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Épreuve de : Analyse et commentaire LVE: Anglais

Consignes

- Remplir soigneusement l'en-tête de chaque feuille avant de commencer à composer
- Rédiger avec un stylo non effaçable bleu ou noir
- Ne rien écrire dans les marges (gauche et droite)
- Numéroter chaque page (cadre en bas à droite)
- Placer les feuilles A3 ouvertes, dans le même sens et dans l'ordre

Thucydides, an ancient Greek historian, had theorized that every powerful State would some day decline and face the threat of a rising power that want to take the ~~leadership~~ leadership in the world. The powerful State would fear the decay and declare war on the rising nation. Thus decline seems to be something to be afraid of and that can lead to dangerous reaction.

The ~~Decline~~ decline of nations seems to be the very topic of this set of texts. It is mainly described by Jim Tomlinson in The Politics of Decline published in 2001. At the beginning of the 21st century, he looks back to the description of the British role in the world during the 20th century, often said to be in decline. Tomlinson stresses that decline is not always a reality but is often a political construction, product of the context in which it takes place and the fear that people feel.

This idea is epitomized by Margaret Thatcher's speech to the Conservative Political Centre Summer School also known as "The Renewal of Britain", that she told in 1979, after her victory in the elections. Thatcher emphasizes that the former government, her rivals from the Labour Party has left Britain in decline, but she expresses that she can end that decline. However, political speeches that denounce decline may not

always be true, as Frederick Douglass explains it in "Composite Nation", a lecture in the Parker Fraternity Course in 1867, a couple years after the end of the Civil War. Douglass refutes the idea that the United States are in decline after the war and he says that if some principles are respected, the United States can become "the most fortunate of nations" (doc. 9, p. 2). But, even when there is no real decline, political speeches can point out decline as a threat to avoid. So does Bill Clinton when he speaks to a meeting of ^{newspaper} newspaper editors on April 11th, 1997. After the end of the Cold War, Clinton says that the United States should not go back to isolationism if they want to avoid decline, which is meant to justify Clinton's politics in favour of global cooperation. Decline as a threat is also pointed out by Lord Salisbury in a speech known as "The Living and Dying Nations" in 1898, in a period in which Britain has a huge empire and is the strongest economy in the world. Lord Salisbury divides nations in two groups, the "Living" and the "Dying" and stresses that Britain could become a dying nation if it does not protect its Empire, but also that there is a competition ~~the~~ between living countries that can lead to war against the dying nations, as Thucydides stated it, but also between living countries.

Decline is obviously a situation that every nation wants to avoid from an economic point of view and from a political point of view. However the fear of decay can be used by populists ~~to~~ to fuel people's nostalgia of a glorious (and not always historically accurate) past and to gain people's support: that is how Hitler or Mussolini were elected and this use of the fear of decline had justified authoritarian laws. Hence, it raises

a question:

How can decline be used and deformed in politics, whereas it does not always ^{match} the reality?

I will stress that decline can be a real issue, as a situation in which a country has lost ^{economic} ~~economic~~ or political power (I), but even if the fear of decline can often be used in a political context to motivate actions (II). Finally, I will point out that this use of the fear of decay can be dangerous (III).

Decline can be a real issue when a country loses some power. It can be seen within the country or in the country's place in the world.

The country can be in decline when it has lost economic or social power. As Comblin stresses, "declinism" (as he ~~defines~~ ^{calls} the ideology that says the country is in decline) "comes in a number of forms" (doc. 1. l. 42-43) but one of the main forms is the concern about "economic performance" (doc. 1. l. 44). When a country is in an economic crisis, people can have the feeling that it is in decline. That is the idea that Thatcher expressed. Because of the economic crisis in the 1970s, ~~the British economy is~~ and of Britain's weak economy during the 1950s (it is said to be the "sick man of Europe"), Britain faced a huge crisis, as the number of poor people ~~was~~ rising, which is illustrated by the "winter of discontent", that Thatcher evoked when she said "there were few signs, least winter that Britain had any unique capacity for growing poor gracefully" (doc. 3. l. 38-39). Thatcher opposed the current situation with a nostalgia that people ~~are~~ supposed to feel as they "remembered a resolute, industrious and grand-hearted Britain" (doc. 3. l. 1-2) to show that Britain suffers from a major decay, that other countries like Germany or France are said to have avoided. But decline matches

a country cannot only be seen through economic crisis. A country can also be in decline when there is a lack of ~~solidarity~~ ^{social and political cohesion} like is described by Lord Salisbury when he explains the situation in dying countries. According to him, dying countries are not only in economic decline but they also struggle with "a mass of corruption" (doc. 2. l. 29) that spreads in society and in the administration, which lead to "disorganization" (doc. 2. l. 18) and no "hope for reform or restoration." (doc. 2. l. 29) because there is a separation between the people who want better conditions and the administration that wants to keep privileges. The dying nation Salisbury described ~~represent~~ can be illustrated by the example of the USSR during the 1970s and the 1980s: even if it had a huge power in the world, this country was struggling with corruption of the administration, which led to the falling apart of the country as soon as reforms were made by Gorbachev. Hence decline can be a real issue that can be seen within a country.

But the decline of a country can also be seen in the decay of the power of a country in the world. That is the other major type of decline that Robinson stressed: concerns about "global status" (doc. 1. l. 99). In the international community, some countries can be ~~influential~~ ^{influential and} have "soft power" (the power to influence the others). But when new nations rise, the influence of a country can be reduced: the country is in decline. The epitome of this phenomenon is Britain, because, as Robinson stated ~~it~~: "Britain plays a prominent role, with its rise to become a global power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its decline in the twentieth." (doc. 1. l. 9-10). With the growing influence of the United States and Russia, the contestation of colonialism and the economic problems after World War II, Britain has lost the leadership of the world, as illustrated

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by the Iraq affair, "commonly seen as when Britain's hopes were finally dashed in the face of US opposition to [...] the invasion of Egypt" (doc 1, l. 51-53). While Britain and France wanted to intervene in Egypt, as imperialist powers who claim to defend world peace and liberty, they were forced to back down by the United States and the USSR, which shows that they don't have the leadership of the world anymore, thus their power is in decline. However, the situation of decline in an international field can be seen when the leading power ~~starts~~ ^{also} to be criticized. During the 1980s, the United States are said to be ^{begin} "the world's only super power" (doc. 5, l. 40) as Clinton says. Thus, other countries expect them to maintain peace in the world. When the United States refused to intervene in Bosnia to help to stop the war, its position of leader of the world had been strongly criticized, even by its allies, which can be seen as the sign that their power in the world is in decline.

Hence, decline can be a genuine situation that can be seen from an economic point of view, a political point of view or an international point of view. However, this situation can sometimes be manipulated to be elected and motivate action in a country: in Animal farm, Napoleon uses the decline caused by the destruction of the mill to ~~convince~~ ^{convince} the others to work harder.

NE RIEN ÉCRIRE DANS CE CADRE

Decline ~~is~~ or the fear of decline is often used to motivate action.

Decline is often used for political reasons and manipulated. That is why ~~Tom~~
~~Wilson~~ ^{Andrew Gamble} wrote that "Decline is therefore politically constructed and need to be understood through the political debate, which have taken place on its dimensions" (doc. 1. p. 26-28). Indeed, politicians uses the fear and the threat the declines inspires to serve their political interests. Thatcher used decline to criticize her rivals, as she pointed out that "many leaders of the Labour Party refused to recognize the reality of British decline, to which they had contributed more than their fair share" (doc. 3. p. 13-14). She denounced Wilson's government for example that is said to have spent too much time "upon 'cracks' ^{and} 'crises' matters of a non-productive nature" (doc. 3 p. 4-5). While describing the British decline, Thatcher used it to show that she was the solution to those issues, because her politics could "inspire the renewal of our past facilities and ingenuity" (doc. 3. p. 20). By describing herself and the Tories as the solution to this decline (which they failed to avoid during the 1970s), Thatcher used the fear of decline to gain people's support as she admitted ~~is~~ ^{by} saying that "We won the election on 3rd May because we pointed out these tragic shortcomings to the electorate" (doc. 3. p. 93), but she also used it to motivate people's actions to fight this decline. That is why she says that "decline is not inevitable. But nor is progress a law of nature." (doc. 3. p. 30). By making people fear the British decline, Thatcher wanted to encourage people to act to help her politics and to work harder. Here, the fear of decline can be used for political reasons to motivate action because, as Mondragon stated it, it "affects the beliefs of a significant section of the population" (doc. 1. p. 38), encouraging this section

to act to avoid this decline. This fear can also be used to justify foreign policy, as Clinton did it. For him, America had an important choice to make: whether or not it must intervene in the world. For him, the answer was, fear: to "renew our strength and prosperity here at home" (doc. 3. l. 8), America needs to ~~stay~~ continue to preserve peace in the world. Clinton was showing that "strength" and "prosperity" can be ~~lost~~, so it is safe to say that he ~~makes~~ people fear decline. However, in the global society of the 21st century, "the line between domestic and foreign policy continues to blur" (doc. 5. l. 28-30), America should preserve peace in the world to avoid decline. While this conclusion is debatable (~~the~~ spendings in foreign intervention have contributed to Britain's economic weakness in the 1960s for example), Clinton clearly used ~~fear~~ of decline in order to justify his foreign policy that relies on ~~intense~~ ^{the fear} - kind cooperation and intervention. The fear of decline can clearly be used to manipulate public opinion.

And the fear of decline can even be used when there is no decline. It can be used for preventive actions as Lord Salisbury did it. According to Friedberg in the essay Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, the use of "declinism" during the period before the First war "was strategic" (doc. 1. l. 48): it was used to make sure people do not allow it to happen, in spite of the growing power of Germany and the United States. Lord Salisbury's speech epitomized it. He seemed to be working to warn British people that even if they were strong, they were a "living country", they "might [...] look forward to the future without disquietude" (doc. 2. l. 2) rather than "they [can]". Indeed there is a risk of becoming a "dying country", of becoming a nation in decline, ~~to~~ namely because of the risk of "conflict amongst civilized nations" (doc. 2. l. 35) that he theorized. By describing what a "dying nation" is, Salisbury explains people what they must not let happen in their countries, in order to

avoid decline. Hence, the fear of decline can be used to convince people even when a country is prospering. This idea is criticized by Frederick Douglass. He denounced the use of the fear of decline that Southern supporters did to contest the victory of the Union during the Civil War, especially the abolition of slavery by the 13th Amendment. Some people said that the United States were in decline, because "you will never see the South morally reconstructed and our we happy people again united", for the Civil war has opposed two different visions of what America should be ^(doc 4, p. 18) but was the bloodiest war in American history. Hence, America ~~is~~ said to be in social decline by being divided. Moreover, these people, according to Douglass, stated that America was in decline because of 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, for "you will never make the negro work without a master, or make him an intelligent voter, or a good and useful citizen" (doc. 5, p. 20). These people used the fear of decline to convince people that the consequences of the Civil War doomed the United States: Decline ~~was~~ used by politicians. But, it ~~is~~ a "political construction" (doc. 1, p. 27): According to Douglass, this so-called ^{was} decline did not match reality. In fact, Americans were "the best fed, the best clothed, the best sheltered and the best instructed people in the world" (doc. 3, p. 30), meaning that they were ^{not} in ^{any} social decline, and America ~~was~~ "the most fortunate of nations" (doc. 2, p. 2) so there ~~is~~ ^{was} no economic crisis either. People who used the fear of decline when it ~~was~~ ^{was} not real forget one thing according to Douglass: America ~~was~~ ^{was} "at the beginning of [its] ascent" (doc. 4, p. 4), so it ~~was~~ a "living nation" destined ~~to~~ not for decay but for glory if it can forget the racism that people who denounced the decline. For Douglass, America only needed History to make Douglass right: after the Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, the United States became the leader in the economic field during the Progressive Era, then of the most influential country in the world, which shows that people can use the fear of decline for political reasons, while it is not always real.

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Even if the decline ~~is~~ is sometimes real, it is often used by politicians to convince people, motivate action and be elected, even when there is no decline in reality. Moreover, this use of the fear of decline can be dangerous because it ~~allowed~~ ^{allows} politicians to manipulate people.

This use of the fear of decline can be dangerous. As Combs stated it, "Declension [...] has had its impact on almost all parts of the political spectrum" (doc. 1. l. 41-42), which means that every political party can use it. Therefore, the fight against decline can reduce every citizen, while the politics used to do it cannot. When Thatcher denounced economic decline by criticizing the government which politics had made people poor, she suggested a neoliberal solution against it: "individual responsibility" (doc. 3. l. 32) for "the possession of even a little capital encourages the virtues of self-reliance and responsibility" (doc. 3. l. 34). Thatcher's solutions to poverty ~~is~~ ^{was} to let everyone be responsible for themselves. However, this solution would not be accepted by a labour elector who ~~would~~ would have wanted the state to help the poor, not to reduce the workings of the welfare state. While promising to fight decline, Thatcher has increased inequality between the have and the have-nots, which is not quite like fighting decline.

for poor people. Moreover, the fight against decline can be not only inequitable but also violent, especially when the source of the decline is other people. When Ennock Powell pronounced his "Rivers of Blood" speech, he also wanted to fight decline in society, but this decline was caused by immigrants, so this fight against decline was a way of fighting foreigners, which caused violence, xenophobia and racism. As we can see it, the fight against decline can be dangerous because it does not mean the same thing for everyone. If everyone agrees that they do not want their countries to decline, they do not always agree on the methods to use to avoid it.

But the fight against decline can also be dangerous when it is an excuse to pursue personal interests. When Lord Salisbury explained that a war could happen between "living countries", he explained that "the controversy [was] as to who shall have the privilege to [help dying countries]" (doc. 2. l. 38), but the irony should be stressed: if "living countries" intervene in "dying countries" "under the pretence of philanthropy" (doc. 3. l. 74), let us bear in mind that it meant that these countries would do it to fulfill their own interests and not to help others. When the Ottoman Empire (a "dying nation") was torn apart, France and Britain took control of it to help this dying nation and bring people to autonomy as they said. However, in fact they did it to increase the size of their Empire, as is illustrated by the violent crackdown on Syrian attempt to form their own government, whereas French people were there to help them to be autonomous, fulfilling their duty, "the heavy burden of the white man" (Kipling). While pretending to stop decline in the world, nations can follow their own interests. That is also the case of

the United States. Yet, Clinton stated that the United States should be "stungly involved in the world beyond [its] borders" (doc. 5. 31-32) to intervene in foreign countries in order to preserve peace in the world, maintain "security and prosperity" (doc. 5. l. 26), in a word: to keep decline at bay. However, Clinton's successor, Bush launched an attack on Afghanistan during the Second Gulf War, to protect American citizens after the World Trade Center Attack, while in reality, it was an excuse to take control of oil stocks. Even if Clinton said that America intervention in the world had the goal to avoid decay, Bush's attack followed America's economic interests, without caring about decline.

Not only is decline used by politicians, but it also is used as an excuse to follow personal interests and politics that would not be accepted without the manipulation.

At the end of the day, even if decline can sometimes be a real situation that involves issues, it is often used by politicians to inspire fear, manipulate people and motivate people's action, although the fight against decline may be dangerous, by being an excuse to set politics that does not help everyone or to pursue personal or selfish interests.

In order to prevent this phenomenon, it may be helpful to promote the teaching of history to help people to have a more sceptical attitude to the idea of ~~the~~ a decline that is not always historically accurate and often manipulated.

