

The permanence of the migration issue in the public debate gives depth to any documentary testimony, even if it only gives a fragmentary view of the question. It was 1974, leftism was decaying, but it was part of the intellectual formation of the then twenty-year-old Yan Morvan. Trying his hand at photography, those pictures are the first Yan's took.

La digue is one of the two shanty towns in Nice, the largest, where African immigrant workers from the former colonies have been crammed together in miserable conditions since 1969. The post-war period saw the need for housing explode on the coast, especially since the Alpes Maritimes were chosen to welcome the two major waves of repatriates, first from Indochina and then from Algeria. In addition, the concrete development of the coastline for tourism and the development of real estate marketing saw the promoters become essential links in the local economy. Pre-war Italians provided this workforce with work in the construction industry, and left-wing associations and organisations tried to provide legal and militant assistance. The state tried to regulate the situation with the creation of the Sonacotra hostels in 1956 and then with the Debré law in 1964, which aimed to combat slums.

These workers were governed by specific statutes whose rigidity was a distant echo of the workers' booklets of the 19th century, giving full power to the police prefecture services. Priority for housing was given to those with families, so that isolated workers were found in these makeshift towns, which in turn generated a parallel economy: dressmakers, bars, butchers and prostitution were all visible here.

Although the years that followed saw the end of the shanty towns, these were a genesis in the formation of the large housing estates, which became places of 'lawlessness' as the need for labour eroded. The oil crisis marked the end of the golden period of the thirty glorious years, and the spectre of mass unemployment crept into this new space of permanent crisis, which had become endless. Bad tactical choices, in particular Giscard's introduction of family reunification, ended up destroying class consciousness as the Communist Party declined, leaving the hand to trafficking and religious withdrawal for lack of a dialectical framework. Fraternity is succeeded by the oratorical sophism of equality, behind the concealment of human rights, the left yields in an endless spiral to societal principles to mask with difficulty its dogmatic adherence to the most savage individualism.

These photographs, in which there are many smiles, also bear witness to that moment when things were not written, when hope was to be found underneath the misery, and in this way prefigure the career of Yan Morvan, who will not lose the strength of this gaze to this day.

La Digue des Français

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