

The Nose of Hate

Chantal Jaquet

The paper analyses the olfactory figures of hate and the various kinds of discrimination based on smell. It shows how figures of hate express themselves in the olfactory form of rejecting the other who stinks. All of the categories considered to be contemptible or inferior are olfactorily devalued. The paper examines successively the nose of anti-Semitism and racism, the nose of homophobia and sexism, the olfactory social discriminations, and the fiction of the stinking enemy. One may ask why this theme of the other's bad smell so thoroughly permeates the discourses of rejection. One of the reasons is doubtlessly related to the uncontrollable nature of smell, which invades space and intimacy, and betrays your identity. Eyes can be turned away or be deceived, but the nose knows. It is supposed to sniff out otherness and perceive invisible differences despite all efforts to hide them. | *Keywords: Homophobia, Racism, Sexism, Smell, Social Discrimination*

1. Introduction

We are bodies that smell: smelling the other or being smelled always entails discovering the intimate part of individuals and penetrating their inner sphere. This is because odour is an emanation from the body, the externalisation of an internal space beyond the frontiers of the skin. The other's smell is their flesh exhaled and inhaled by myself, both from the inside out and from the outside in. The other extends their hold on the world, expanding his body through its smells. Odour thus makes it possible to incorporate the other through his familiar smell and abolishes the distance between my body and theirs. This is what Sartre (1950, p. 174) very clearly brings to light in his *Baudelaire*: "The smell of a body is the body itself which we breathe in with our nose and mouth, which we suddenly possess as though it were its most secret substance and, to put the matter in a nutshell, its nature. The smell which is in me is the fusion of the body of the other person with my body; but it is the other person's body with the flesh removed, a vaporized body which has become completely itself but which has become a volatile spirit." Through its smell, the other person's body becomes spirit and expresses its quintessentialised nature. By inhaling it, I possess it, yet it slips away right under my nose, because the odours escaping from it vanish into thin air, and present themselves to me like an ephemeral skin. The other is therefore both

caught and slips through our fingers. In its presence full of absence, smell takes a hold of me and gives me a hold on the other like ectoplasm. "Smelling the beloved," Bernard Marcadé (1987, p. 146) tells us, "is being in the illusion of her presence for a few instants. It is believing that it is possible to access her interior, that is, ultimately, have access to her soul. But smell, like the soul, is purely a trick. We take pleasure in it, we revel in it, we get lost in it, but we never possess it. In this sense, smell is what identifies the other's irreducibility." A fleeting trace of secret intimacy, smell thus reveals the other person in his essence as a distant neighbor.

By metonymy, how the other person smells becomes an expression of a close or, on the contrary, distant relationship, and implies a value judgment on his entire being. In ordinary language, "he passes the smell test" expresses complicity, a trusting relationship, and means that I have figured out his personality and I do not see any hint of trickery or deceit. The expression "I smell something fishy," on the other hand, introduces a reservation since it implies an accusation that the other has an ulterior motive that I saw coming and have detected thanks to my shrewdness. In a more negative register, if I say "I smell a rat," I am indicating not only that I do not quite get him, that he is shifty and difficult to pin down, but I am also insinuating that I have suspicions about his reliability and I am showing my distrust. Lastly, in a more negative register, if I say "he stinks," I affirm without a shadow of a doubt that I cannot stand him; he arouses repulsion in me and all of the accompanying hostile emotions. All of these expressions borrowed from the register of smell demonstrate how the essence of the other is perceived, identified, assimilated, or rejected, depending on whether it is the subject of a negative or positive judgment.

The sense of smell plays a key role in various figures of speech expressing love and hate. In the register of hate, it becomes the principle of judgment of negative value. My goal is to examine what I call the "Nose of Hate" and the different uses of odours as a means to exclude. The paper analyses the various kinds of discrimination based on smell and their expressions in hate discourse.

Generally speaking, verbs and slang turns of phrase such "to sniff at," "to turn one's nose up at," "to hold one's nose," "he gets up my nose," as well as the abundance of adjectives and nouns borrowed from the register of things that smell bad. Thus we speak of a guy who "stinks to high heaven," is "rotten to the core," "revolting," "foul," "a piece of garbage," "a filthy pig," "scum," "dirtbag," and "a piece of shit," etc. In a nutshell, the person I hate smells bad. More peculiarly, figures of hate express themselves in the olfactory form of rejecting the other who stinks. All of the categories considered to be contemptible or inferior are olfactorily devalued. It is necessary then to embrace the main figures of olfactory hate and to try to explain why this theme of the other's bad smell so thoroughly permeates the discourses of rejection. In this regard, I will examine successively the nose of anti-Semitism and racism, the nose of homophobia and sexism, the olfactory social discriminations, and the fiction of the stinking enemy.

2. The nose of anti-Semitism and racism

Thus, forms of hate such as anti-Semitism come with the stigmatisation of the other's smell, and have even resulted in the fabrication of the specific concept of the "*foetor judaïcus*," or the Jewish stench, which has been feeding into anti-Semitic discourse since the Middle-Ages.¹ All we have to do is look at how the anti-Semitic press attacked Léon Blum. The leader of the Popular Front was called a "pile of trash," a "scumbag," a "smelly camel" that "perspires that sort of Middle-Eastern vapour that all his kind give off, that greasy wool odor so typical of them."² In the same register as the *foetor judaïcus*, in Arabic "jiffa" refers to the characteristic odor of Jews that makes it possible to identify and ostracize them. In his *Manifeste archaïque*, Laurent Dispot denounces this nasal fraud: "Racism is thus a science of scent-sensitive people: You have to have a nose for recognizing Jews, and at the same time Jews are recognizable by their noses. It is time to turn our noses up at these things" (Dispot, 1987, p. 181).³

In general, racism, particularly towards Blacks, goes hand in hand with olfactory discrimination. Blacks are beings that smell in both senses of the term. On the one hand, they are cursed with a rough sensuality marked by the primacy of the senses of smell and taste over the other senses, which are judged to be nobler. In his *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, Gobineau (1853) thus believes that the Black race is characterised by a predominance of smell and taste, ready to sniff and devour indiscriminately, while the white race, less influenced by the senses, is inclined by nature to speculation. Indifferent to bad smells, Blacks wallow in stink and are content with any flavour. On the other hand, Blacks give off a characteristic odour that stinks up the air. The stereotype of the foul smell of sweating and stinking Black people is a leitmotif in colonialist and racist literature. It even shows through the scientific works of a naturalist like Buffon (1803, p. 303), who does not shy away from writing that "Negroes" from Angola and Cap Verde "smell so bad when they become hot and that the air of the places they have been passed through remains infected for more than a quarter of an hour."⁴ Smell was frequently used as a marker of racial identity by missionaries in accounts of their travels, as a sign of irrefutable recognition. The Dominican friar André Chevillard thus writes: "one knows that there is a Black due to the goat stench that is emitted from the sweat of their bodies" (Chevillard, 1659, cited in Peabody, p. 116).⁵ Carl Vogt, in his *Leçons sur l'homme*, goes even further by

¹ Fabre-Vassas, in her book *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, and the Pig*, shows that the theme of the Jewish stench is recurrent and is a cliché, repeated even in medical treatises: "It is this stench and the filth in which they wallow every day in their homes, like a pig in its trough, that makes them subject to inflammations of the skin, to flushes, and to other stinking illnesses that cause them to lower their heads all the time" (Fabre-Vassas, 1997).

² On this subject, see David Le Breton's (2003, 123ff) article *Les mises en scène olfactives de l'autre*. English translation from David Le Breton (2017, p. 168).

³ "Le racisme est ainsi une 'science' de gens bien-nez: il faut avoir du nez pour reconnaître les Juifs et en même temps les juifs sont reconnaissables à leur nez. Il est temps d'en avoir plein le nez de ces histoires."

⁴ "Sentent si mauvais lorsqu'ils sont échauffés que l'air des endroits par où ils sont passés en est infecté pendant plus d'un quart d'heure."

⁵ See *Annales des Antilles* 11 (1963, p. 72). English translation of the passage by Peabody (2004).

considering that smell is a characteristic of race: “The exhalations from the skin also have their specific characteristics, which in certain races do not disappear in any circumstances, even the most scrupulous cleanliness. These characteristic odors of race should in no way be confused with the exhalations that originate from type of food, and can be noted in the same race [...] the specific odor of the Negro remains the same whatever attention he pays to cleanliness or whatever food he takes. It belongs to the species as musk does to the musk deer that produces it” (Vogt, 1865, p. 161). The stench of the Black person then becomes the expression of his bestiality, of his savage and primitive nature, of his naturalness that cannot be tamed by any form of culture or civilization. It is the stigmata of barbarian sub-humanity and flagrant evidence of racial inequality.

It is striking to note that, in racist discourse, disqualification by smell occupies a prominent position. Facial features, skin colour, language, or the sound of the voice may be condemned as ugly and subject to rejection, but it is the other’s real or imaginary smell that arouses the strongest disgust and triggers the most violent comments. Ethnologist Jean-Pierre Jardel⁶ notes that although colour and smell play the role of markers of discrimination in para-anthropological literature about Caribbean Blacks, the former marks a phenotypical distinction with Europeans that is possible to get used to, while the latter always has a strong negative connotation. To back up his argument, he cites Paul Reboux’s (1931, p. 39) comment about Caribbean Blacks that “these Blacks of African origin, even with a complexion the color of licorice, are characterized by a civility in which a moral culture worthy of esteem comes to the fore”,⁷ but, on the other hand, he judges the “smell of the Negro [to be] powerful and intolerable,” (Reboux, 1931, p. 88) several pages later. So colour is okay, but surely not smell!

We may wonder why this theme of the other’s bad smell so thoroughly permeates racist discourse. One of the reasons the olfactory motif is so full of rejection is doubtlessly related to the uncontrollable nature of smell, which invades space and betrays your identity. Eyes can be turned away or be deceived, but the nose knows. It is supposed to sniff out otherness and flush out ethnic differences despite all efforts to hide them.⁸ Is it not the greatest fear, deep down, that the other is lumped together with me and resembles me to the point where I am so taken in that even I can no longer tell the difference? The nose is supposed to remind forgetful or imperceptive eyes, with the help of foul-smelling fictions, of the ethnic particularity hidden behind the mask of culture. This phenomenon of disqualification by the nose is widespread and also extends to sexual orientation.

⁶ See his article *De la couleur et de l’odeur de l’Autre dans la littérature para-anthropologique : représentation de l’altérité antillaise et idéologie raciale* (Jardel, 1999).

⁷ Cited in Jardel (1999, p. 88): “ces Noirs d’origine africaine sont, même avec un teint couleur de réglisse, d’une urbanité où s’atteste une culture morale digne d’estime”.

⁸ This is what Jean-Pierre Albert (1999, p. 13) underscores: “The sense of smell, as the sense of the invisible and intuitive knowledge, could become an infallible means of detecting the least obvious otherness: The other that resembles us (and wants to resemble us) does not elude our nose, precisely because it is the least cultivated sense. And its discriminatory abilities count as evidence of the naturalness of the differences (or incompatibilities) it is supposed to make us aware of.”

3. The nose of homophobia

Indeed, homophobia is also expressed in the form of the olfactory stigmatisation. Homosexuals, marked by anality, are supposed to smell of latrines and excrement. In his *Etudes de pathologie sociale, Les deux prostitutions*, published in 1887, Félix Carlier already highlights how homosexuals are attracted by the proximity of latrines and their mustiness.⁹ The visceral rejection and slurs take various forms, such as equating homosexuality with bestiality, deviance, a disease, or disgrace, but the most frequently encountered theme revolves around smelliness, which gives rise to scatological comments. Prejudice dies hard, despite the evolution of society. This is what clearly emerges from Serge Simon's book, *Homophobie, 2004, France*, a compilation of letters, e-mails, and drawings from among the four thousand messages received by the mayor of Bègles, Noël Mamère, when he conducted a gay wedding in his community. A local citizen, who wished the young couple a happy honeymoon behind bars, commented ironically on the "happiness of making love in our body's sweet-scented sewage plant" (Simon, 2004, p. 50).¹⁰ One of the messages is a good summary of the olfactory content of the slurs since it is entirely written in the register of foul-smelling dirtiness: "You filthy bastard, you're really a scumbag, a dirty pig, a whore, a piece of garbage, scum, a freak, a dirty pig, really disgusting, a filthy bastard, asshole, douchebag, dirty pimp" (Simon, 2004, p. 57; my translation). In these letters, which sometimes even contain dirty toilet paper, the nose of hate clearly shows through. It consists of not being able to stomach homosexuals and people supporting them by attributing an excremental stench to them. This is the recurring theme in this medley of insults, behind which the entire scatological imagination is revealed along with its procession of fascination and anxiety about something that has been stigmatised since childhood as dirty and smelly. It is above all male homosexuality conceptualised on the basis of the model of anal intercourse that is the target of violent rejection. Lesbians, however, do not come up smelling like roses either, since in this case homophobia is coupled with olfactory sexism, as this recommendation addressed to the mayor demonstrates, for example: "When you marry two dykes, it is in your interest to negotiate a blowjob or be sprayed with smelly clam juice" (Simon, 2004, p. 52).

4. The nose of sexism

Sexism, in turn, is fed by slanderous epithets borrowed from the register of smell. Like Black people, women are often considered to be endowed with a more developed sense of smell than men, a sign of a greater naturalness and a lesser intellectuality. Generally speaking, body odour in women is more subject to repression than in men, where it often seems like a sign of virility. A woman with a strong body odour will be perceived as a slob and will be accused of negligence. She will inevitably inspire disgust, while a man may be

⁹ "The odor exhaled by these sorts of places is one of the circumstances which a very numerous category of pederasts seek, as it is indispensable to their pleasures" (Carlier, 1887, p. 305), as cited in Alain Corbin (Corbin, 1986, p. 271, note 27).

¹⁰ We translate: "bonheur de faire l'amour dans la station d'épuration de notre organisme aux senteurs suaves." (Simon, 2004, p. 50).

subjected to a simple smile or a joke before being called a pig or a smelly goat. The rules of hygiene are thus less strict for a man than for a woman. Women are disqualified through olfactory discrimination. A woman of ill repute is thus called a *putain* in French, which etymologically comes from the verb *puer* or 'to stink'. Like the Italian *puttana*, or the Spanish or Portuguese *puta*, the French noun is derived from the Latin verb *putere*, which means 'to stink, to smell bad', or the adjective *putidus*, which means 'fetid, stinky'. A woman of easy virtue can also be seen as a *salope* [slut]. Although the origin of this word is uncertain, it relates to dirtiness and applies to unsavoury people and by extension to loose women. It must also be noted that when the term is used to insult a man, it is even more contemptuous than the French adjective *salaud*, since it even denies the virility of the man we wish to denigrate.

Putain, cocotte [chick], or *morue* [tart, literally codfish], women are sometimes called names evoking a smelly vagina, or considered to be dirty and impure. Their menstrual blood is very often conceived of as a foul-smelling or even evil flow. In Jewish medical literature, for example, period (*vesset*) is also called *nidda* (impurity). For a very long time, it was equated with a putrid stain, so much so that "we may wonder whether the anorexia that so many mystics condemned themselves to did not only have the effect of, but also the goal of, erasing this stain by provoking a saintly amenorrhea" (Bruit Zaidman et al., 2001, p. 30). In *Aroma. The Cultural History of Smell*, Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott thus observe that for the Desana, the smell of menstrual blood is the most disgusting and polluting of all smells. Menstruating women are considered to be like wild animals, escaping the influence of cultural norms, hence the need to control them. When she has her first period, the young girl is locked in a small room where she receives a visit from a shaman three times a day, who blows tobacco smoke on her in order to purify her (Classen et al., 1995, p. 136). The anthropologists also note that for the Hua of the highlands of Papua New Guinea, menstrual odours are harmful to men and particularly to initiates who must avoid some varieties of mushrooms, possums, and yams that are said to smell of *be'ftu*, or menstruation, otherwise their descendants would degenerate (*Ibidem*). This belief in the harmful nature of menstrual odour, which goes as far as contaminating food and making anything a menstruating woman touches impure, is widespread in many cultures.¹¹ It is linked to the idea that menstrual blood is of a putrid and excremental nature.

¹¹ It is frequent in Arabic culture, and particularly in the United Arab Emirates, where women on their periods are considered impure and do not have the right to use perfume until their period is over and they have taken a ritual bath. There are, however, exceptions to this repulsion, for example among the Ongee or Dassanetch of Ethiopia, for whom menstrual blood does not have a significant smell; it is called "the rain of a woman" and is synonymous with fertility. For more details, see Classen et al. (1995, pp. 137ff). This impure blood can also be charged with a seductive connotation. This is what Alain Corbin (1986, p. 44) notes, when he analyzes the ambiguous status of menstruation in the 19th century: "Menses were an aspect of the purging process and therefore exercised a putrid effect; but they were also impregnated with subtle vapors transmitted by the essence of life. From the viewpoint of the Montpellier school the woman at that point in her cycle was conveying the vitality of nature; she was emitting the products of a strong animality, she was making an appeal for fertilization, dispersing seductive effluvia."

Whatever the language, men have come to forge a vocabulary stigmatising feminine stink. In Persian, for example, the word *lakhan*, which evokes the fetidness of a sweaty body in general, applies specifically to women to describe the smell of their genitals. Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave (1999, p. 105) also recalls that in Moorish Spain, a woman's breath could be a legitimate motive for divorce and that in this domain, "the vocabulary is very precise: *nashar*, 'a smell that unfolds and spreads' is also 'a women's breath, the odor of her nose and armpits when she wakes'."¹² Ironically enough, neither rigorous hygiene nor exemplary moral purity can overcome this feminine stink; only a man can put things right, at least if we believe doctor Trotula, who claims in her *De Passionibus mulierum* that abstinence and the build-up of their own unexpelled seed cause infections in virgins and widows.¹³

Invoking this stink also sometimes serves as an excuse or an alibi to justify sexual mutilations such as excision. Without going into a complex analysis of cultural and religious motives that govern this practice, the removal of the clitoris, which deprives women of the possibility of experiencing pleasure, also has the function of purifying them and thereby preventing them from being unfaithful and overcome by their sexual desires. Excision is an ancestral rite of passage to which girls must submit during the *Salindé* (purification) festival. As Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene's film *Mooladé* (The right of asylum) shows, little girls must bear the physical pain without whining or crying and are elevated to the status of pure women who will be the honour of their husbands and families. An unexcised girl is a *bilakoro*; she is impure for marriage and therefore cannot find a husband: "The *bilakoro* smells bad." The lead actress, Fatoumata Coulibaly, echoes this line from the film in an interview where she explains that men "say that as long as a girl isn't excised, she is unclean, she is dirty, they don't have the right to marry her."¹⁴ Unexcised women are therefore devalued and abandoned because a bad smell is attributed to them.

5. Olfactory social discrimination

Social stigmatisation through the sense of smell can be added on top of sexual or racial discrimination. In the 19th century, social class, particularly in France, was based on an olfactory hierarchy. The discreet perfume of the bourgeoisie is set against the stench of the working class, who are dirty and foul-smelling. In a letter addressed to Mme Bonenfant dated May 2, 1842, Flaubert echoes this repulsion with regard to the common people: "The journey back was excellent, apart from the stench exhaled by my neighbors on the top deck, the proletarians you saw when I was leaving. I have scarcely slept at night and I have lost my cap." In French slang, *pue-la-sueur* (literally, "stinks-of-sweat") designates the labourer, unskilled worker, a prole or manual worker. The rich excoriate the odour of the poor bathed in sweat, thus justifying the legitimacy

¹² "Le vocabulaire est très précis: *nashar*, 'odeur qui se déploie et se répand' is also 'l'haleine de la femme, l'odeur de son nez et de ses aisselles au réveil'."

¹³ As cited in Laurence Moulinier (2001, pp. 96–97).

¹⁴ You can see her interview on <http://www.commeaucinema.com/interviews=29756.html> Accessed 1 July 2010.

of their exploitation and keeping them at a distance due to fear of the risk of infection.¹⁵ The labouring classes deserve to be treated with little consideration; they live like coarse beasts, do not know about hygiene and crowd together in shacks. They have little use for luxury and would not be able to use money astutely. What is the use of raising their salaries under these circumstances?

The insistence on the fetidness of the labouring classes has the goal of signalling the risk of infection, reveals the fear of being contaminated, and the need to establish deodorisation strategies. As Alain Corbin (1986, p. 143) notes, disinfection and submission are symbolically equated: “The enormous fetidity of social catastrophes, whether riots or epidemics, gave rise to the notion that making the proletariat odourless would promote discipline and work among them.” The author of *The Foul and the Fragrant* thus shows how all the lower social categories were the targets of this olfactory discrimination. Among tradesmen, it is the rag picker, reeking of excrement and corpses, who gets the award for worst smelling, hence the common French expression *sale comme un chiffonnier* (dirty like a ragpicker). But it is not only the fetid labourer, the dung-smelling farmer, or the grubby tradesman that smells bad. Domestic servants are also steeped in the odour of their condition, such that you have to air out as much as possible the places they have stayed, or even ban them from the nursery, as Hufeland, recommends (Corbin, 1986, p. 70). This olfactory social stigmatisation extends to the figure of the prefect and the teacher and reflects contempt for the lower classes.¹⁶

The olfactory social discrimination continues even when excluded groups, motivated by a desire to integrate, come to use the costly perfumes of higher social classes. Luxury perfume being a sign of success, they sometimes use it liberally in order to raise themselves to the upper strata of society or they use poor quality scents that disqualify them in the eyes of initiates. Far from being abolished, class distinctions have shifted to the olfactory realm, since individuals from lower social classes always betray their origins through their indiscreet use of luxury perfume or by spraying themselves with unsophisticated scents, like the *Eau de Cologne* that was formerly very popular among the working class. This results in a new form of ostracism, which consists of making fun of the perfume used by social climbers, who reveal themselves as such by their bad taste. Using too much or bad perfume, the social climber reeks of vulgarity, as Chekhov subtly remarks in *The Cherry Orchard*. Gayev, the heir of the cherry orchard, pretends not to hear the comment made by Lopakhin, who used to be a peasant but is now a merchant;

¹⁵ This is what Alain Corbin (1986, p. 143) starkly highlights: “The absence of intrusive odor enabled the individual to distinguish himself for the putrid masses, stinking like death, like sin, and at the same time implicitly to justify the treatment meted out to them. Emphasizing the fetidity of the laboring classes, and thus the danger of infection from their mere presence, helped the bourgeois to sustain his self-indulgent, self-induced terror, which damned up the expression of remorse.”

¹⁶ Based on Paul Gerbod’s study *La condition universitaire en France*, Alain Corbin thus maintains that “these old, frustrated bachelors, whose former bourgeois pupils remembered their odor of sperm and rancid tobacco, had proved unable to fulfill their dreams of promotion; their stench, like the stench emitted by clergy of humble descent continued to betray their origins” (Corbin, 1986, p. 177).

instead of answering him, he contents himself with noting with an aristocratic disdain: “It smells of patchouli here.” (Chekhov, 2010, p. 9) Ironically, the use of perfume, instead of being a means of eclipsing the unpleasant smell of those judged to be inferior, becomes a new means of stigmatising them.

6. Stinking enemy

Beyond class prejudice, a bad smell always comes from the other, the foreigner, the enemy. In all likelihood, body odour is a function of diet and the environment one lives in, but what is striking is that this smell is always considered to be foul and is devalued. Thus, for example, Arthur Toynbee (1935, p. 231) talks about the disgust felt by Japanese vegetarians when they smelled “the rank and fetid odor of the carnivorous peoples of the West.” Similarly, Westerners give off an odour of cheese and butter, causing them to be called *bata kusai* (stinking of butter) in Japan. The uncircumcised also give off a stinky odour. In the language of the Bedouins, the uncircumcised are referred to by the terms *lakhnum* and *al-khanum*, which are derived from *lakhina*, whose primary meaning is “to smell bad, for a goatskin.”¹⁷ Otherness is therefore very often a synonym of fetidness.

When otherness takes the ultimate form of enmity, the enemy sees himself demonised, he smells of sulfur. Paul Valéry (1970, p. 530) rightly points out: “Hearts are hardened (as the Bible says) or, rather, stiffen up the moment they suspect or catch scent of the enemy.” In this respect, one of the most striking examples of demonising the enemy through his stench is attributed to Edgar Bérillon, the author of a work titled *La bromidrose fétide de la race allemande* (The fetid bromidrosis of the German race), published in 1915.¹⁸ This French doctor, marked by the ideology of WWI, had come to create a “Kraut smell” and give life to the idea of a pestilential ethnic disease, the fetid bromidrosis of the German race. Bérillon, the inventor of a false science, ethnochemistry, believed himself capable of defining races and characters as a function of the chemical composition of smells. In his book, he maintains that “the different chemical constitution of the races is also revealed by the specificity of their odors [...] We know that the odor of certain races is so strong that it permeates a space long after people of that race have been there for only a few hours. This is the case of most negro races, as well as with the Chinese, and the north Germans” (Bérillon, 1915, p. 7).

David Le Breton (2017, pp. 168–169) also highlights Bérillon’s quackery, who “affirms, with the calm objectivity of the scholar steeped in rigor, that bromidrosis (from the Greek *bromōs*, meaning “stench”, and *hindrōs*, meaning “sweat”) is ‘one of the most widespread afflictions in Germany’”. As an example, Bérillon uses pseudo-accounts of French doctors who had to treat wounded Germans and who recognised that a fetid and tenacious

¹⁷ Françoise Aubaille-Sallenave highlights that this is also the case for the Teda and Tibesti, based on Le Cœur’s account about how the Sara tirailleurs (colonial soldiers) had come to get themselves circumcised because the Teda women they kept company with reproached with smelling bad. See Musset and Fabre-Vassas (1999, p. 111).

¹⁸ On this subject, see David Le Breton’s (2003, pp. 124–128) analyses in his article *Les mises en scène olfactives de l’autre*.

odour emanated from them. He proceeds to crude generalisations by asserting that it is not only the wounded but also prisoners who smell to such an extent that they had to disinfect the bank notes found in their pockets! Barracks or hotel rooms occupied by Germans were thought of as stinking for a long time after their departure. Without batting an eye, Bérillon (1915, p. 3) even goes as far as maintaining that German cities are bathed in a pestilential aura so strong that it is perceptible by French pilots flying a plane overhead. In sum, the entire German race is afflicted, and Bérillon does not hesitate to proclaim that bromidrosis is originally an ailment of Prussian origin. He applies himself to explaining the physiological causes of this illness and finds ethnic reasons for it: “The German, who has not developed control over his instinctive impulses, has not mastered his vasomotor reactions either. In this way, he has more in common with those species of animals in which fear and anger have the effect of triggering exaggerated activity of the odor-secreting glands” (Bérillon, 1915, pp. 5–6). This brilliant “diagnosis” aims to animalise the enemy and bring him down to the level of a brutish beast incapable of controlling his instincts. In short, the German is a real skunk.

The nose knows! All these olfactory figures of racism, sexism, classism and xenophobia demonstrate that smell functions as a principle of discrimination and exclusion to such an extent that acceptance and integration of the other involves deodorisation, or even purification. Olfactory sterilisation, however, does not necessarily mean the negation of all smells. Sometimes, integration into the community is based on a process of substituting one smell for another. The perfume that eclipses the initial odor therefore works as an agent of assimilation. It abolishes differences and makes me similar to the other. Thus, for example, the rituals of sprinkling guests in North Africa with rosewater and orange flower water are a sign of hospitality destined to both purify the stranger of his scent and welcome him. Pierre Loti (2011, p. 62) echoes this in his account of a trip to Morocco in which he describes the customs of welcoming strangers by sprinkling and sumptuously diffusing perfume to honor them: “There we are sprinkled with rose-water, flung as one uses a whip in our face from silver bottles very long and slender in the neck; pieces of precious Indian wood are kindled in brasiers in our honour, shedding a thick odorous smoke.” Perfume here abolishes distance and otherness by enveloping people in the same olfactory environment. From that moment on, it makes a merger of separate individuals possible and facilitates their integration. Recognition of the other therefore does not necessarily occur through deodorisation but by reodorisation. Perfume plays the symbolic role of a baptism or a reconversion. In this respect, the ritual of incense in Christian churches, which makes it possible to purify the faithful from the stench of sin and to elevate them to a communion with God, also has the function of abolishing all differences between rich and poor by enveloping them in the same olfactory community and by transcending the social hierarchy in order to proclaim equality before God and inciting people to live in the odour of sanctity. The sacred perfume in

which the faithful are bathed unites them in the same belief and proscribes ostracism. It strengthens religious and social cohesion by breaking barriers and transforming the other into a neighbour. The sharing of smell may seem like a symbolic means of integration and opens the way not to the nose of hate but to the nose of love.

References

- Albert, J-P. (1999) 'Introduction', in D. Musset and C. Fabre-Vassas (eds.) *Odeurs et parfums*. Nice: Éditions du CTHS, pp. 9–17.
- Aubaile-Sallenave, F. (1999) 'Le souffle des parfums: un essai de classification des odeurs chez les arabo-musulmans,' in D. Musset and C. Fabre-Vassas (eds.) *Odeurs et parfums*. Nice: Éditions du CTHS, pp. 93–115.
- Bérillon, E. (1915) *La bromidrose fétide de la race allemande*. Paris: Revue de Psychothérapie.
- Bruit Zaidman, L. et al. (eds.) (2001) *Le corps des jeunes filles de l'Antiquité à nos jours*. Paris: Perrin.
- Buffon, G.-L. L. de (1803) *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière, vol. 3*. Paris.
- Carlier, F. (1887) *Études de pathologie sociale, Les deux prostitutions*. Paris: Dentu.
- Chekhov, A. (2010) *The Cherry Orchard*. Translated by S.M. Carnicke. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Classen, C. (1993) *World of Sense. Exploring the senses in history and across cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Classen, C., Howes, D. and Synnott, A. (1995) *Aroma. The Cultural History of Smell*. London: Routledge.
- Corbin, A. (1986) *The Foul and the Fragrant*. Translated by unknown. Leamington Spa: Berg.
- Dispot, L. (1987) 'L'escroquerie du nez', in J. Blanc-Mouchet (ed.) *Odeurs, l'essence d'un sens*. Paris: Autrement, pp. 138–141.
- Fabre-Vassas, C. (1997) *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, and the Pig*. Translated by C. Volk. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jardel, J-P. (1999) 'De la couleur et de l'odeur de l'Autre dans la littérature para-anthropologique : représentation de l'altérité antillaise et idéologie raciale', in D. Musset and C. Fabre-Vassas (eds.) *Odeurs et parfums*. Nice: Éditions du CTHS, pp. 81–91.
- Le Breton, D. (2003) 'Les mises en scène olfactives de l'autre', in P. Lardellier (ed.) *À fleur de peau*. Paris: Belin, pp. 115–128.
- Le Breton, D. (2017) *Sensing the World: An Anthropology of the Senses*. Translated by C. Ruschensky. London: Bloomsbury.
- Loti, P. (2011) *Morocco*. Translated by W.P. Baines. London: Routledge.
- Marcadé, B. (1987) 'Odor di femina', in J. Blanc-Mouchet (ed.) *Odeurs, l'essence d'un sens*. Paris: Autrement, pp. 143–147.
- Moulinier, L. (2001) 'Le corps des jeunes filles dans les Traités médicaux du Moyen Âge,' in L. Bruit Zaidman et al. (eds.) *Le corps des jeunes filles de l'Antiquité à nos jours*. Paris: Perrin, pp. 96–97.
- Reboux, P. (1931) *Le paradis des Antilles*. Paris: Librairie de la Revue Française, Alexis Redier.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1950) *Baudelaire: A Critical Study*. Translated by M. Turnell. New York: New Directions.
- Simon, S. (2004) *Homophobie*. France, Lormont: Le Bord de l'Eau.
- Peabody, S. (2004) "'A Nation Born to Slavery": Missionaries and Racial Discourse in Seventeenth-Century French Antilles', *Journal of Social History*, 38(1), Fall, pp. 113–126.
- Toynbee, A. (1935) *A study of history*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. 1.

Valéry, P. (1970) 'Humanities III', in *Collected Works of Paul Valery, vol. 14: Analects*.
Translated by S. Gilbert. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 288.

Vogt, C. (1865) *Leçons sur l'homme*. Paris.

Chantal Jaquet
Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
Place du Panthéon 12, 75005 Paris, France
c.jaquet19@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12734702