way, in " outsider's " position.

The frustration in possibility promotion is already sensitive: some of our interlocutors say themselves "resigned", the others regret that " we did not give them their luck(chance) ", the others, finally, hope to succeed, in spite of the difficulties, in progressing.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE TRADE UNION PRACTICE

The relatively exceptional aspects of the history and recruitment of the hypermarket Continent-Grand Littoral (became Carrefour-Grand Littoral two years ago) could let think that no generalisation may be drawn of. Nevertheless, this case study, renewed in nine years of interval, can, on the contrary, and in a lot of considerations, be considered as an exemple of situations and problems which, as the Direction says, have strong probability to appear more and more frequently to the future.

The sector of the large-scale retail, actually, continues to recruit and knows a strong turn-over. In spite of a rate of very weak unionization, movements of protest are now emerging. The racist discrimination in the recruitment is there still very wide-spread, even if a tendency to move the ethnic composition of the employees closer to that of the zone of establishment develops, linked to the relative crisis of clientele which hypermarkets know to day in front of the competition of discounters.

Concerning discrimination in the employment, the situation, in France, is in full evolution, passing of an almost total immunity in a more and more strong public denunciation. Besides recent legislative progress (2001) introducing in the French law the notion of indirect discrimination and modifications in producing of evidence of the discriminatory treatment, an independent institution has just been set up (Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations : HALDE).

A part of the employers undertook in favour of the “ variety” in the recruitments (Charte de la diversité), pleading in the same time for the legalization of “ ethnic” statistics in companies. Experiments on this subject are in progress, in particular within the retail group Casino, and the initiatives multiply, often gathering public authorities, institutions, companies and associations, of which some concern the procedures of recruitment and look like more or less the one who was adopted in Marseille in 1995-96 (Ikéa).

6.1. Fill the gap between the national level and the local level

About racism, the trade union confederations limited themselves for a long time to the reminder of their basic principles, notably in favour of the equality of the rights and of the salaries between French and foreign workers and for the denunciation of the extreme-Right positions. For some years, however, they more sharply undertook in favour of the fight against the sexist and racist discriminations. For their part, the trade union federations of the retail sector face extremely contrasted situations, certain being situated on the verge of the legality, others concerning powerful groups drawn up in the international plan, where the forms of exercise and expression of the racism are extremely different, from the overexploitation unbridled to the subtle differentiation, from ethnic exclusion to the ethnic « niche ».

For the first ones as for seconds, the « coverage » of the field of the racist or ethnist disparities is, at this stage of their structuralization, almost impossible. As a result, except the cases of « spontaneous » mobilizations where they bring their help to the employees, their commitments have only little of relay on the ground. As for their constant reminder in the law, which is sometimes translated by the « dream » of the « exemplary lawsuit », they recognize themselves their limits.

So, while they exercise a constant attentiveness on the « ethnic » composition of the staff and while they are permanently alarmed, in spite of their visible serenity, on all which could be a product of racism, most of our interlocutors unionists in the hypermarket Carrefour-Grand Littoral ignore the programs of action of their organizations. At the most, they think that they would find assistance if it was necessary to them to begin an action on this subject.

For this subject, the comparison with the sexism is enlightening. French trade unions put a long time before making equality men/women a so important demand as that all the trade-union authorities seizes it. But today, from the top to the bottom of the trade-union hierarchy, the persons whom we interrogated are perfectly capable of describing the state of the situation, of evoking the progress and the blockings which they know in the subject and to exercise a certain attentiveness, even relative. Concerning the racist disparities, on the contrary, they switch from generalities to anecdotes, without appearing to be able to supply a synthetic analysis of the realities, and without even have a real idea of the means of fight they could envisage outside « case by case ». This is enough to show that the fight against the discriminations and the racism does not constitute a priority, but especially, it shows that Unions, in spite of the undeniable individual commitment of certain activists, did not take the necessary capacities to know really the facts and look, as a consequence, for the means to change them.

From another point of view — intern this one to the federal unions — the current hiatus between the base of recruitment, which counts very numerous members of minority groups, and their representation in the various hierarchical levels (local, regional, of group, federal, confederate) cannot probably goes on as it is. The campaigns of unionization, such that envisaged by CGT, will prolong probably the current tendency to the emergence of new activists from the base. It is not sure at all that the internal democracy and the time will be enough to make « go out of the rank », trade-union responsables « descending from immigration ». The demand of recognition, at this level, is strong, even if it remains still latent and contained in a vague denunciation of the mode of functioning of « the French society », not less confusedly defined. The consciousness of having to do « the double of the others » to be accepted — which prevails in the working relations and with the employers — begin to aim at unions. If these are not careful there, this delay for co-opting and for making elect minority activists will be deeply blamed them very soon, and it will damage all the more their image as their equalitarian principles, constantly shown, will be taken without any trouble for lack of application.

6.2. To go beyond the assimilationist horizon

The confederal responsables, as well as federal responsables of the commerce and services sector, whom we interviewed expressed strong hesitations towards the preferential recruitments in the urban or peripheric popular districts where are implanted hypermarkets, as moreover towards any plan of action intended to surmount the obstacles to the recruitment of the members of a minority group. More or less well known by them, the experiment of Marseille Grand Littoral, arouses their reserve.

Their mistrust towards any voluntarist plan of action is all the stronger as they associate it spontaneously, on one hand in a « difference of treatment » of which they consider that it risks to turn around against the very interested, and on the other hand in the adoption of « ethnic quatae », that they reject on principle as « anti-republicans ».

This more or less rigid position — sometimes, however, pragmatically accommodated according to local « grounds » — also feeds the formal refusal of any appeal to plan of action

intended to promote the representation of members of the groups stigmatized within the trade-union authorities. In the same way, if they easily denounce the employers, they tend to minimize the racism which can be expressed inside the working collectives as inside the trade-union themselves.

Besides, many of them adheres more or less to stereotypes concerning the inhabitants of these districts, in particular « young-descendants-of-immigration » (« jeunes-issus-de-l'immigration »). They so participate of a public opinion tending to criminalize these last ones, even if they grant that « they are not all the same ».

It results from all this a certain closing towards the persons from these groups, suspected a priori not to be capable of representing all the employees.

Actually, the claimed universalism and the support in the republican ethos come along with strongly normative expectations. The possible entrance of members of a minority groups to the various levels of trade unions is envisaged only on condition that it modifies nor the functioning of the organization (if we except the composition of the meals served during the meetings) neither the priorities of the program. It is, finally, the pure and simple assimilation which is expected from the possible newcomers.

Unions tend to behave with the minority employees of the business as « established » towards eternal « outsiders ». These last ones, however, share mostly the refusal of the différencialism, to which they are themselves very sensitive, as the universalist values. It is thus in terms of opening, at the same moment equalitarian and pluralistic, and thus in terms of trade-union democracy, that the current obstacle to the promotion of the members of minorities within the various levels of the trade-union hierarchy can be surmounted.

6.3. Share the knowledge: trade-union information and training

Union Confederations, as well as certain federations, notably those of the business and the services, are engaged, at the European level, in cooperations which bring them to discuss and to adopt official texts about the fight against racism and xenophobia (cf. Charter UNITED EUROPE), as in the promotion of equality between men and women.

Little or badly diffused, not explained, these texts are hardly the object of an appropriation by the union activists situated at the various intermediate levels. So, the speeches which we collected, if they continue rightly to appeal to the notion of equality between French and foreign workers, consider more with difficulty the discriminations against French persons, who are nor foreign neither immigrant. The general denunciation of the overexploitation of the most powerless masks the weakness of analyses on the more subtle discriminations, and often structural. The reduction of these discriminations in anecdotal « cases » proves this, as the frequent insistence on the difficulties of the appeal to the justice.

Globally, the racism, and its various modalities of expression, are the object by no means of a shared knowledge. The circulation of the information is failing between a superior level which expresses principal positions and statements adopted at the international or national level, and a militant basis who accumulates observations and experiences which do not find a place to discuss it and learn for the collective action.

The example of the obstacles to the promotion of the employees of Carrefour-Grand Littoral could, from this point of view, be interesting. It is not certain that this problem is really specific to this hypermarket, and he could usefully be the object of discussions within unions in sight, if need be, to make propositions to free this type of situation.

Actually, the initiatives for the fight against racism, xenophobia and discriminations are dependent on individual wills and there does not seem to be a subject of internal training organized for the activists who would like to undertake more before in this domain.

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The big trade union confederations always wanted shielded from the racism and considered a long time that a reminder of their founder principles was sufficient, underlining rather the importance of the fights for the equality of the rights between national and foreign workers. These actions and mobilizations always occupy an important and necessary place in the work which lead the activists in charge of the unions of the retail. Leaflets in mothertongue, specific attention worn in wild exploitation of a precarious workforce, even without status, to require employers the respect for the Labour Law and the employees, are subjects which return frequently in the description which the responsables made us of the sector.

The current situation requires more and other thing of the social partners, and, as we have seen before, it quickly evolves. It is up to the unions to take the measure and to take the means to face it, from the head to the bottom of their apparatus.

The remark of Du Bois in the 40s, about the black workers in the USA, could apply to a lot of situations lived directly by the groups stigmatized because of their real or supposed origins : « The most violent cause of suffering does not come from the capitalism, but from their white workers friends (...) It is not sufficient to say that the capitalism encourages the oppression and uses it in its own purposes. This can be an excuse for the poor superstitious Russian farmers and the poor white men of the South (...), but the major part of the white workers in the USA is neither ignorant nor fanatical. It knows exactly what happens and what it means » [quoted by Rubio, 2001].

ANNEXE 1 :

LIST of INTERVIEWEES

We led 30 discussions, among which 25 were directly exploitable:

- 4 national representatives for the Confederations of the trade of the main confederations of trade unions: FO, CFDT and CGT (n° 1 à 4);
- 1 representative for a local Union CGT (n°5);
- 2 representatives for the [Agence locale pour l'emploi](#) (public service of employment) (n°6);
- 1 member of the Direction of the supermarket Continent - Big Coastal (n°7);
- 6 union activists elected by the hypermarket Continent-Grand Littoral (n°8 to 13);
- 3 employees unionized by the hypermarket Continent-Grand Littoral (n°14 to 16);
- 3 members non-unionized by the supervision of the hypermarket Continent-Grand Littoral (n°17 in 19);
- 1 ancient employee unionized by the hypermarket Continent-Grand Littoral (n°20);
- 2 representatives for an antiracist association (MRAP) (n°21 and 22);
- 1 representative for an association for the job of the minority publics (Oracle) (n° 23)
- 1 representative for parents' association of pupils (n°24);
- 1 journalist (n°25).

	Nom *	Niveau	Activité/ Appartenance	Fonctions	Origine minoritaire **
1		One national representative	FO. Fédération du commerce alimentaire et de la grande distribution		yougoslave
2		One national representative	CFDT. Fédération des services		
3		One national representative	CGT. Fédération des personnels du commerce, de la distribution et des services		
4		One national representative	CFDT-groupe Carrefour	Membre CICE (Carrefour Europe)	
5	M. DASSALI		CGT. Union Locale (Marseille, Quartiers-Nord)		
6	Mme DASTRET		ANPE-Bougainville (Marseille)		
7		Direction	Carrefour-Grand Littoral		italienne
8	M. BEN KHADI	activist employee	CFDT. Section locale	Délégué syndical. Élu au CE	maghrébine
9	Mme PATRAT	activist employee	CFDT. Section locale	Élue au CE	

10	M. ARHAT	activist employee	CFDT. Section locale	Délégué personnel	maghrébine
11	Mme KHEMISSI	activist employee	CGT. Section locale	Déléguée personnel. Élue Prud'homme	
12	M. CHAIB	activist employee	FO. Section locale	Délégué personnel	algérienne
13	Mme BENDAM	activist employee	FO. Section locale	Élue au CE	
14	M. HAMSA	activist employee	CFTC. Section locale		maghrébine
15	M. SILES	unionized employee	CGT. Section locale		
16	Mme OSIS	unionized employee	FO Section locale		turque
17	Mme TORTI	Head of service			italienne
18	Mme DIEUDON	Supervisor			gitane
19	M. LAROCCA	Underhead of service			corse
20	M. GUÉVIR	Ex- employee Carrefour-Grand Littoral, unionized	CGT		marocaine
21	M. TRIOLET	Responsable ONG	MRAP, section locale de Marseille		
22	Mme ISABE	ONG	MRAP, section locale de Marseille		
23	M. ABDELRAHMAN	ONG representative	Association <i>Oracle</i> pour l'insertion professionnelle des enfants de migrants		maghrébine
24	Mme BAMGHERI	ONG Employee	Association de parents- relais <i>Chebba</i> (Marseille, Quartiers- Nord)		algérienne
25	Mme JORY	Journalist	<i>La Provence.</i>		

*Tous les noms propres ont été changés.

**Tous nos interlocuteurs sont de nationalité française. Les origines mentionnées sont celles qui ont fait l'objet d'une auto-déclaration.

ANNEXE 2 :

LIST OF USED ACRONYMS

1. Trade unions

CAT : Confédération autonome du travail.

CE : Comité d'entreprise des magasins ayant plus de 50 salariés

CFDT : Confédération française démocratique du travail

CFTC : Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens

CGC : Confédération générale des cadres

CGT : Confédération générale du travail

FO ou CGT-FO : Force ouvrière

SUD : Fédération des syndicats Solidaires, Unitaires et Démocratiques. *Ce syndicat a été créé en 1988 par des militants parisiens des postes et télécommunications ayant quitté la CFDT.*

UD : Union départementale

UL : Union locale

UNI-EUROPE : Réseau d'organisations syndicales européennes régionales et globales à la fois. *En Europe, avec ses sept millions de membres, UNI-EUROPE revendique son rôle actif à Bruxelles, défendant le principe du dialogue social auprès de l'industrie et de la Commission européenne. Il existe une subdivision en charge des salariés du commerce : UNI-EUROPE-COMMERCE.*

UNSA : Union nationale des syndicats autonomes. *Organisation syndicale interprofessionnelle créée en 1993 par sept organisations catégorielles ayant quitté le G10 (différents syndicats de la fonction publique, des caisses d'épargne, des journalistes, des transports, et la Fédération générale des syndicats de l'agroalimentaire regroupées depuis 1981.*

2. Employers' organizations :

MEDEF : Mouvement des Entrepreneurs de France. *Nouvelle appellation du Conseil National du Patronat Français (CNPF) depuis octobre 1998. Réseau français d'entrepreneurs.*

FCD : Fédération (patronale) du commerce et de la distribution

3. Autres :

ANPE : Agence nationale pour l'emploi

APEC : Agence pour l'emploi des cadres

Bac et Bac + : Niveau d'étude sanctionné par l'examen du baccalauréat (12 années d'études primaires et secondaires) et nombre d'années d'études postérieures à cet examen.

CCE : Comité centraux d'entreprise rassemblant tous les CE de la même enseigne présents en France

CICE : Comité de groupe au niveau des 25 pays de l'UE où une entreprise est représentée

CDD : Contrat (de travail) à durée déterminée

CDI : Contrat (de travail) à durée indéterminée

Contrat-jeune ou emploi-jeune :

DIF : Droit individuel à la formation

EDF : Électricité de France (organisme public en cours de privatisation)

GSA : Grandes surfaces à prédominance alimentaire

MRAP : Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples. *O.N.G.*

SNCF : Société nationale des chemins de fer français. *Entreprise publique de transport ferroviaire.*

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