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Isabel Coyle April 8, 2023

A Network of Resistance: West African Immigration to France and the Struggle for Inclusion, 1960-1973

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Abstract

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The West African immigrant population in France during the 1960s and 1970s combatted unsafe and unsanitary housing and labor conditions, racism, and often uncertain immigration statuses through individual and community acts of resistance. This thesis adds to the growing body of work on West African immigrant experiences in France during the "postcolonial" era, by tracing the evolution of the activism of these migrants as they allied with French leftist groups and unions to work to protect themselves against poor housing and labor conditions and exclusionary border policies. French media narratives, economic stagnation, and fears of a racially diverse immigrant population combined to lead the French government to block labor immigration beginning in 1972 and increase its policing of undocumented immigrants. The backlash to this policy came from across the immigrant community in France including from West Africans who continued their legacy of resistance from the late 1960s and early 1970s. I argue that their participation in the May 1968 movement as well as their leadership in a 1969 rent strike in Ivry-sur-Seine and in the protests following the deaths of five migrant workers in Aubervilliers in 1970 laid the foundation not only for future alliances between migrants and the French left and labor movement, but also in the way they were able to shape their representation more effectively in the media, especially that from the French left. This has implications for the way scholars study and discuss more recent immigrant movements in France including the *sans-papiers* movement of the 1990s, as it shows that these forms of protest built on a history of West African immigrant resistance.

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Introduction: Locating the Roots of the *Sans-Papiers* Movement

The barricade of chairs blocking the doors of the Saint-Bernard church in Paris lasted less than five minutes against 1,500 riot police on the morning of August 23, 1996.[1] The police had arrived at the church around 7:45 am to find protesters waiting outside and news cameras trained on their vans.[2] Inside, 300 underdocumented and undocumented immigrants, or *sans-papier*s, including families and individual migrants, mostly from West Africa, waited with bated breath.[3] Beside them were ten blue sleeping bags, a contrast against the gray stone floor; there was little movement from these migrants, some of whom were on the 50th day of a hunger strike, to protest their deportation rulings.[4] The air was tense. The *sans-papiers* listened to a priest begin mass even as the yells of the crowd outside intensified. Babies cried. Then hammers began hitting the doors.[5] Soon the pile of chairs crashed down. The riot police burst inside, spraying tear gas into the air.[6] Quickly, the police began sorting through the crowd: Hunger strikers were to be sent to a military hospital, while families and the healthy were intended for a detention center in Vincennes.[7] In the chaos, families and friends clung to each other while their leaders called for calm.[8] The police handcuffed and carried out those who tried to resist.[9] They passed by

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[1] "23 Août 1996 : évacuation de sans-papiers de l'église Saint-Bernard: INA," ina.fr (INA, August 20, 2021), https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/23-aout-1996-evacuation-de-sans-papiers-de-l-eglise-saint-bernard-0; Alain Morice, "1996-1997 : L'épopée des Saint-Bernard," *Plein Droit* 101, no. 2 (2014): pp. 40-44, https://doi.org/10.3917/pld.101.0040, 41.
[2] "23 Août 1996 : évacuation de sans-papiers de l'église Saint-Bernard: INA," ina.fr, 2021.
[3] Ibid.
[4] "7 h 30, les cloches de Saint-Bernard sonnent à la volée...," *Le Monde*, August 8, 1996, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1996/08/24/7-h-30-les-cloches-de-saint-bernard-sonnent-a-la-volee_3722953_1819218.html.
[5] "23 Août 1996 : évacuation de sans-papiers de l'église Saint-Bernard: INA," ina.fr, 2021.
[6] Ibid.
[7] "Le gouvernement fait évacuer par la force l'église Saint-Bernard," *Le Monde*, August 24, 1996, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1996/08/24/le-gouvernement-fait-evacuer-par-la-force-l-eglise-saint-bernard_3722977_1819218.html.; "7 h 30, les cloches de Saint-Bernard sonnent," *Le Monde,* 1996.
[8] "Le gouvernement fait évacuer par la force," *Le Monde*, 1996.
[9] Ibid.

the protestors outside the church which included *sans-papiers* activists, members of immigrant-rights and leftist organizations, labor unions, intellectuals, celebrities, and religious leaders.[10] This mix of supporters had spent the night around the church in an effort to obstruct the entry of the police and to bring attention to the brutal operation.[11]

The event, part of what became known as the *sans-papiers* movement of 1996, was a watershed in French immigration history, marking the first time that immigrants to France effectively resisted government policies on a major scale by winning the support of the French population.[12] Some of the activists had been in France without regularization for more than ten years.[13] The movement started, as one participant, Mr. Sissoko, stated in an interview in the 1997 documentary *La ballade des sans-papiers,* "with a group of friends."[14] These friends had "lived in the same town or in the same village, or [were] from the same country [and] knew each other from before."[15] The idea for the movement then spread through word of mouth, especially through hostels where many of the migrants lived.[16] While after the police raid eight of the Saint-Bernard *sans-papiers* were deported, most were able to remain in France. According to the French daily *Le Monde*, "73 received a residence permit and the others were not followed after the arrests."[17] Less than a year later, on a larger scale, the passage of the Chevènement circulaire

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[10] "Le pouvoir refuse toute concession aux sans-papiers de Saint-Bernard," *Le Monde*, August 18, 1996, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1996/08/18/le-pouvoir-refuse-toute-concession-aux-sans-papiers-de-saint-bernard_3721258_1819218.html; "Plus de dix mille personnes place de la République," *Le Monde*, August 25, 1996, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1996/08/25/plus-de-dix-mille-personnes-place-de-la-republique_3723068_1819218.html.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Achille Étienne et al., in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory Sites and Symbols in Modern France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 255-266, 258.
[13] *La ballade des sans-Papiers*, *Youtube* (Global Women's Strike, 1997), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFxQYWpeCXY.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Pierre Lepidi and Amadou Ndiaye, "Les sans-papiers de Saint-Bernard, vingt ans après," *Le Monde*, August 22, 2016, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/22/les-sans-papiers-de-saint-bernard-vingt-ans-apres_4986040_3224.html.

regularized "80,000 undocumented migrants" in France.[18] To accomplish this monumental legal change, the migrants had harnessed the assistance of French organizations and the media to shift public opinion.[19] It was a strategy long in the making that began decades earlier in the 1960s and 1970s when they first began to organize against France's repressive immigration policies. "A shared memory of resistance and political representation," argued French scholar Dominic Thomas, was the origin of the *sans-papiers* movement.[20] Thomas noted that "many points of commonality [with the *sans-papiers* movement] can be identified with other collective struggles and memorial practices."[21] This thesis will start by examining that earlier time period, looking specifically at significant events in the history of West African immigrant activism in France such as the May 1968 movement, a 1969 rent strike in Ivry-sur-Seine, a protest in 1970 in Aubervilliers, and the many responses to the 1972 Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires. It will explore the way that media narratives both helped and hindered these immigrants and reference the rich historiography on immigration to France and French perceptions of that immigration. These scholars focused on media narratives and their effect on French public opinion as well as the lived experiences of distinct immigrant communities in France. I will explore the lives and patterns of resistance of West African immigrant workers in particular and ask how and why their activism evolved during this time period.

The Foundations and Evolution of French Immigration Historiography

[18] François Krug, "Il y a vingt ans, la bataille des sans-papiers de Saint-Bernard," *Le Monde*, March 24, 2016, lemonde.fr/m-actu/article/2016/03/25/vingt-ans-apres-la-bataille-des-sans-papiers-de-saint-bernard_4890145_4497186.html.
[19] Krug, "Il y a vingt ans," 2016; "Plus de dix mille personnes place de la République," *Le Monde,* 1996.
[20] Achille Étienne et al., in *Postcolonial Realms of Memory Sites and Symbols*, pp. 255-266, 260.
[21] Ibid.

Over the past three decades, there have been an increasing number of works published about immigration to France and experiences of immigrants in France.[22] Early on, these works focused on French people's perceptions of the largest or most historically controversial populations of immigrants including Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, North African, and Jewish migrants.[23] Among these, Gérard Noiriel's 1992 *Le Creuset Français* later translated into English as *The French Melting Pot* introduced his idea of a "French Model" of immigration, shaped by the nation's "deep historical roots," the values of human rights and political passion formed during the Revolution, and the idea that immigrants should not "[become] political actors outside of the rules established by the nation."[24] Using this model as a framework, Noiriel maintained that "France is one of the countries in which racial prejudice has been the least pronounced."[25] To justify this claim, he wrote that racism and xenophobia against immigrants in France has historically been mitigated because it had to "draw from the French legal tradition" and be accepted by the French populace through political and media narratives.[26] While this concept has been challenged in the years since its publication, the idea of a "French Model" of immigration and Noiriel's argument surrounding immigrant integration continue to be influential.[27]

Eight years later, French historian Yvan Gastaut further developed the idea of the power of media narratives in shaping French immigration policy, in *L'immigration et l'opinion en France sous la Ve République.* Gastaut's extensive work on French public opinion about

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[22] Hein, Jeremy, and Gerard Noiriel. "Book Review." *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 6 (1997): 1751–53.
[23] Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996), 24-25, 106-107, 118-120, 190; Patrick Weil, *How to Be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 87-90, 131-137, 152-158.
[24] Ibid, 258-60.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 260-261.
[27] Hein, Jeremy, and Gerard Noiriel. "Book Review." *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 6 (1997): 1751–53. https://doi.org/10.1086/231146.

immigration and representations of immigrants in France during the Fifth Republic made him one of the first scholars to reconsider the question of immigrant participation in the May 1968 movement.[28] Similarly to Noiriel, but focusing on a narrower time frame, Gastaut argued that, "Under the Fifth Republic, the politicization of media coverage of immigration and racism enabled public opinion to become aware of and reflect on the question [of the acceptance of foreign populations] especially since dramatic events and social conflicts have guided the French in this process."[29] He highlighted the October 1961 massacres of Algerian protestors by the Parisian police, immigrant participation in the May 1968 movement, and the death by asphyxiation of five West African immigrants in Aubervilliers in 1970, as foundational in media representations of and French opinions about immigrants and immigration.[30] While Gastaut focused on the largest immigrant groups in France, like Algerian, Spanish, Polish, and Belgian immigrants, his examination of public opinion surrounding immigration is useful and he devoted several sections of his book to perceptions of Sub-Saharan African immigrants. Gastaut argued that despite the growth of what he called "négrophobia" during the 1970s and 1980s, these immigrants tended to be viewed either positively or with sympathy by the French during the 1960s and early 1970s.[31]

Works on the French view of immigrants and immigration yielded in the mid-2000s to a more political and legal approach to French immigration history. In 2008, political scientist Patrick Weil published *How to Be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789.* By looking at the development of French immigration law and comparing it with the German immigration system, Weil came to a similar conclusion to Noiriel: the evolution of French immigration law

[28] Yvan Gastaut, *L'immigration et l'opinion en France sous la Ve République* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 37-51.
[29] Ibid, 599-600.
[30] Ibid, 17-20, 37-39, 52-52.
[31] Ibid, 104-106

since the Revolution could be described as, "a progressive opening up to foreigners, a conquest of equality, and finally a series of victories over discrimination."[32] The victories he referenced were triumphs over the Vichy regime, the defeat of a proposed quota system after World War II for accepting immigrants based on their assimilability, and the end of the "anti-Algerian" crisis during the late 1980s.[33] In discussing the restriction of worker immigration that officially began in 1974, Weil downplayed its significance, arguing that "the status quo was more or less respected in other areas."[34] In contrast, in Martin A. Schain's comparative analysis of the immigration systems of France, Britain, and the United States, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States: A Comparative Study,* he viewed the 1974 restriction as a dramatic change in policy. Schain argued that the shift occurred not only because of the economic crisis of the 1970s but also because of French fears about the integration of immigrants from outside of Europe into society, a lack of housing capacity, and the "increasing militancy of immigrant workers in the workplace."[35] I draw from Schain's exploration of the significance and causes of the border closure but argue that this policy change began earlier than 1974, with the announcement and enforcement of the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires.

Following this legal turn in the scholarship, there have been an increasing number of works that blend the study of policy, the experiences of immigrants, and the French population's perception of these immigrants. In 2009, historian Elisa Camiscioli continued the emphasis on the writings of policymakers, but also introduced a gendered focus in *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century.*[36] Camiscioli

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[32] Weil, *How to Be French*, 254.
[33] Ibid, 152.
[34] Ibid, 154.
[35] Martin A. Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States: A Comparative Study* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 47-48.
[36] Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 2009), 2-3.

established the importance of gender and demographic theories in shaping French immigration policy during the early twentieth century.[37] Historian Daniel A. Gordon, in his 2012 study of immigrant activism during the latter half of the twentieth century, *Immigrants & Intellectuals: May '68 & the Rise of Anti-Racism in France,* built on Gastaut's earlier brief description of immigrant participation in the May 1968 movement.[38] Gordon conducted an in-depth analysis of the relationships between leftist groups, trade unions, students, and immigrants during and after May 1968.[39] While he focused on the most visible participants in the movement such as Algerian, Spanish, and Portuguese immigrants, he did discuss West African workers especially in regards to a large May 1968 strike at a Renault factory outside of Paris.[40] Gordon and Gastaut's works are useful in tandem with Kristin Ross's 2002 book, *May '68 and Its Afterlives,* in which she used her expertise in comparative French literature to reconstruct the image of 1968 in France.[41] Ross reexamined the ways that the movement has been represented in French social memory as a finite political movement rather than as a part of a broader, enduring cultural shift.[42]

More recently, historians have increasingly focused on the experiences of specific immigrant communities and the issue of race in French immigration policy. Nimisha Barton's *Reproductive Citizens: Gender, Immigration, and the State in Modern France, 1880-1945* examined the role of gender and reproduction in shaping policy like Camiscioli. Barton's work, however, was much more localized. She took a different approach by studying individual interactions between immigrants and French bureaucrats.[43] Studies on distinct immigrant groups

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Daniel A. Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals: May '68 and the Rise of Anti-Racism in France* (Pontypool: Merlin Press, 2012), 19-22.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid, 40, 61, 62-63.
[41] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1-3.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Nimisha Barton, *Reproductive Citizens: Gender, Immigration, and the State in Modern France, 1880-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 95.

have become more common, including important works on Algerian and North African immigration to France during and after the Algerian War of Independence. Scholars have argued that this war had a significant psychological impact on the French population and a large effect on French public opinion surrounding immigrants, integration, and Islam, three concepts that became inextricably linked by the mid-1970s.[44] Two such works include Todd Shepard's 2017 *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962-1979* and Amit Prakash's 2022 *Empire on the Seine: The Policing of North Africans in Paris, 1925-1975*. Shepard argued that French conceptions of Algerian immigrants and the Algerian War of Independence shaped the French sexual revolution and French leftism during the 1960s and 1970 and laid the groundwork for the resurgence of the French far right in the late 1970s.[45] Prakash described the experiences of North Africans in Paris and the way that French government surveillance pervaded their everyday life, in what he argued was a continuation of colonial policies of the Algerian War.[46] Because this wave of post-war immigration coincides with the timeframe of my study, I will discuss the way that French conceptions of Algerian immigrants impacted their conceptions of West African or Black African immigrants. Most relevant to this thesis, two works have been published about Black immigration to France during the mid-to-late 20th century. One is Félix F. Germain's *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974*, which described the experiences and activism of West African and Caribbean workers and students in France and how these immigrants, "played an important role in eradicating certain colonial continuities in the French Republic."[47] Finally, Gillian Glaes' *Political Activism in*

[44] Todd Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962-1979* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 5-7, 9-10, 12-13, 18, 43-47, 272-74, 284-85.
[45] Ibid, 1-5, 272-73.
[46] Amit Prakash, *Empire on the Seine: The Policing of North Africans in Paris, 1925-1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 1, 9-10.
[47] Germain Félix F., *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946-1974* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 2-3.

Postcolonial France: State Surveillance and Social Welfare, discussed the way that West African immigrants shaped French immigration policy and surveillance through their activism.[48]

In this thesis, I build on the public opinion theories of Noiriel and Gastaut and the legal and policy approaches of Weil, Schain, and Camiscioli. I borrow from the approaches of Gordon, Barton, Germain, and Glaes, especially the way Glaes, Gastaut, and to a lesser extent, Gordon, revealed key moments in West African immigrant activism in France. I believe it is important to closely examine individual immigrant populations to enhance our understanding of the way that their different histories and the different French perceptions of these groups shaped their experiences and legacies in France. Thus, I ask the question: How did West African worker resistance to French housing and immigration policies evolve during the 1960s and 1970s, and how were they able to use the French left and leftist media to aid them in their fight? I aim to locate West African immigrants within movements of mass protest like the May 1968 movement and the aftermath of the 1972 border closure, events where they have historically been underrepresented. I add to the current historiography around West African immigration to France by studying the influence of the French media's rhetoric on French immigration policy, specifically the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires, and by explicitly linking this organization with the 1996 *sans-papiers* movement. I argue that West African immigrant workers, while, at first, wary of working with leftist groups and unions in the early to mid-1960s, became more involved in activism and resistance and more adept at navigating the French media after showing their potential for organization during the May 1968 movement. This partnership solidified during a 1969-1970 Ivry rent strike and in the aftermath of the related Aubervilliers tragedy of 1970. This evolution toward collective activism occurred simultaneously with the French government's shift

[48] Gillian Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France: State Surveillance and Social Welfare* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 53-63, 198-200.

towards restricting labor immigration from outside of Europe. Thus, the networks that West African migrant workers built and maintained during the late 1960s and early 1970s were put into use in their resistance to the 1972 Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires. While immigrants in France did not ultimately succeed in overturning the circulaires, and the French border policy became even more restrictive under the conservative administration of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1974, the work of West African immigrants during the late 1960s and early 1970s was essential in building relationships with French leftist groups and laying the groundwork for media strategies that would serve these communities in their successful resistance to restrictive immigration laws almost 30 years later.

Locating Immigrants in the Archives and in Print

To conduct the bulk of my analysis I have used archival and online newspaper sources. For my first chapter, introducing the experiences and struggles of West African immigrants, I have relied on two pieces of media created by West Africans in France during the 1960s and mid-1980s. To comprehend the policy shift towards a border closure during the late 1960s and early 1970s and to track immigrant activism during that same time period, I depended on newspaper articles published during the 1960s and 1970s about immigrants in France. I located many of these articles at the National Archives at the Pierrefitte-sur-Seine site in Seine-Saint-Denis, France. Scholars like Gordon, Gastaut, Glaes, and Germain who study the later twentieth century, have tended to utilize newspaper accounts because French archival codes have made it difficult to access many relevant documents. In particular, records concerning the Algerian War and some immigrant-related events during the same time period are difficult to access. This can be seen in the case of archivists Brigitte Lainé and Philippe Grand who were instrumental in

releasing embargoed archival documents and proving the complicity and responsibility of the former Prefect of the Paris Police Maurice Papon in the 1961 October Massacre of Algerian protestors in Paris.[49] In 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron's administration began to more strictly enforce IGI 1300, which limited access to documents from before 1970 that had at one point been classified as secret, requiring them to be declassified one at a time.[50] This was done despite the fact that the Code du patrimoine governing French archives allows access to documents after 50 years have passed since their publication.[51] The enforcement of IGI 1300 led to an uproar among historians and activists alike arguing it would block "for months, even years, access to documents concerning the most controversial episodes of [France's] recent past, whether it be the periods of the Occupation, colonial wars or political history of the Fourth Republic and the beginnings of the Fifth Republic."[52] While partially repealed in July of 2021, this law is indicative of the French government's attitude towards declassifying documents and the repeal still maintained that, "The formal or automatic declassification of a document does not necessarily make it communicable."[53] I have relied on the previously mentioned archival collections that are available at the National Archives as well as the online archives of *Le Monde* and the leftist magazine *Droit et Liberté* published by the Mouvement contre le racisme et pour

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[49] Clémence Jost, "Brigitte Lainé : l'archiviste qui dérangeait Papon dérange-t-elle encore après sa mort ?," Archimag (GROUPE SERDA, November 13, 2011), https://www.archimag.com/archives-patrimoine/2018/11/13/brigitte-laine-archiviste-derangeait-papon-encore-apres-mort.

[50] "« Seul l'accès aux archives peut garantir un examen informé et contradictoire de notre histoire récente »," *Le Monde*, October 2, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/10/02/seul-l-acces-aux-archives-peut-garantir-un-examen-informe-et-contradictoire-de-notre-histoire-recente_6054569_3232.html

[51] "American Historical Association," *American Historical Association* (American Historical Association, November 23, 2020), https://www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/aha-advocacy/aha-statement-concerning-access-to-french-archives-(november-2020).

[52] Yves Bordenave, "Archives classées « secret-défense » : un recours déposé devant le Conseil d'Etat," *Le Monde*, October 1, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/10/01/archives-classees-secret-defense-un-recours-depose-devant-le-conseil-d-etat_6054395_3224.html.

[53] Antoine Oury, "Archives : l'état publie une nouvelle instruction sur les documents secret défense," *ActuaLitté*, August 11, 2021, https://actualitte.com/article/101844/archives/archives-l-etat-publie-une-nouvelle-instruction-sur-les-documents-secret-defense.

l'amitié entre les peuples (Movement Against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples - MRAP), an anti-racist NGO created in 1949. While conducting my research, I would have preferred to sample more newspapers from across the political spectrum and from across regions of France and Francophone Africa, but this was not possible given the archives available to me. Even when these articles appear objective, they contain biases and misrepresentations as they are largely written by French journalists and rarely contain interviews with West African immigrants. However, without access to police records from this time, scholars must depend on journalists' accounts to recreate the actions of immigrants during strikes and protests from the latter half of the 20th century.

Throughout this thesis, I use the category of West African to refer to the immigrant communities that I discuss. In contemporary French media and government reports, policymakers labelled this population Black African or West African, often to distinguish them from the larger North African population and believed that the majority of this group originated in Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal.[54] Anthropologist Jacques Barou, however, in his 1975 study of Black African immigrant workers in France, "Travailleurs immigrés et dialogues interculturels," argued that, "The independence of African states [was] too recent and their geographical and human lines too arbitrary for one to speak of national cultures."[55] He thus contended that scholars should, "consider that the entity through which African cultures are best expressed is above all the ethnic group, this grouping of men who recognize each other by certain common signs and are recognized as such by others by a set of original features."[56] He based this on his analysis of the experiences of Black African immigrant communities in Paris and Lyon and on

[54] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France*, 100-102.
[55] Barou, Jacques. "Travailleurs immigrés et dialogues interculturels." *Civilisations* 25, no. 3/4 (1975): 307–18. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41229294, 309.
[56] Ibid, 309.

data about the inhabitants of immigrant foyers in the Paris region during the 1960s.[57] Barou contended that reports from policymakers during the 1960s, like an influential one by Michel Massenet, delegate for social action for foreign workers to the Prime Minister, overestimated the number of African immigrants in France who were part of the Soninke ethnic group, from the area surrounding the Senegal river.[58] He therefore concluded that there were likely more migrants from "Cameroon, the lower Ivory Coast, and other Atlantic regions" than often believed.[59] Thus, the label of West African that I use is a category developed by French policymakers who did not comprehensively document the demographics of this population, and who imposed categories that these migrants may not have used for themselves. In both my study and in Barou's there is evidence that the distinctions between migrants' nationalities were more superficial than policymakers portrayed them, with migrants from different communities and regions at times inhabiting the same foyers.[60] Thus, the term West African, unless a nationality is specifically stated, could refer to immigrants from a number of different African countries with colonial ties to France.

My first chapter, "Life in France" seeks both to describe the experiences of West African immigrant workers in France beginning in the early 1960s and ending before the events of May 1968 and to comprehend the roots of anti-immigrant sentiment forming during this decade.[61] In this chapter, I use West African-created media to establish an understanding of life in France for West Africans and to reconstruct how they thought about and coped with their experiences. West African immigrant workers typically endured horrific housing conditions and discrimination that

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Barou, "Travailleurs immigrés et dialogues interculturels," 309-15; Michel Massenet, "Le Fonds d'action sociale et les travailleurs d'Afrique noire en France," *Hommes et Migrations*, 1965, 59.
[59] Barou, "Travailleurs immigrés et dialogues interculturels," 309-10.
[60] Ibid, 316-18.
[61] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France,* 100-102.

alienated them from the broader French population. They wrote about these experiences in different media forms including films and movies but were often reluctant to share them with French journalists, especially during the early and mid-1960s. I compare West African-created accounts with contemporary newspaper articles, which tended to discuss housing conditions, to understand the way that colonial stereotypes pervaded French journalists' narratives about West Africans during this time. Finally, I explore the evolution of French perspectives about West African immigrants through this media coverage of housing quality. I discuss how these representations, combined with economic and demographic factors during the later 1960s, led the French government under President Georges Pompidou to move towards a stricter border policy.

My second chapter, "Building Networks of Resistance" explores the increasing participation of West African immigrants in French leftist and labor movements during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Within this trend of increasing participation, West Africans served as leaders in their own movements, which were focused on their communities' specific needs. I place West African immigrants in the already overlooked story of immigrant participation in the May 1968 movement in France by exploring their motivations, fears, and contributions to the movement. With the alliances from that recent participation newly formed, I then discuss how, when faced with the traumatic housing conditions that resulted in the Ivry rent strike of 1969 and the Aubervilliers tragedy of 1970, West African leaders developed publicity and media strategies to bring justice to their communities. The Ivry strikers and their allies on the left saw the connection between this tragedy and their own horrific housing conditions and pushed to have the two events linked in the media.[62] The ensuing press coverage created what Yvan Gastaut has labeled France's, "first debate on immigration," one of several events, including immigrant

[62] J. M. Mercier, "Qui est responsable?," *Le Monde*, January 5, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/01/05/qui-est-responsable_2653539_1819218.html.

participation in the May 1968 movement, that shaped the opinion of many French citizens about immigration and immigrants.[63] I show how the French media, largely on the left, began to cover West African immigrants not just as victims of poor housing, but as participants in protests and activists. The way these immigrants were able to use the press and key organizational allies makes this movement a predecessor of the Saint-Bernard *sans-papiers* movement.

Finally, in "Meeting the Challenge of the Circulaires," I discuss how the increasing visibility of immigrant workers and West African workers in the realm of housing and labor exploitation combined with French fears of economic downturn, increasing unemployment, and culturally unassimilable immigrant populations. I argue that these factors led to the passage of the aforementioned Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires. The French government under President Georges Pompidou had been searching for a solution to what the media had labeled as chaotic immigration and a humanitarian crisis for much of the 1960s. As the economy slowed, it became apparent that rather than invest massively in immigrant housing, training, and education, the government would work to limit immigration, especially that from Africa. As the largely clandestine West African immigrant worker population watched from their overcrowded lodgings and the factories that had fueled French industrialization for decades, the French government closed the border to labor immigration, increased enforcement of border policies, and placed immigrant workers in even more precarious positions.[64] Despite or because of these increasing risks, immigrant workers in France opposed this new exclusionary policy through labor and hunger strikes as well as through individual acts of resistance. This mass resistance included West Africans who have historically been excluded from narratives about these

[63] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France*, 9, 51-52.
[64] Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States,* 45; J.-M. Théolleyre, "Les travalleurs étrangers de Penarroya reclament « le droit de vivre »," *Le Monde*, February 19, 1972.

protests. In protesting, they strengthened their relationships with labor and leftist organizations, many of whom took the opportunity to take a stand against capitalist exploitation alongside these immigrant workers. It is possible to conduct this examination because the French press again shifted from an overwhelming focus on immigrant housing policy during the early 1960s to immigrant activism in both housing and the workplace during the later 1960s and early 1970s.

Chapter 1: A Threshold of Tolerance

The French director and Communist Party member Jacques Krier started his 1964 documentary *Ouvriers noirs de Paris (Black Workers in Paris)* with a close-up shot of a West African man talking to a French immigration officer.[65] As the camera zooms in on the man's face, the viewer gets the sensation that they are crowding him.[66] A voice from off-screen asks, "You came to France to work?"[67] The man responds, "Yes, yes." A follow-up question: "Do you have an employer here in France?"[68] The man hesitates, "I have an older brother."[69] His lack of a job upon arrival in France was indicative of the situations of most West African workers when they arrived in France.[70] So too was his answer about his brother. Later in the documentary Krier attempted to film the living conditions of a group of West African immigrants, but the owner of the foyer, or lodging that they inhabited, refused to allow him in with his camera, so he interviewed one of the residents about the conditions.[71] His first question was telling, "Is it not, to some extent, the fault of these African workers if they are badly housed because they do not concede a large enough part of their salary to housing? They are too keen to save money."[72] Krier voiced the question on the minds of many during the early 1960s including French leftists and members of the French government and media. Why, they wondered, should they invest in better housing conditions for West African immigrants in France, if they were unwilling to pay a reasonable amount for their accommodations? Krier's unnamed subject reframed the issue,

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[65] *Ouvriers Noirs De Paris*, *Ouvriers Noirs De Paris* (Collectif James Baldwin, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEpf0vFNg-k.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

suggesting that it was more complicated. He explained that West Africans who arrived in France usually did so without a job but that "they [could] stay two to three months or even six without work…at the expense of their community."[73] He argued, "They need this community, and I don't think a hotel in Paris…accepts 30 or 50 people at a time."[74] West Africans, he argued, saved money for their communities back home and lived with large groups of people as a matter of survival; they relied on their communities to succeed in France. This documentary shows that while some leftists like Krier worked to understand the struggles of West African immigrants through direct communication, there was a gap in understanding between leftist and West African communities that can be viewed through the words of both.

Life in France

The French government's treatment of West African immigrants after World War II fluctuated between hostility and indifference. As Patrick Weil noted in his list of "victories over discrimination" in the history of French immigration law, a quota system like the one established in the United States in 1924 never developed in France, despite some proposals after the Second World War.[75] Instead the main focus after the war was on providing enough labor to rebuild the nation and fuel new levels of industrialization.[76] For this purpose, the provisional government placed the Office Nationale d'Immigration (ONI) in charge of labor recruitment. Because the organization failed to meet the extensive needs of French companies, however, there was an unspoken agreement that they could recruit foreign workers to enter the country without

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Weil, *How to Be French*, 254; Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States,* 45.
[76] Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot*, 236.

registering with the ONI and that immigration officials would look the other way.[77] These immigrants, if they chose to remain in France, were usually regularized, a policy in which a government offered "those migrants who are in a country without authorization the opportunity to legalize their status."[78] Thus, despite an airport security increase in 1963 to target Sub-Saharan Africans hoping to enter the country on tourist visas specifically, and bilateral immigration agreements that the French government negotiated and signed with African countries to check the health of workers before they arrived in France, this system was highly unregulated.[79]

In fact, scholars have pointed out that in the decades following World War II, French attitudes surrounding Algerian immigration tended to dominate conversations about immigration policy.[80] Historian Megan Brown has argued that because Algeria was a French department like "the overseas departments of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion (DOM)," but its indigenous, Muslim population was viewed as undesirable, policymakers vacillated on how to categorize these potential immigrants.[81] Shepard echoed this idea, writing that the religion and gender of most North African immigrants to France during the 1960s and 1970s led them to dominate French public debate.[82] While West Africans were largely viewed as separate from this population by policymakers, their faith, origin, and gender-makeup caused them at times to become enveloped in these debates, especially later in the 1970s.

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[77] Weil, *How to Be French*, 254; Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States,* 47; Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States*, 64.
[78] Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States*, 47, 64; Amanda Levinson, "Why Countries Continue to Consider Regularization," migrationpolicy.org (Migration Policy Institute, September 1, 2005), https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/why-countries-continue-consider-regularization.
[79] Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic,* 25.
[80] Megan Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 5-6.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962-1979*, 1-8.

In the midst of these debates about immigrant populations and lack of border enforcement, France was experiencing a post-World War II immigration-driven economic boom with a growing need for industrial labor.[83] As established, French policy makers did not view all immigrants the same way, regarding those from Southern Europe and especially those from Africa as too culturally dissimilar.[84] Yet by 1963, with European sources of immigrant labor reaching their limit, and an impending recession, France would soon be forced to reach a reckoning on immigration. Meanwhile, many immigrant communities in France were struggling to navigate French society and its economy, including West Africans who made up a small but not insignificant population, largely in urban areas.[85] As the West African population in France was negligible prior to the 1960s, these new immigrants could not rely on a large already settled population for support in their new country.[86] These migrant workers, largely men, endured horrific housing and working conditions, eventually leading them, with and without their consent, into a public debate about immigrants and immigrant welcome or "accueil" in France.[87] This played out in the partisan French press through its portrayal of immigrants and often in its representations of - largely undocumented - West African immigrant workers. These migrants had few chances to present their own narratives to the French public. Despite this accueil debate, immigration did not dominate French headlines until the 1970s with the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires and the ensuing backlash. Still, the topic of immigration was featured regularly in news media from the early 1960s on, due to economic stagnation, these immigrants' exploitative living and working conditions, and French fears of racial diversity. This can be seen in the case

[83] Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot*, 236.
[84] Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States*, 47-48.
[85] Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States*, 47-48; "Situation des travailleurs étrangers dans le département de la Seine," *Le Populaire*, April 6, 1963.
[86] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France,* 100-102.
[87] "L'accueil réservé aux travailleurs étrangers doit être amélioré estiment les sénateurs," *Le Monde*, June 29, 1964.

of the growing North and West African immigrant populations. In both cases, the migrants were largely young, Muslim men, and, especially in the case of Algerian immigrants, they were portrayed as culturally alien and often as threats.

This sense of danger is clear in the way that both West Africans and North Africans were policed in France during this period. Prakash described how the French police retained their policies of targeting North African immigrants even after the end of the Algerian War, with the Prefect of Police advocating for the continued policing of this "Muslim Mass."[88] Prakash argued that the Paris police justified this continued surveillance even after the end of the Algerian conflict by portraying Islam as a threat.[89] According to Prakash, this force for policing migrants, the Service d'assistance technique (Service for Technical Assistance - SAT), was intended for "all postcolonial migrants," and one of the five sectors in Paris was dedicated to the Black African immigrant population.[90] The SAT surveilled these populations' political stances and "by the mid-1960s…was primarily oriented around 'expulsions from locales and re-housing.'"[91] It worked with those in charge of government-run immigrant housing to conduct this surveillance and monitor housing.[92] Thus, the SAT's mission was inextricably linked with violence and colonialism.[93] Prakash wrote that this policing laid the groundwork for ideas that solidified in the late 1970s about African immigrants' inability to assimilate into French society, largely due to their religion.[94]

Entering this fraught, colonial landscape of the 1960s, West Africans made their way to France in modest numbers, earning money to send back to their families and often returning to

[88] Prakash, *Empire on the Seine,* 106, 170-1.
[89] Ibid, 170-74.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

their home countries after a few years. But how many of these migrants were there? Contemporary sources had difficulty pinpointing their demographics because they were rarely registered with the ONI.[95] In 1971, the Union générale des travailleurs sénégalais en France (General Union of Senegalese Workers in France - UGTSF) estimated the number of Mauritanian, Senegalese, and Malian immigrants in France to be around 26,000, while the pan-African newspaper *Jeune Afrique* estimated that there were 200,000 of these immigrants.[96] The former was likely attempting to stave off concerns over what was being called a "Black invasion" by some French newspapers.[97] In a more plausible estimate, in 1973, writer J.-C. G., from the center-left newspaper *Le Monde*, citing official statistics from the Prefecture of Paris and the ONI, estimated this population to be around 66,000, with a high unemployment rate of around 20 percent.[98] The uncertainty around these numbers and the discourse that surrounded this immigration illustrates that these immigrants had an incentive to hide from French authorities, especially as anti-immigrant rhetoric increased in prevalence during the mid-1960s and early 1970s.

Once in France, these workers settled in "foyers" or lodgings in which landlords known as "sleep merchants" habitually rented out beds for multiple patrons to take turns sleeping in.[99] The harsh living conditions in these foyers have been well-documented in West African-created media from the time as well as in French newspapers and documentaries. One such source is the 1983 book *Le froid et le piment* (The Cold and the Chili Pepper) by Mame Seck Mbacké, an

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[95] James R. McDonald, "Labor Immigration in France, 1946-1965," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no. 1 (March 1969): pp. 116-134, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1969.tb00661.x, 126; G., J.-C. "Qui sont-ils ?" Le Monde.fr. Le Monde, May 17, 1973. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1973/05/18/qui-sont-ils_2572031_1819218.html.
[96] G., J.-C. "Qui sont-ils ?" 1973.
[97] Louis-Paul Aujoulat, "Invasion noire ou présence africaine," *Hommes et migrations*, 1965, 111-12.
[98] G., J.-C. "Qui sont-ils ?" 1973.
[99] G., J.-C. "Qui sont-ils ?" 1973.

award-winning Senegalese author and poet.[100] Mbacké moved across West Africa during her childhood, living in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Ivory Coast, and Guinea before completing her education in Senegal and moving to France.[101] She wrote *Le froid et le piment* based on her experiences serving as a social worker at the Senegalese Consulate in Paris to "free [her]self, and also to testify, because for seven years [she] only saw cases of notorious injustices going unpunished."[102]

The title of the book alone provides insight into the experience of life in France for West African communities, Mbacké's use of "froid" (cold) in the book's title, is a reference to the harsh temperatures West African migrant workers experienced during winter in France, particularly in Paris and Lyon, and the greeting received by many from the French public and government. These migrants often arrived unprepared for the colder French temperatures due to economic difficulties and housing discrimination.[103] This led to famous tragedies including the one at Aubervilliers and many more fires and asphyxiation events across immigrant worker communities during this time.[104] As for the second part of the book title, Mbacké stated that she intended the word "piment" (chili pepper) to represent the suffering felt by these immigrants as well as the painful and tense relationships between Europeans and West Africans in France.[105] According to Mbacké, this relationship was characterized by complicity and indifference on the part of French citizens. She narrated stories of intense suffering and pain experienced by more than thirty Senegalese immigrants in Paris. Mbacké described these brief stories detailing the

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[100] Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, *Littérature féminine francophone d'Afrique noire* (L'Harmattan, 2000), 382.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Jean-Marie Volet, "Mame SECK MBACKE," Lire les femmes écrivains et les littératures africaines (The University of Western Australia, December 24, 1995), https://aflit.arts.uwa.edu.au/MbackeMameSeck.html; Herzberger-Fofana, *Littérature féminine d'Afrique*, 382.
[103] Rioux Lucien, and François Jacques. "Trois millions d'étrangers en France…." Le Nouvel Observateur. March 29, 1971, 1.
[104] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France,* 54-55.
[105] Herzberger-Fofana, *Littérature féminine d'Afrique*, 383.

facts of the immigrants' lives, as "unadorned accounts that sound dry like the emaciated parts of an ossuary," and yet each story evokes more feeling than the contemporary coverage of immigrants and their struggles found in French newspapers like *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and *l'Humanité*.[106] As someone who developed close bonds with individual immigrant workers in France due to her position and nationality, Mbacké was able to better capture the emotions of her subjects.

Throughout the book, Mbacké emphasized the exploitative nature of immigrant work in France. When an immigrant named Dauoda died, of causes Mbacké never revealed, the police did not discover his body until a month later, when Dauoda's friends alerted the authorities about his disappearance.[107] The only sign of Dauoda's absence at the company where he worked was a sign posted on his locker: "dismissal for unjustified absence."[108] Notably, at the end of the passage, Mbacké lamented the fact that Dauoda's migration from Africa even occurred, suggesting that he and all West African immigrants in France were far from their true homelands: "Daouda was buried in the grayness and the snow, far from his hot African sun."[109] This cautionary tale was a theme of Mbacké's work, which she wanted to be published in Africa so it would be "read by all those who dream of Europe as a paradise or a remedy for their misery."[110]

Though he had a similar message, Med Hondo believed a visual medium could be effective in warning African immigrants about the realities of life in France. Born in Mauritania in 1936, Hondo's family could not afford higher education, and he trained to become a chef in

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[106] Volet, "Mame SECK MBACKE."
[107] Mame Seck Mbacke, *Le froid et le piment: nous, travailleurs immigrés* (Dakar: Les nouvelles éditions africaines, 1983), 17.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Herzberger-Fofana, *Littérature féminine d'Afrique*, 383.

Morocco before moving to Paris in 1960.[111] Once there, he worked a series of odd jobs while studying acting.[112] His first film, *Soleil Ô* (Oh Sun) of 1970, followed a day in the life of an unnamed African man as he arrived in Paris and became disillusioned with the society he encountered.[113] Hondo wanted the film to allow viewers to live in the protagonist's shoes for a day, a character that he partially based on his own experiences when he first moved to France.[114] He derived the title *Soleil-O* from a song that enslaved Africans sang during the middle-passage to the Caribbean.[115] The title thus attempted to convey the shock contemporary African immigrant workers felt upon reaching France.[116] The use of a lyric created by enslaved Africans contributed to the image of workers in "exile," expressed by Mbacké and underscored the role of labor exploitation and racism in forcing this migration.

The protagonist in Hondo's film did not inhabit the infamous overcrowded basements and foyers so commonly experienced by West African immigrants during this time, instead living in a small, clean, sparsely furnished apartment.[117] However, the character was designed to be a symbol of the overwhelming loneliness of the West African migrant in France, even without showing the shocking conditions faced by many. According to Hondo, "My main character could be a garbage collector, a student, or a teacher. His status does not prevent him from being

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[111] Brittany Gravely, "Med Hondo Collection - Collection," Harvard Film Archive, accessed October 13, 2022, https://harvardfilmarchive.org/collections/med-hondo-collection.
[112] Ibid.
[113] *Soleil O*, *Criterion Channel* (Criterion Collection), accessed October 13, 2022, https://www.criterionchannel.com/soleil-o/videos/soleil-o.
[114] Marguerite Kagan, "« Soleil Ô » de Med Hondo," *Le Monde*, May 1970, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/d/d7/Dl70_292opt.pdf, 25.
[115] Ibid.
[116] M. V., "« Soleil O »," *Droit et Liberté*, February 1973, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/4/4f/Dl73_318opt.pdf, 25; Françoise Pfaff, "The Films of Med Hondo An African Filmmaker in Paris," *Jump Cut* 31 (1986): pp. 44-46, https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC31folder/HondoFilms.html.
[117] Ibid.

affected in the same manner by the general conditions of history within a racist society."[118] In this way, Hondo was able to overcome the tension that French documentary makers faced between their aim of bringing attention to the shocking living and working conditions faced by African workers and respecting their wishes and dignity. However, the protagonist did find solace in the growing community of West African immigrants in France and at union meetings with workers he met during his workday.[119] As Hondo illustrated, immigrants were becoming increasingly involved in French labor organization. Throughout the film Hondo attempted to convey the protagonist's rage at France and at the Western system of industrialization, capitalism, and colonialism, something that is present in *Le froid et le piment* too. Media theorist Sheila Petty has interpreted the film as an argument that Paris of the late 1960s had not progressed past colonial understandings of society and thus represented "a space in which identity [became] fragmented and alienated in an environment where equality [was] promised but never delivered."[120]

Both Mbacké and Hondo emphasized a gulf between French communities and West African communities, and an overwhelming, choking sense of alienation on the part of West African immigrants, usually workers. While Hondo included scenes of joint activism between West Africans and French leftists, a nascent phenomenon in the early to mid-1960s given that the major French unions tended to think of immigrants as labor competition at this time, the general sense of forgottenness was pervasive as well as the idea that improving conditions in the metropolis was ill-advised and almost impossible.[121] In other words, it was better not to leave

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[118] Brittany Gravely, "Med Hondo Collection - Collection," Harvard Film Archive, accessed October 13, 2022, https://harvardfilmarchive.org/collections/med-hondo-collection.
[119] *Soleil O*, *Criterion Channel* (Criterion Collection), accessed October 13, 2022, https://www.criterionchannel.com/soleil-o/videos/soleil-o.
[120] Sheila Petty, "The Metropolitan Myth: Assimilation, Racism and Cultural Devaluation in Soleil O and Pièces D'Identités," *L'Esprit Créateur* 41, no. 3 (2001): pp. 163-171, https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2010.0154, 165.
[121] Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals,* 41-44; Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives,* 95-6.

Africa. This idea was echoed in Noiriel's *The French Melting Pot* when he described the concept of uprootedness experienced by immigrants to France: "the individual's loss of the essential references and support base with which integration into a 'community' would have provided him."[122] Noiriel suggested that this sensation of uprootedness would end with a "stabilization" event, when the immigrant gave up the idea of returning or the idea that they lived in exile. He suggested that this was often accomplished by the second generation of immigrants who joined organizations and began to feel belonging in their new country.[123]

Colonial Mindsets in Media Portrayals

To understand how French people viewed the West African experience at the time, it is possible to compare the narratives of West African authors and filmmakers with the many articles written on the topic by the French journalists during the early and mid-1960s. Both expressed the idea of the West African migrant as an alienated individual in exile, but the French media's narratives had a darker side that often condemned these newcomers for the act of immigrating. Both Noiriel and Gastaut established the importance of the French media in shaping immigration policy by justifying either xenophobia or sympathy towards immigrant workers.[124] Thus, the French media's treatment of West African immigrants was important, and, during the 1960s, this coverage was invariably about living and working conditions, with the main focus usually being their housing. Such articles and documentaries shed light on the problem, but in their framing they portrayed West Africans as voiceless victims, social liabilities, and sometimes at fault for their situations, compounding an idea that the solution to the

[122] Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot,* 120-21.
[123] Ibid, 145.
[124] Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot*, 260-61; Gastaut, *L'immigration et l'opinion en France*, 599-600.

immigrant housing problem was to cut off immigration, rather than investing robustly in subsidized housing.

Tellingly, conservative papers were less likely to cover immigrants and immigration until the early 1970s. I have only identified two articles from the conservative paper *Le Figaro* from before 1970 that discussed West African immigrants in the newspaper articles on immigrant workers housed at the French National Archives. In the first article, published in 1963, the authors explicitly linked West African immigrant housing problems with a proposed border closure to labor immigration. They described in detail the miserable working and living conditions that West Africans endured in France, emphasizing the appalling housing quality and overcrowding experienced by these workers, who "pile[d] up at thirty or forty in dark attics from which all hygiene [was] absent."[125] In an example of the continuation of colonial mindsets in France or what Prakash has labelled, "the specter of colonial racism," the authors then suggested that the ONI send to these countries, "former officers of the overseas troops who could provide prospective immigrants with information on the possibilities of employment in France and dissuade those who do not know our language, explaining that that this would ensure that, "no one could come without a work contract."[126] The second article compared the growing Black population in France to majority Black neighborhoods in the United States, ominously calling for strengthened immigration laws to prevent cultural and racial clashes.[127]

While conservative papers were unlikely to cover immigrants especially during the 1960s, leftist journalists often reported on the housing issue, clearly shocked by the living conditions they encountered. They tended to show sympathy for West African workers,

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[125] Méteye, J.-L., and André Vinard. "Africains en métropole," *Le Figaro*. December 23, 1963.
[126] Prakash, *Empire on the Seine*, 1.
[127] J.-L. Méteye and Christian Lara, "Harlem-sur-Seine: malaise entretenu par une subversion dont Londres est la plaque tournante," *Le Figaro*, July 19, 1966.

proposing solutions that focused on increasing public housing quantity and ameliorating its conditions. These journalists were more likely to place the blame for immigrants' situations on French corporate greed and government irresponsibility. In a 1963 article from the socialist newspaper *Le Populaire*, entitled "Situation of Foreign Workers in the Seine Department," the author identified problems with the French system of social security, family allowances, public housing, and unemployment insurance for immigrants.[128] He used matter-of-fact language when describing the "the particularly difficult situation of African workers," and it is difficult to determine whether he had actually visited these lodgings first-hand.[129] Even so, there was clearly greater sympathy from this author when compared with the *Le Figaro* article in which the authors suggested that a solution to the problem of West African immigrants' working and living conditions lay in agreements between France and labor-exporting countries, specifically with the aim of limiting this immigration.[130]

As with conservative commentators, however, leftist journalists fell into colonial mindsets and portrayed immigrant workers as an obstacle to organizing and as out of place in France when describing the conditions these immigrants worked and lived in. The same article from *Le Populaire* that challenged the French government to make a "great effort" to "put an end…to abuses which ha[d] lasted too long," lamented the practice of allowing and even encouraging undocumented immigrants to enter the country to fuel industry.[131] Leftist and centrist newspapers promulgated the idea that West African immigrants, as well as immigrants in general, threatened French working-class organizing capacity.[132] In an article from the socialist

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[128] "Situation des travailleurs étrangers," *Le Populaire,* 1963; Martin, Marc. *Médias et journalistes de la république*. Paris: O. Jacob, 1997, 162.
[129] "Situation des travailleurs étrangers," *Le Populaire*, 1963.
[130] Méteye and Vinard. "Africains en métropole," 1963.
[131] "Situation des travailleurs étrangers," *Le Populaire*, 1963; Méteye and Vinard. "Africains en métropole," 1963.
[132] "Situation des travailleurs étrangers," *Le Populaire,* 1963.

Syndicalisme and *Forces Nouvelles,* the newspaper of the center-right Mouvement républicain populaire (Popular Republican Movement - MRP), frustrated journalists described West African and North African immigrants as forming a "sub-proletariat."[133] The French Minister of Labor would echo these sentiments in a 1963 speech.[134] Seemingly endorsing this point of view, in a letter to immigrant workers at large, the socialist magazine *Le Peuple*, wrote that the ease of entry for immigrants constituted President Charles de Gaulle's government's attempt to "pit immigrant workers against French workers in order to better exploit each."[135] The *Le Populaire* article treated the lives and hardships of West African immigrants as separate from and more difficult than the rest of the immigrant population, specifically when compared to Spanish immigrants.[136] It followed this description by suggesting the government invest more in immigrant housing and social security and require companies to provide vocational training and general education for the West African migrants they employed.[137] Extra effort on the part of the French state was thus needed to "put an end…to abuses which [had] lasted too long" in the West African immigrant community in France.[138]

As more and more people became aware of the miserable housing conditions in their own cities, journalists flocked to cover them and condemn the government's lack of action. But why, given the volume of articles published in the 1960s about immigrants, are there so few interviews with the people whose living situations they were investigating? French historian and sociologist Jean-Philippe Dedieu has argued that this can be credited to a fear of stigmatization by the

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[133] "Les parias de l'immigration," *Forces Nouvelles*, January 16, 1964; Claude Feuillet, "Nous ne voulons pas d'esclaves!," *Syndicalisme*, March 1963, 4; "Forces Nouvelles," RetroNews (Bibliothèque nationale de France), accessed November 25, 2022, https://www.retronews.fr/titre-de-presse/forces-nouvelles.
[134] Ibid.
[135] "Rapport sur les questions d'organisation pour assurer le développement de l'unité et de l'action le succès du programme d'action renforçons puissamment la C.G.T," *Le Peuple*, March 31, 1963, 17-21.
[136] "Situation des travailleurs étranger," *Le Populaire,* 1963.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

French public as well as a desire to hide horrific or shameful conditions from African community members in their countries of origin.[139] When French people, almost always documentary filmmakers, did visit and interview West African communities, their outrage was palpable. Walking through the dark, musty stairways, they entered long narrow rooms lit only the yellow light of a few bare lightbulbs. Inside, rows of mattresses were pressed against the stone walls, there was rarely more than one faucet for drinking water and hygiene, and, in the winter, the cold pervaded the often-underground dwellings.[140] These documentarists provided the few interviews or glimpses of West African immigrant workers in the French media such as the 1964 documentary *Ouvriers noires de Paris (Black Workers of Paris)* (mentioned in the introduction to this chapter). In this film, Director Jacques Krier emphasized the importance of community in ensuring the survival of young West African immigrants upon arrival in France.[141] Six years later, in *Un Malien d'Ivry* (A Malian of Ivry*)* director Jean Mailland, infuriated after five senseless deaths in 1970 in Aubervilliers, due to poor housing and greed, interviewed a Malian participant in the Ivry rent strike of 1969.[142] Mailland expressed his condemnation of the status quo and support of the strikers by interspersing the film with video of the graves of the men who died in Aubervilliers[143] Seeing the conditions that these immigrants lived in and hearing their voices moved audiences, as is apparent in photographer Elie Kagan's review of Jean Schmidt's 1964 documentary *L'Afrique des banlieues* (Africa of the Suburbs) in *Droit et Liberté.* Kagan wrote, "These men… are revealed to us in their personality, with all that that entails for them in

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[139] Dedieu, Jean-Philippe. "S'engager dans l'image. Migrants ouest-africains et journalistes français dans les années 1960." *Ethnologie française* 42, no. 4 (2012): 811–22. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23274909, 814-15.
[140] *Ouvriers noirs de Paris*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEpf0vFNg-k; *Un Malien d'Ivry*, *Institut national de l'audiovisuel* (ina, 1970), https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/caf86015496/un-malien-d-ivry.
[141] *Ouvriers noirs de Paris*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEpf0vFNg-k.
[142] Ibid.
[143] *Un Malien d'Ivry*, *Institut national de l'audiovisuel* (ina, 1970), https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/caf86015496/un-malien-d-ivry.

terms of respect and fraternity: men like us because they are different."[144] He believed the film was especially effective and moving because the men were, "described without concession or sensibility."[145]

Gaining this access was difficult, however, given the mistrust between African communities and the French as well as their landlords' attempts to hide their avarice from the public. According to Dedieu, filmmakers often had to rely on tricks such as concealing their cameras or, alternatively, on working to build trust with the African workers and communities.[146] After seeing their lodgings and coming to the sickening realization that the conditions were normal for the majority of West Africans, reporters became frustrated by the workers' reluctance to show their housing conditions, or to talk about the abuse they faced at work, in housing, and from French citizens.[147] West Africans would have been equally frustrated by these reporters' lack of understanding. Their fear of stigmatization was well-founded, as specifically West African immigrants came to be associated with poor housing conditions and poor hygiene, as well as high rates of tuberculosis.[148] Some had watched their community members be deported back to Africa without the little money they had come for. Knowing that if they were deported, their sleepless nights in the overcrowded and inhabitable foyers of urban France would have been for nothing, they often stayed silent when interrogated by journalists with cameras; they understood little of their words, and they knew they were taking footage that could be used by the French police and immigration officials.[149] Thus, French progressive journalists faced a paradoxical situation in attempting to portray the situation of these workers who were both

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[144] Elie Kagan, " « L'Afrique des banlieues »," *Droit et liberté*, October 1967, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/a/a3/Dl67_266opt.pdf, 8.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Dedieu, Jean-Philippe. "S'engager dans l'image." 816-18.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France,* 145-48.
[149] Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France,* 145-48; Dedieu, "S'engager dans l'image." 816.

"socially dominated and socially incapable of showing their domination."[150] In this situation, was it justifiable to show images of migrants, in the words of one man interviewed in *Un malien d'Ivry*, "living like rats," packed into dark, damp, cold, overcrowded hovels? While the accounts were intended to raise awareness of these conditions in French society, they presented very real consequences of racial alienation and stigmatization.[151]

The clicking of typewriters filled leftist newsrooms of France as journalists eagerly reported on the conditions they had witnessed or heard about. As they described the austere basement dormitories, disease, and hopelessness, they called for reforms of the system of housing, contracting, and educating immigrant workers. However, as they wrote, during the mid-1960s, they were aware of the turning economic tide. Economic fortunes that had so long been positive, were souring.[152] As journalists on both sides of the political spectrum witnessed their children struggle to find employment and read predictions of a recession, their critiques of the government's treatment of immigrants morphed into questions about these immigrants' suitability for life in France. Then, as French-born citizens and officials read these newspaper accounts, the picture that formed of West African immigrants was that of a foreign population living in poverty and unhygienic conditions and bringing down wages of French jobs. While immigrants' housing conditions elicited some support and sympathy from the public, these articles introduced these migrant workers into the broader public's imagination as a liability and massive cost to the French government.

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[150] Dedieu, "S'engager dans l'image." 819.
[151] Ibid.
[152] "Les travailleurs étrangers dans l'économie française - II," *Les Échos*, July 26, 1966; "LES ÉVÊQUES DE LA RÉGION PARISIENNE ATTIRENT L'ATTENTION SUR LE CHÔMAGE DES JEUNES," *Le Monde*, April 29, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/04/29/les-eveques-de-la-region-parisienne-attirent-l-attention-sur-le-chomage-des-jeunes_2490218_1819218.html; "M. MENDÈS FRANCE : une grave crise économique menace.," *Le Monde*, January 20, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/01/20/m-mendes-france-une-grave-crise-economique-menace_2512441_1819218.html; "MOBILISER L'ÉCONOMIE," *Le Monde*, April 1, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/03/01/ii-mobiliser-l-economie_2505658_1819218.html.

Scapegoating, Humanitarianism, and Demographics

As West African immigrants became one of the faces of the immigrant housing crisis, economic fluctuations, and declining sources of immigrant labor from inside of Europe merged with these humanitarian concerns. Thus, journalists in the mid-to-late 1960s increasingly advocated closing the border to immigrants who could not effectively adapt to life in France without posing a social cost. After a small effort by journalists to shed light on and to improve living conditions for immigrants in order to entice more manpower to come to the country, priorities changed when the economy soured. Center and leftist media coverage increasingly pushed the narrative that immigrants, especially West African immigrants, were a liability to the French state, and hurt the French working-class.

France's national labor shortage worsened in 1964, and the government, companies, and newspapers recognized the problem. Papers including the financial daily *Les Échos*, *Le Monde*, and *Forces Nouvelles* argued that France was in competition with other Western European countries including Switzerland and Germany to attract workers.[153] This meant they needed to improve accommodation and what were known as "conditions d'accueil" or "reception conditions" for immigrants. Mirroring this sentiment, the Parti communiste français (French Communist Party - PCF) under the leadership of Georges Marchais released a statement calling for increased organizing efforts on behalf of immigrant workers.[154] Due to this advocacy and the public's increased attention to the conditions of immigrant housing and life in France, the French government under President de Gaulle, expanded the Fonds d'action sociale (Social Action Fund

[153] "Les travailleurs étrangers dans l'économie française," *Les Échos,* 1966; "Les parias de l'immigration" *Forces Nouvelles,* 1964; "Un rapport de M. Marchais au bureau politique : le Parti communiste va réorganiser son activité en direction de l'immigration ouvrière," *Le Monde*, April 23, 1964.
[154] "Un rapport de M. Marchais au bureau politique," *Le Monde*, 1964.

- FAS).[155] Some doubted it would be enough to fully improve conditions, however, and make France competitive in the labor market.[156] The FAS, originally known as the "Fonds d'action sociale pour les travailleurs musulmans d'Algérie en métropole et pour leur familles" (Social Action Fund for Muslim Workers from Algeria and for their Families), was created in 1958 to address the influx of Algerian workers to France during the 1950s, "as a first attempt to respond to accusations of 'discrimination' in the Social Security Administration's distribution of funds collected from Algerian workers' salaries."[157] The FAS then funded "private agencies offering housing and job training" for Algerian immigrant workers.[158] As mentioned, in 1964 the FAS expanded to aid all immigrant worker communities, including West African immigrants, becoming known as the "Fonds d'action sociale pour les travailleurs étrangers" (Social Action Fund for Foreign Workers).[159] In the language of the legislation, Sub-Saharan African workers, as opposed to North African, were referred to as "primo-immigrants" or first-time immigrants with no significant previously established communities in France.[160]

In 1966, multiple newspapers called for a drastic decrease in immigration, citing economic stagnation after a boom period for the French economy.[161] They pushed back against the idea, popular in the early 1960s, that immigrants filled jobs that no French-born citizens wanted to do, suggesting that as the economy stagnated, French citizens would become desperate and be forced to compete futilely with immigrants who would work for less and in worse

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[155] Ibid.
[156] "Les travailleurs étrangers dans l'économie française," *Les Échos,* 1966; "Les parias de l'immigration," *Forces Nouvelles,* 1964; "Un rapport de M. Marchais au bureau politique," *Le Monde*, 1964.
[157] Lyons, Amelia H. *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole : Algerian Families and the French Welfare State During Decolonization*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013. Accessed September 6, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 40; Michel Massenet, "Le Fonds d'action sociale et les travailleurs d'Afrique noire en France," *Hommes et Migrations*, 1965, 59.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Massenet, "Le Fonds d'action sociale et les travailleurs d'Afrique noire en France," 59-60.
[160] Ibid, 61.
[161] "Les travailleurs étrangers dans l'économie française," *Les Échos,* 1966; "Les parias de l'immigration," *Forces Nouvelles,* 1964; "Les trois quarts des immigrants sont des clandestins," *Les Échos*, April 14, 1966.

conditions.[162] This sentiment built on the trend of left and center-leaning newspapers suggesting that immigrants weakened the organizing capacity of the French labor force. A 1966 study quoted in *Les Échos* found that 56 percent of French people were "opposed to the arrival of foreign workers."[163] While there was still sympathy to be found, such as in a 1966 article from *Forces Nouvelles* by Marguerite Santes, where she lamented the conditions suffered by all immigrants, especially West Africans, much of the news coverage from 1966 framed immigration to France as a threat. Newspapers predicted an economic stagnation at the same time that European sources of immigration were drying up.

The French news media criticized an immigration system they perceived as chaotic, with large-scale regularizations of workers who decided to stay in France and little information at all about those who entered temporarily. As Italy industrialized, journalists and immigration officials feared the loss of culturally similar, Western European immigration sources to provide labor to France. Spanish and Portuguese immigrants fulfilled some of this need, albeit with more perceived cultural difficulties than Italians, but the government struggled to find a permanent, larger solution during the early 1960s. Before the economic downturn of the mid-1960s, the French media concerned themselves with this shortage, suggesting that improvements be made in immigrant housing and living conditions such as with the Fonds d'action sociale. Their narratives along with those created by Mbacké and Hondo emphasized the gulf between West Africans and the rest of France, and lamented the horrific conditions endured by these migrants. After predictions of an economic stagnation proliferated in 1964, however, colonial, paternalistic narratives that had always pervaded their rhetoric, and humanitarian concerns that they had once

[162] "Les travailleurs étrangers dans l'économie française" *Les Échos,* 1966.
[163] Ibid.

suggested the government work to address, provided a framework for the media to demonstrate the perceived social costs of immigration, especially from West Africa.

Chapter 2: Building Networks of Resistance

The front page of the June 1968 issue of the MRAP's monthly magazine *Droit et Liberté* read, "The weeks that have shaken France," referring to the May 1968 movement. This was followed by a question in bold red lettering, "Is it the fault of foreigners?"[164] In an article within, journalist Jacques Tenessi wrote that a Gaullist group had distributed xenophobic pamphlets at a protest in Paris on May 30th. The group claimed that foreigners or immigrants were taking over French workplaces through strikes and on the picket line.[165] Tenessi saw an interesting development within this bigotry, "the massive, unprecedented participation of immigrant workers in recent protest movements."[166] Instead of dwelling on the growing xenophobia, Tenessi praised the "meritorious," "commendable" and "massive" presence of immigrants in the May 1968 protests and strikes, despite the fact that they "[were] among the most threatened in their safety and their daily lives."[167] He recognized that some immigrant groups like those from French departments in the Caribbean were more visible because as French citizens they did not fear deportation.[168] In contrast, he specifically cited Algerians and West Africans as needing to be more wary in their resistance.[169] He followed this, however, by writing that despite differences between immigrant groups this involvement was, "confirmation that immigrant workers [were] an integral part of the labor movement in France."[170] This movement was just the

[164] Jacques Tenessi, "Les immigrés dans la grève," *Droit et Liberté*, June 1968, 7.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Ibid.

beginning, according to Tenessi, who ended his piece by calling for further consolidation and inclusion of immigrants in the broader French workers' movement.[171]

The Risks and Rewards of the May 1968 Movement

As unemployment increased and immigration continued, French society faced a reckoning with the May 1968 movement. While immigrants have traditionally been left out of narratives of 1968, their involvement laid the foundation for future migrant resistance and activism, although it did not immediately lead French leftists and trade unionists to accept immigrant workers as equals in the fight against exploitation and to see their goals as legitimate.[172] Nevertheless, immigrant actions during May 1968 and the ensuing Ivry strike and Aubervilliers tragedy did help to forge connections, encourage alliances between the two groups, and shape the way immigrants were able to use the French media to their advantage. During the May 1968 movement itself, West African immigrants and their struggles received little coverage in centrist and conservative newspapers, and leftist papers made reference to these migrants only in passing, in relation to the student and French-led labor movements taking place. By actively participating in the movement, despite the lack of coverage they received in the press and the barriers they faced, however, West African immigrants, along with the larger immigrant population in France, established themselves as allies of the French leftist and labor movements. Afterwards, though media coverage of their struggles was still saturated with colonial ideas, leftist groups and labor unions played a larger part in these immigrants' movements and in bringing media attention to their struggle as can be seen in the Ivry Rent Strike and Aubervilliers tragedy. Not only were these immigrants able to rely on assistance from French-led

[171] Ibid.
[172] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France,* 37-38; Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals,* 6-8, 11-13.

organizations, but they also appeared to be empowered to ask for more from the French government, at the same time that the government's receptivity to such demands was rapidly closing. Thus, West African immigrant participation and partnerships during the May 1968 movement, the Ivry rent strike, and the outrage after the deaths at Aubervilliers had lasting consequences for the future of French immigrant protests both within and outside the West African immigrant worker community. To identify the presence of West Africans in the May 1968 movement, however, it is necessary to read between the lines of media coverage of the fraught May 1968 protests and strikes to discover what these demonstrations meant to West African communities and how these immigrants navigated the months of student and worker mobilization.

The May 1968 movement began among French university students as a challenge to conservative traditional values in French culture and politics.[173] According to Kirstin Ross the movement was, "a massive refusal on the part of thousands, even millions, of people to see in the social what we usually see: nothing more than the narrowest of sociological categories."[174] This social upheaval led to increasing connections between different socioeconomic classes and segments of society. As the protests spread from the universities to the cities and began to include the working class, French police reacted with increasing violence, leading major unions like the Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor - CGT) and the Confédération française démocratique du travail (French Democratic Confederation of Labor - CFDT) as well as the Force ouvrière (Workers' Force - FO) to ally with the students and eventually call for a general strike.[175] This partnership was fragile, as the unions and PCF

[173] Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives,* 7-9, 8, 200.
[174] Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals*, 6, 59-61.
[175] "Paris: May 1968," *Paris: May 1968* (New York, NY: Solidarity, 1968), 10-13.

vacillated and worked to maintain the distinction between worker and student aims.[176] Ross has described May 1968 as France's "first general strike that extended beyond the traditional centers of industrial production," arguing that, "No professional sector, no category of worker was unaffected by the strike; no region, city, or village in France was untouched."[177]

In this context of repression, chaos, and increasing mobilization of the working-class and French society, immigrant workers, who numbered around three million, faced a more difficult decision than the average French worker in choosing whether or not to join the movement. According to French law, immigrants were required to practice "strict political neutrality."[178] Despite this, and building on the work of Gastaut who described the movement as a "moment of change in interethnic relations under the Fifth Republic," Daniel Gordon argued on the basis of available news articles and records of arrests, that immigrant workers participated in the movement in numbers comparable to native-born French members of the working class.[179] In his chapter on the movement, Gastaut only mentioned briefly one West African student participant in the movement and the participation of Senegalese and Mauritanian workers in the Comité de liaison des organisations de travailleurs immigrés en France (Liaison Committee of Immigrant Workers in France - CLOTIF).[180] In his more in-depth look, Gordon found examples of West African immigrant workers not just as witnesses to the massive strikes but as active participants.[181]

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[176] "Colloque ouvriers-étudiants à Billancourt," *Le Monde*, May 18, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/18/colloque-ouvriers-etudiants-a-billancourt_2501338_1819218.html.
[177] Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives,* 3.
[178] Tenessi, "Les immigrés dans la grève," 1968, 7.
[179] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France,* 37; Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals,* 80.
[180] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France,* 40, 43.
[181] Gordon, 80, 60-65.

In fact, West African immigrants were at the heart of a May 1968 strike at the enormous and diverse Renault automobile factory at Boulogne-Billancourt, on the outskirts of Paris.[182] Production at the austere grey building on the bank of the Seine ground to a halt on May 13, 1968. In the early morning, a cloudless one, as remembered in an anonymous eyewitness account from the publisher Solidarity, as they took the train or bus to their shifts, the West African employees of Renault would have been aware of the unrest enveloping the nation and especially Paris.[183] Perhaps they had seen the graffiti throughout the city, and they'd likely have heard about the violent clashes between students and riot police in the Latin Quarter two days before.[184] Talking amongst themselves they would have heard about the leaflets that the CGT and CFDT had distributed among workers the previous day in Portuguese, French, and Spanish.[185] Perhaps concerned with their own struggles, letters not reaching family at home, rising food costs, and more mundane facets of daily life, they had disregarded these flyers that many of them could not read.[186] The observer from the Solidarity account noted that many immigrant workers waited to see whether the rest of the workforce would do before joining the Renault strike, and pointed to the difficulties in communication between native-French trade unionists and immigrant workers.[187] This was especially true in the case of West African immigrants who rarely saw their native languages spoken by the unions and illustrates the higher stakes of participation for immigrants, and likely a higher perceived risk for West Africans in

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[182] Ibid, 61, 62-63.
[183] "Paris: May 1968," *Paris: May 1968* (New York, NY: Solidarity, 1968), 9-13;
[184] Ibid.
[185] "Paris: May 1968," *Paris: May 1968* (New York, NY: Solidarity, 1968), 12; "Renault : la grève avec occupation des ateliers s'est étendue de Cléon à toutes les usines," *Le Monde*, May 18, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/le-monde-2/article/2008/05/09/renault-la-greve-avec-occupation-des-ateliers-s-est-etendue-de-cleon-a-toutes-les-usines_1042804_1004868.html
[186] "Paris: May 1968," *Paris: May 1968* (New York, NY: Solidarity, 1968), 12; "Renault : la grève avec occupation des ateliers," *Le Monde,* 1968.
[187] "Paris: May 1968," *Paris: May 1968* (New York, NY: Solidarity, 1968), 12-13;

particular. When they arrived at the picket lines, however, observers noted that they joined and proved to be resolute, even as the pressure from the Renault company increased.[188]

The many French news sources and leftist magazines that discussed the May 1968 movement did so from a distinctly French-centered perspective. Thus, it is impossible to know exactly why these workers hesitated before joining the strike. Even so, given the paucity of sources that mention immigrant participation, these articles are useful in painting a picture of immigrant life during May of 1968 and in understanding the choices or lack of choices these migrants faced. Like most urban residents, especially in Paris and the surrounding suburbs, West African workers faced transportation strikes for days on end, sanitation strikes causing rats to inundate the streets, food shortages, and an inability to contact home due to a postal strike.[189] From their crowded lodgings in urban France, workers watched as their host nation was overtaken by what resembled a Revolution. Although they found solidarity in their communities in France, they would have been frustrated and anxious when they realized they could no longer send letters and money home to their families. Compounding this sense of helplessness, the ongoing transportation strikes for much of the movement meant that many immigrants became involved in the strikes regardless of their own views, as they could not commute to their places of employment.[190] Those who could left their lodgings in the early mornings for their shifts, leaving the temporarily unemployed to clean, cook, and hope that the chaos would end or that the strikes would ensure better working conditions for them and their communities in the future.

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[188] Ibid.
[189] "Des rats dans les rues de Paris," *Le Monde*, May 30, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/30/des-rats-dans-les-rues-de-paris_2501557_1819218.html; "Les postiers sont en grève jusqu'à jeudi matin," *Le Monde*, May 9, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/09/les-postiers-sont-en-greve-jusqu-a-jeudi-matin_2503722_1819218.html.
[190] Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals,* 60.

When immigrants did make the decision to participate in marches, strikes, or other demonstrations, they faced a tense atmosphere bursting with opportunities for both progress and repression. May 1968 saw an increasingly hostile and violent police force, though this was not novel for immigrant communities in France, as well as a growing xenophobic and racist sentiment among the Gaullist segment of the French population.[191] Gordon notes that immigrant workers in general were less likely to participate in demonstrations that were predicted to be violent or involve property destruction because of the high risk of a confrontation with the police.[192] He cites the example of the Malian worker Richard Tôle, who was deported due to his suspected involvement with the May 1968 movement, although he only admitted to trade union participation.[193] Even the act of being a bystander and immigrant could prove dangerous and result in police violence, and the memories of the October 1961 massacres of Algerians at an anti-curfew protest were fresh in the minds of many.[194] French police beat, arrested, detained, shot, and deported Algerians involved or near the protest, culminating in around 120 Algerian fatalities, according to Prakash's estimates.[195] Even so, the immigrants who joined the movement, whether in a strike at their workplace or in a march of solidarity, saw a promise in the movement, one that they could help to achieve and make more inclusive and revolutionary. They did not simply support the demands of their French-born compatriots, but added their own

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[191] "Transports parisiens : la grève continue," *Le Monde*, May 25, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/25/transports-parisiens-la-greve-continue_2502518_1819218.html; "Quatorze lignes d'autobus de la banlieue parisienne paralysée par un grève-surprise," *Le Monde*, May 4, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/04/quatorze-lignes-d-autobus-de-la-banlieue-parisienne-paralysees-par-une-greve-surprise_2502736_1819218.html; "Paris et la grève," *Le Monde*, May 21, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/21/paris-et-la-greve_2502065_1819218.html; "De sérieux accrochages au quartier Latin," *Le Monde*, May 9, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/09/de-serieux-accrochages-au-quartier-latin_2504274_1819218.html; Louis Mouscron, "Ardent mois de mai," *MRAP*, June 1968, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/6/68/Dl68_274opt.pdf.

[192] Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals,* 80.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Mouscron, "Ardent mois de mai," 5;

[195] Prakash, *Empire on the Seine*, 126-27; Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France,* 18-20.

stipulations; the MRAP reported that immigrant demands included "equal pay, family allowances, social advantages, effective recognition of the right to strike and trade union rights, removal of slums, and construction of decent housing at affordable prices."[196] The CGT published their platform for immigrant workers in Arabic, Portuguese, French, and Spanish, however, raising the question of how involved West African workers were or could have been in this process as compared to those from North Africa or Southern Europe.[197]

Thus, by participating in the movement and helping to shape its aims even if they fell short, as they often did, immigrant workers in France, including West African immigrants, challenged the French left not just to include them in their activism, but to change it for the good of both groups. As Gordon put it, for the French Left, "It was a two-way process: trying to spread their ideology among the immigrants, but also learning from the immigrants about the realities of their own society."[198] This can be seen in leftist publications from the months after the movement, with the MRAP publishing a guide for activists working with immigrant worker populations in a November 1968 article in its magazine *Droit et Liberté.*[199] The article included statistics on the demographics of the immigrant population in France as well as advice about how to be culturally sensitive when dealing with immigrant populations and interviewing immigrant workers on their working and living conditions.[200]

In contrast with the MRAP, whose mission included working on behalf of immigrants in France, there was a notable lack of coverage of immigrant worker participation in most French media coverage during the time. In the case of *Le Monde*, journalists were preoccupied with

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[196] Jacques Tenessi, "Les immigrés dans la grève," 1968, 7.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals,* 60.
[199] Alain Gaussel, "Immigrés : votre enquête," *Droit et Liberté*, November 1968.
[200] Ibid.

countless descriptions of the clashes between students and police in the Latin Quarter, accounts of the many disagreements and rivalries between unions, and coverage of the hopeful counteractions, compromises, and promises made by the Gaullist government; the few stories about immigrant participants in the movement focused on foreign students.[201] Instead journalists from *Le Monde* devoted five articles to the anti-immigrant speeches and sentiments of the British Member of Parliament Enoch Powell during May of 1968, expressing hope that his movement of racist demagoguery, which journalist Alain Jacob compared to the U.S.'s long, hot summer of 1967, would be limited to the other side of the Channel.[202] As it turned out, this would not be the case.

Ivry as a Model of Resistance

Contrary to its name, the May 1968 movement did not end after a month and had reverberations throughout French society for decades to come. Immigrants in France, both those who participated in the May 1968 movement and those who did not, continued to challenge the status quo in French society, but were increasingly visible in doing so. West African immigrant resistance occurred most often through rent strikes, most notably, in Ivry-Sur-Seine in the suburbs outside of Paris beginning in March of 1969.[203] While this strike garnered the most media coverage and public attention and is thus important in understanding the evolution of West African immigrant worker political participation in France, it is important to observe that it was not an anomaly. Historian Gillian Glaes noted that in 1969 in Paris and its surrounding suburbs

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[201] Christitch and Quélin, "De sérieux accrochages au Quartier Latin," 1968.
[202] Alain Jacob, "M. Enoch Powell a lancé un défi ouvert au système politique britannique lui-même," *Le Monde*, May 4, 1968, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1968/05/04/m-enoch-powell-a-lance-un-defi-ouvert-au-systeme-politique-britannique-lui-meme_2501785_1819218.html.
[203] "Les travailleurs africains du 'foyer' d'Ivry vont être relogés," *Le Monde*, December 9, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/12/09/les-travailleurs-africains-du-foyer-d-ivry-vont-etre-reloges_2643541_1819218.html.

there were rent strikes or the threat of rent strikes on rue Bisson, rue Léon Gaumont, rue d'Orgemont, rue de Faubourg-Saint-Denis, rue Raymond-Losserand, and rue Pinel.[204] The Ivry strike was particularly significant due to its size, longevity, and the way the organizers commanded media attention and French union support, but the conditions that drove the strikers to organize were ubiquitous among West African immigrant workers living in France.

The rent strike took place in a foyer or immigrant lodging that had originally been a chocolate factory until landlords Madeleine Morael, French, and Garba Traoré, Malian, began to rent it out.[205] Despite this partnership being unusual for the time, the two filled the traditional role of landlords when dealing with West African tenants: renting out beds to multiple men, for one to sleep in at night and the other during the day.[206] By 1969 there were over 500 tenants in the residence, a number far greater than the initial 150 Malian workers that the French police had relocated there from inside Paris after a court ruled their previous dwellings unsafe.[207] Glaes noted that this number increased significantly over the years before 1969 likely because immigrant networks encouraged their friends and families to join them, as well as the double-renting practices of the landlords.[208] By 1969 the community inside the former chocolate factory included mostly Malian immigrant workers and a few students as well as some Antillean, Senegalese, and Mauritanian workers.[209]

Thus, after being thrown out of their admittedly poor housing, the original 150 residents of 45 rue Gabriel Péri, watched as their community grew, and as their new housing became more and more crowded. During this same time period, 1965 to 1969, the owners of the building

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[204] Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France*, 56.
[205] Ibid, 57-8.
[206] Ibid, 59.
[207] Ibid, 57.
[208] Ibid, 59.
[209] Ibid, 60; Jacques Tenessi, "Fin d'un scandale," *MRAP*, February 1971, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/0/0d/Dl71_299opt.pdf, 8.

collected more than 919,110 Francs according to *Le Monde*.[210] The three-story building itself was hardly equipped for living, as its utilities made clear; it contained no air vents or windows, five toilets, four taps, with only two for drinking water, one kitchen, mold, and, according to Jacques Tenessi of the MRAP, the bedding had not been changed or cleaned in four years.[211] His colleague, MRAP author Marie-France Sottet, was startled by the condition of the building, especially after and encounter with one of the many rats in the foyer.[212] Thus, when the landlords attempted to increase the rent from 40 to 60 Francs a month, the residents refused to pay.[213] In response, Morael and Traoré cut off the building's electricity and water, "intercep[ed] the mail, and coordinated[d] an ongoing police presence in and around the neighborhood."[214]

The decision to strike would not have been taken lightly, but conditions had gone from bad to worse since 1965, and thus the immigrants inside the former chocolate factory weighed their options and decided to take action. Glaes argued that rent strikes were a more effective and less daunting way for immigrants to France to protest during this time than factory strikes.[215] Because French law required that immigrants be politically neutral, these immigrants could frame the strike as a protest against horrific housing conditions rather than a political statement

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[210] Robert Buron and Madeleine Trébous, "L'oubli de l'injustice est pire que l'injustice," *Le Monde*, January 13, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/01/13/l-oubli-de-l-injustice-est-pire-que-l-injustice_2654596_1819218.html.

[211] "Cent trente-sept personnes interpellées," Le Monde, January 13, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/01/13/cent-trente-sept-personnes-interpellees_2653095_1819218.html; Michel Leiris, "Chez les Maliens d'Ivry-sur-Seine," *Le Monde*, January 13, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/01/13/chez-les-maliens-d-rsquo-ivry-sur-seine_2653164_1819218.html; Tenessi, "Fin d'un scandale," 1971, 8; J. T., "La fin d'un scandale," *Le Monde*, December 10, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/12/10/la-fin-d-un-scandale_2640266_1819218.html.

[212] Marie-France Sottet, "Les africains poursuivent la grève du loyer," *Droit et Liberté*, March 1970, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/2/2d/Dl70_290opt.pdf, 8.

[213] Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France*, 60.

[214] Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France*, 60; "Ni eau ni électricité pour sept cents locataires d'un foyer de travailleurs africains.," *Le Monde*, January 3, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/01/03/ni-eau-ni-electricite-pour-sept-cents-locataires-d-un-foyer-de-travailleurs-africains_2653319_1819218.html.

[215] Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France*, 63.

against the governments' immigration policies and lack of safeguards against discrimination and racism.[216] Glaes wrote that, "The African immigrants who staged the Ivry strike transcended the boundaries of national citizenship in the postcolonial era and made the case that all individuals regardless of legal status should have access to decent housing and other basic amenities."[217] Thus, the decision to strike was revolutionary, while framed around mundane issues like access to water and stoves. It was well-organized as the unrest was years in the making. The strikers' residents' committee chose Mamadou Diandouma, Amadou Diarra and Ali Diallo as leaders, and they worked with leftist organizations to publicize their cause. The MRAP, for example, organized a film screening and discussion about the strike and published numerous press releases and articles in support of the strikers.[218] A striker, Mr. Mamadou, gave a statement to Marie-France Sottet of the MRAP, stating resolutely that the strikers would not pay rent until the lodging was improved and residents who worked far from Ivry were relocated by the government.[219] The leftist municipality of Ivry brought gas, lamps, and water twice a day for months to the strikers.[220] When the Prefecture of Police summoned one of the leaders, Mr. Diandouma, on October 1 of 1969, in what the MRAP labelled as an intimidation tactic, his fellow strikers followed in solidarity and waited outside to ensure his safety.[221] The tenants and their leaders developed strategies to attract media attention and public sympathy for their struggle, including occupying the Malian embassy in Paris, and linking themselves to the tragedy

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[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid, 64.
[218] "En bref," *Droit et liberté*, March 1970, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/2/2d/Dl70_290opt.pdf, 33; "Les Travailleurs Africains Et Les Libertés," *Droit et Liberté*, March 1970, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/b/b5/Dl69_287opt.pdf, 30.
[219] Sottet, "Les africains poursuivent la grève," 1970, 8.
[220] Sottet, "Les africains poursuivent la grève," 1970, 8; "La main-d'œuvre africaine doit cesser d'être considérée comme un sous-prolétariat," *Le Monde*, 1970.
[221] "En bref," *Droit et liberté*, 1970, 33; "Les Travailleurs Africains Et Les Libertés," *Droit et Liberté*, March 1970, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/b/b5/Dl69_287opt.pdf, 30.

of Aubervilliers, when five immigrants in a different suburb outside of Paris died of asphyxiation due to their unsafe housing conditions.[222]

In the press, the conditions at the Ivry foyer, which as has been seen were fairly standard for West African immigrants at the time, were reported with outrage, especially in the aftermath of Aubervilliers when the tone and volume of coverage shifted. Journalists made comparisons between the lodging and concentration camps and called the lodgings "veritable slums," and "ghettos" that "some would in no case want for their dog."[223] In a different *Le Monde* article, the author appeared to realize that West African immigrant workers constituted a significant population in France for the first time, reporting in a shocked tone that in Paris *alone*: "The police headquarters counted around 20,000, a third whom are housed in official homes; 2,000 others live in private accommodation which they have managed to acquire, 1,500 in hotels, 1,500 in private centers not approved by the police headquarters. The remaining 8,000 have never been accurately counted and constitute a floating population."[224] In his article for *Le Monde*, journalist Jean Lacouture posed a question that appeared to be on the minds of most French, including the government officials who would move to drastically limit West African immigration in just two years, "Who makes the ghettos? Those who arrive or those who welcome?"[225]

In December of 1970, the strikers, exhausted from the drawn out conflict, yet hopeful about their futures in France, finally achieved victory when the courts came to an agreement to relocate them to better but more expensive lodging.[226] The fact that they accepted these terms

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[222] J. T., "La fin d'un scandale," *Le Monde*, 1970.
[223] Leiris, "Chez les Maliens d'Ivry-sur-Seine," 1970; "Ni eau ni électricité pour sept cents locataires," *Le Monde*, 1970; "La main-d'œuvre africaine doit cesser d'être considérée comme," *Le Monde*, 1970; Jean Lacouture, "Nos ghettos," *Le Monde*, March 21, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/03/21/ii-nos-ghettos_2662776_1819218.html.
[224] "Ils sont cinquante mille en France," *Le Monde*, January 5, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/01/05/ils-sont-cinquante-mille-en-france_2654829_1819218.html.
[225] Lacouture, "Nos ghettos," 1970.
[226] J. T., "La fin d'un scandale," *Le Monde*, 1970.

indicated that the conditions had been the main issue for them rather than the rent increase.[227] Leftists were enthusiastic about the victory with the MRAP reporting, "everything has changed for them."[228] The strikers left the factory that had served as home for some of them for over five years and moved via buses and trucks provided by the municipality of Ivry to higher quality housing in the southwest suburbs of Paris.[229] While many strikers were happy with the solution, some who were relocated to suburbs like Thiais lamented that they would have to wake up at five in the morning to reach their jobs at the Renault factory.[230] Thus, some of the former Ivry residents were upset that their initial aims of improving the Ivry lodging and lowering their rent had not been achieved. Enjoying his new lodgings and giving an interview for the MRAP, strike leader Mamadou Diandouma emphasized the determination, centrality, and work of the former residents of 45 rue Gabriel Péri, "Our relocation is due in the first place to our own action, but it was facilitated by support that we brought from French organizations and the municipality of Ivry."[231] He recognized the crucial support of French organizations and the leftist Ivy municipality, but phrased his statement carefully, emphasizing that the immigrants "brought" outside support rather than received it.

The strikers ended 1970 with an unprecedented success. Just the previous year a different West African-led rent strike in Seine-Saint-Denis, a different suburb of Paris, had ended in disaster as the MRAP reported that two of the participants were arrested and deported.[232] Thus, the Ivry strikers knew the risk they took on in resisting their unlivable housing conditions, and in actively searching for allies and media attention. The decision to strike, despite the clandestine

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Tenessi, "Fin d'un scandale," 1971.
[232] Jacques Tenessi, "Immigrés ont-ils des droits?," *Droit et Liberté*, 1969, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/1/1d/Dl69_284opt.pdf, 7.

status of most West African immigrant workers at the time and the French laws around immigrant political neutrality, demonstrates their resolve and organizing capacity. They suffered without water and electricity and through police harassment during the strike of over a year.[233] This paid off in the end for many, though not all, of the strikers, who secured for themselves a clean and habitable living space.

Tragedy in Aubervilliers

There were many West African immigrants who were not as fortunate as the Ivry strikers, and many who were unable to choose whether or not to risk ending their anonymity. In the early morning of January 2, 1970, just short of two years after the May 1968 movements, an uneasy silence filled the rue des Postes in Aubervilliers, a northern suburb of Paris. This deceptive stillness was interrupted when the bodies were discovered. Sometime during the night or early morning five West African workers had died of asphyxiation from carbon monoxide poisoning.[234] Two more were hospitalized.[235] That night temperatures had dropped to negative three degrees Celsius, or around twenty-six degrees Fahrenheit, and the owner of the ironically labeled, "Franco-African Solidarity" house refused to heat the lodgings when the residents could not produce the 70 Francs of rent for that month. Despite the body heat of the fifty men crammed into the five rooms, the building would have been freezing.[236] As night fell, desperate from the cold, the men built a fire with branches and logs under the lid of a washing machine.[237] While

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[233] Tenessi, "Fin d'un scandale," 1971.
[234] Jacques Tenessi, "Aubervilliers: l'exception Ou La Règle ?," *Droit et Liberté*, February 1970, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/5/5f/Dl70_289opt.pdf, 4-5.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France*, 52-53.

this provided the necessary heat, carbon monoxide and smoke filled the windowless rooms, killing five of these men.

The bare details reported by the outraged French press about what came to be known as the "drama of Aubervilliers" leave many unanswered questions. Who were these men who had decided to sleep near each other in their overcrowded lodgings? Were they friends despite their different ages and countries of origins, bonded through their miserable conditions? What happened to their families? Were their family members in France or Africa? How were they informed of their loved ones' deaths? Still more questions arise about the men who survived. They were likely moved to government-run housing after the incident, but were they able to go back to work? Did their housing conditions improve afterwards, and could they afford to pay their new rent? How did they cope with the psychological trauma of seeing their friends or acquaintances die?

Unfortunately, it is impossible to answer these questions based on the available French press coverage, which provide only minor insights into the lives of the victims. The five men who lost their lives were Kamara Amara Sidi, thirty years old and Mauritanian, and four Senegalese men, Sow Bocar Thialel, aged thirty-nine, Kamara Semba Hamady, aged thirty-four, Kamara Hamady, aged twenty-eight, and Konte Alioui, aged thirty-seven.[238] The two hospitalized men were Diani Faba Abdauramane, a thirty-nine year Mauritanian and Sow Boulo, a twenty-year old Senegalese man.[239]According to the MRAP, Kamara Semba Hamady and Kamara Hamady were brothers.[240] They were both married and had three children. Both men were employed at a racecourse in Vincennes, a long commute from the Northern to the Eastern

[238] Tenessi, "Aubervilliers: l'exception ou la règle," 4-5.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.

suburbs of Paris.[241] Kone Aliou was married too and had two children.[242] He worked at the Établissements Siam & Dreyfus Montreuil-sous-Bois, again in the Eastern suburbs of Paris.[243] Perhaps the three had commuted to work together. Sow Bocar left one child behind, but the paper made no mention of a wife, nor what became of this child.[244] He had worked at the Comète brewery.[245] Outside of these three men, only names and nationalities remain. *Droit et Liberté* referred to their migration as an "exile," inquiring, "Had they ever imagined dying in exile. Never seeing their parents again, their African land...?"[246] Tellingly, even this anti-racist journal viewed West African immigration to France as something temporary; men migrating far from their home, destined to return to Africa if they survived the inhumane conditions they would inevitably face in France. In the midst of the support from the left, there were hints of a storm gathering. The leftist MRAP journalist Fred Hermantin in an outraged editorial cited statistics about the percentage of immigrant workers who actually passed through the ONI: 18%. He asked rhetorically, "Who benefits from this cheap labor? Who is responsible for this offense which deprives foreign workers of the accommodation to which they are entitled?"[247] Later that day, as snow fell over Paris, and as their presence in the country was debated, fellow West African immigrant workers gathered outside the foyer in silent reflection and mourning.[248]

As the story of the tragedy took over the media, in large part due to the work of the strikers at Ivry and their allies on the French left, the funeral procession, which took place on January 10, 1970, became, *Le Monde* reported in a censorious tone, a "veritable political

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[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Fred Hermantin, "Qui?," *Droit et Liberté*, February 1970, https://archives.mrap.fr/mediawiki/images/5/5f/Dl70_289opt.pdf.
[248] Mercier, "Qui est responsable?" 1970.

meeting."[249] This created tension between the protestors and the West African workers, likely some former roommates and friends of the deceased men, who gathered to show their respect. Documentary filmmakers Marcel Trillat and Frédéric Variot captured this atmosphere in their footage of a scuffle between the gathered Africans and white leftists outside of the foyer.[250] The strikers at Ivry, however, seeing these migrants die of conditions that were all-too-familiar, encouraged the connection between their struggle and the tragedy. The French left quickly latched onto the deaths as a cause célèbre and sign of the government's failure to protect the vulnerable.[251] Thus, the funeral procession included far-left parties identified as Maoist, members of the Unified Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Unifié-PSU), the Senegalese Consulate in Paris, the Mayor of Aubervilliers, and intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre and Kateb Yacine.[252] By the end of the demonstration, security forces had arrested 137 people, and around a thousand continued on to the burial at the Parisian mosque in Thiais.[253] This funeral-turned-protest cemented the Aubervilliers tragedy further in the French imagination and lent much-needed attention and sympathy from the French public to the Ivry rent strikes, where strikers had been without electricity and water since the spring.

While the strike was still being worked out in French court, and would not end until that December, the public outcry reached the Pompidou administration. Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas, who, along with President Georges Pompidou, de Gaulle's successor after the 1968 movement, had made few overtures towards solving the immigrant housing problem, visited Aubervilliers in person the following month on February 12, 1970, for an "investigation"

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[249] "Cent trente-sept personnes interpellées," *Le Monde*, 1970.
[250] *Étranges étrangers* (Scopcolor, 1970).
[251] Glaes, *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France*, 95-97.
[252] "Cent trente-sept personnes interpellées," Le Monde, 1970.
[253] Ibid.

of the conditions; the visit surprised both the media and public.[254] Reporting on his visit in a speech he stated, "I saw a cellar where dozens of Africans were crammed together in intolerable conditions" and powerfully but ominously promised, "I am taking the necessary measures of all kinds, so that we increase the pace this year in order to put an end to the shantytowns by 1972."[255] He followed this by proclaiming that the government had been studying the issue for months, but placed the blame for the conditions on the immigrants themselves as well, saying, "The idea is to accustom the populations of the slums to accepting to pay a modest rent in order to be housed decently, whereas until now they have paid nothing." Speaking about West African immigrants, Delmas-Chaban stated of their habit to live together in communities of the same ethnicity, "We understand them a little…but they are easy prey for illness and physical degradation."[256]

As the memory of the Aubervilliers tragedy faded, and the Ivry residents were successfully relocated, cracks began to show, especially in the way that these immigrants, and West African immigrants in particular, continued to be discussed in the press. In writing about the Aubervilliers tragedy and Ivry after Chaban-Delmas' promises, French journalists, seeing the daunting sums of money cited by studies on how to improve housing for immigrants in France, began to place the blame for the situation more generally on immigrants.[257] One *Le Monde* journalist in 1971 blamed the French immigration policy and the Social Action Fund, but maintained that government policy was not the only cause of the poor housing quality that

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[254] Jacques Chaban-Delmas, "M. Chaban-Delmas : il faut en finir en 1972 avec les bidonvilles," *Le Monde*, February 13, 1970, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1970/02/13/m-chaban-delmas-il-faut-en-finir-en-1972-avec-les-bidonvilles_2670577_1819218.html; William R. Nester, "President Pompidou," in *De Gaulle's Legacy: The Art of Power in France's Fifth Republic* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 73-91, 73-74.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] "Les bidonvilles un an après le pari de M. Chaban-Delmas," *Le Monde*, January 21, 1971, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1971/01/21/les-bidonvilles-un-an-apres-le-pari-de-m-chaban-delmas_2457668_1819218.html.

immigrants in France endured. He claimed that there was a "sociological" problem, arguing, "the migrant, coming from a rural environment where it was taken for granted that housing was free, does not understand the need to devote large sums to it in France, especially since he came there in the hope of earning the maximum in the shortest possible time."[258] Despite the growing support for a harsher border policy to put an end to the issue of poor immigrant housing, however, the alliances forged between leftists, unions, and immigrant communities during the May 1968 movement, and more importantly for West African immigrants, during the Ivry rent strike and Aubervilliers tragedy, would set the tone for the immigrant rebuttal to the changing border policy.

After almost a decade of the same debates about unsanitary and inhumane immigrant housing in the French press and as the unresolved chaos of the May 1968 movement still lingered beneath the surface of French society, West Africans at Ivry stepped into the public eye to claim their right to sanitary housing. They were not the first to do so, as the tragic outcome of the failed 1968 Seine-Saint-Denis rent strike makes clear, but they believed that they could no longer wait for better treatment. Working with their communities, they overcame fears of deportation and police harassment to accomplish their goals. As they enjoyed their new lodgings, they may have thought of the five dead men in Aubervilliers, who had also suffered unacceptable housing conditions, but had been unable to find justice.

[258] Pierre Verdier, "Aurons-nous toujours des bidonvilles?," *Le Monde*, January 2, 1971, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1971/01/02/aurons-nous-toujours-des-bidonvilles_2458430_1819218.html.

Chapter 3: Meeting the Challenge of the Circulaires

While some historians like Patrick Weil have disregarded the importance of the French border closure of the early 1970s, scholars including Gastaut and Gordon have noted the massive backlash the 1972 border closure caused within immigrant communities in France, but made little note of West African participants in the protests.[259] I emphasize the importance of the Ivry rent strike and Aubervilliers tragedy as laying the foundations for the mobilization of this community, and seek to locate West Africans as a part of this larger immigrant movement. Contemporary writers noted the change in immigrant attitudes too. In a 1973 piece for *Le Monde*, Jean-Claude Guillebaud described this phenomenon, writing, "Today, officials declare they are shocked by the new tone of immigrant leaders, who reject the standards of comfort of old foyers, talk abruptly of their rights, and believe that through the Social Action Fund, they themselves finance housing for which they are made to pay twice."[260] He took his information about the dissatisfaction with the Social Action Fund from the President of the UGTSF, an influential Senegalese activist, Sally N'Dongo.[261] Denouncing the existing system that encouraged the exploitation of immigrant workers, a situation that had been exacerbated by the announcement of an exclusionary border policy that past year, Guillebaud wrote, "France only manages to develop its economy at [this] speed because it has at least three million foreign workers. In any case they must be paid and lodged properly."[262] Echoing these sentiments in an article for the new magazine *L'Express* that same year, Pol Echevin and Vincent Lalu wrote

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[259] Gordon, *Immigrants & Intellectuals,* 120-25; Gastaut, *L' immigration et l'opinion en France*, 173-75.
[260] Jean-Claude Guillebaud, "Dix-huit mois de lutte contre les foyers-taudis pour travailleurs immigrés : un maigre bilan," *Le Monde*, January 13, 1973.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.

ominously of the widespread immigrant protests and strikes spreading through France, referring specifically to a large strike at the Renault factory in Lyon, "[France's economic growth] would be impossible without the employment of immigrants. They are beginning to know it."[263]

The Risks of Visibility Realized

In 1972, as discourse about the terrible living conditions of West African immigrant workers in France accelerated due to the protest activities of these immigrant workers and their increased visibility within leftist circles, the Minister of the Interior, Raymond Marcellin, and the Minister of Labor, Employment, and Population, Joseph Fontanet, each drafted and issued what came to be known as the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires. The circulaires, documents that explain new laws to the officials concerned with their enforcement, were to go into effect on September 15 of that year, and quickly garnered attention due to their severe nature.[264] They had two stated intentions: to ensure that "[those who did immigrate to France] benefit[ted] from increased social protection" and to promote the "better integration of foreigners into the national economy."[265] Thus, with the circulaires, Marcellin and Fontanet attempted to resolve both of the main issues in the immigration debate, humanitarian and economic. They prioritized decreasing overall immigration. However, this was not difficult to justify as newspapers had been linking the inhumane living conditions suffered by immigrants, often West African immigrants, to an inability to thrive in and adapt to France throughout the 1960s. The media attention drawn to Ivry and the Aubervilliers tragedy reinforced these ideas for much of the French population. Marcellin and Fontanet planned to address this by limiting immigration, which they argued

[263] Lalu and Echevin, "Les nouveaux esclaves," *L'Express*, 1973.
[264] "Qu'est-Ce Qu'une Circulaire ?," République Française (Le Gouvernement Française, July 18, 2022), https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/20265-quest-ce-quune-circulaire.
[265] *Circulaire N. 1-72*, 1972, Ministre du travail, de l'emploi et de la population.

placed a burden on the national economy and took jobs from French citizens. Secondly, and less importantly for the two ministers, as the implementation of the law would prove, they wanted to increase protections for immigrants *already* in France. Their main aim was to silence accusations of an uncontrolled and chaotic immigration policy in the context of a predicted economic downturn.

The large number of immigrant protests that followed the publication of the circulaires highlighted the discrepancy between the policymakers' goals and how much they were willing to commit to ending the abuses that existed in the French immigration system. The protests continued the trend of increasing visibility of immigrant activism in France. The French media and government's growing awareness of West African immigrants as political actors was due to a combination of the May 1968 movement, the Ivry strike, and the Aubervilliers aftermath. West Africans played an active role in the resistance to the circulaires, and while the new policy was successfully implemented in 1974, these immigrants fought against them for two years, successfully forcing the government to amend them, and winning partial concessions as well as space for themselves in the French media and therefore in the political process.

As Marcellin and Fontanet would soon discover, the new immigration policy was polarizing. The main issue with the previous policy was the power of French companies to largely make their own decisions regardless of official immigration laws. The government under President Pompidou had turned a blind eye to widespread abuses and exploitation of immigrant workers until the press and the weakening economy combined to make them pay attention. Ideally, potential immigrants would receive work contracts prior to immigration to France through the ONI, which negotiated contracts between prospective immigrants and French companies. However, even before the circulaires were passed, after independence in the early

1960s, immigrants from West Africa had to be in possession of a work permit and visa to enter France legally. To obtain the visa, they had to provide a labor contract, complete a medical exam, and have proof of residence in France.[266] The work contract was difficult to obtain due to limited ONI presence and little recruitment by French companies in West Africa.[267] Thus, by the time Marcellin and Fontanet drafted and published the circulaires, most West African immigrants were in France clandestinely.[268] French companies had no qualms with this system as so-called clandestine workers had even fewer rights than workers who were selected by the ONI. They could pay them less, provide them fewer benefits including housing, and easily control them because with no work permit, they were extremely vulnerable upon losing their jobs.[269] Thus, Marcellin and Fontanet argued that by finally regulating this type of informal agreement between immigrants and employers, the government could protect immigrant rights and ensure that immigrants entered the country through official channels. However, the regulation they imposed was largely designed to decrease *overall* immigration and reduce the number of clandestine workers.

To accomplish this, Marcellin and Fontanet attempted to link work with housing in order to resolve the issue of immigrant housing or the lack of it, highlighted by the French media throughout the 1960s. Similar to the requirements for West African immigrants to France ever since they secured their independence, the circulaires stipulated that immigrant workers would be required to obtain a work permit *and* proof of housing before entering France.[270] They required that the housing be decent and have a normal price in an effort to stop the price gouging

[266] Rioux and Jacques, "Trois millions d'étrangers en France...," 1971, 1; Germain, Decolonizing the Republic, 26.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Rioux and Jacques, "Trois millions d'étrangers en France...," 1971, 1.
[270] "L'emploi des travailleurs étrangers," *Le Monde*, December 18, 1970.

that many landlords used to discriminate against immigrant tenants.[271] This would, in theory, resolve the issue of unsanitary and unsafe housing conditions because immigrants who could not find housing or who could only secure housing in poor condition simply would not be permitted to enter the country. In this way, the French government would be able to show the public that it had resolved the issue without spending significantly more on providing immigrant housing. Correspondingly, the new legislation made it illegal for employers to hire immigrants who did not possess work permits.[272]

Most conservative journalists who covered the circulaires, again represented by articles published in *Le Figaro,* supported them because they furthered the goal of limiting the immigration of populations they viewed as cultural unassimilable. However, not all authors felt that the circulaires were the proper response to uncontrolled immigration. In his piece entitled "These foreign workers, indispensable and unliked," an editor at the paper, Jean Creiser, placed West African immigrants at the center of the increased media attention towards immigrants in France.[273] He dated the interest in immigration to the 1970 Aubervilliers fire.[274] Tellingly, Creiser condemned the new policy as racist and claimed that the government was responding too much to the current economic system rather than the humanitarian crisis: "It is already clear that if France welcomes its immigrants better tomorrow, it will receive them in fewer numbers," wrote Creiser.[275] This belief that the government was using the new policy to curb immigration in economic panic, rather than to improve the lives of immigrants in France, was echoed in left-leaning and center-left newspaper articles from 1972.[276]

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[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Jean Creiser, "Ces travailleurs étrangers, indispensables et mal aimés," *Le Figaro*, February 7, 1972.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Jean-Pierre Dumont, "La politique française d'immigration: Les travailleurs étrangers devront justifier d'un contrat et d'un logement décent," *Le Monde*, September 15, 1972.

While it was true that aspects of this new policy benefitted immigrants who entered France, these were largely reserved for those who possessed ONI contracts in order to make sure that they were protected from exploitation. For many immigrants already in France clandestinely or who had planned to enter the country to work clandestinely in the future, these measures were viewed as exclusionary, putting those with irregular statuses at even greater risk of deportation and reducing opportunities for immigrants who could not secure contracts from the ONI in their home countries. The unpopularity of the circulaires among immigrants in France was evident in the pushback that occurred within and across diverse immigrant communities in response. The strength of these movements, in which groups of largely clandestine immigrants protested their increasingly vulnerable positions by working with French unions and leftist organizations, forced the French media to increasingly give voice to immigrants during this fight.

Mass Resistance and Media Coverage

West African immigrant workers in France resisted the new immigration policies just as they had resisted their poor housing and labor conditions during the 1960s, especially after the May 1968 movement. Due to the circulaires, strikes became increasingly risky because unemployment could more easily lead to deportation.[277] This fact increased the stakes of immigrant participation in labor movements because the largely clandestine West African immigrant workers were made even more vulnerable, especially in comparison to their European counterparts. Despite the precarious nature of their situations, West African immigrants fought back against the new immigration laws, achieving only temporary and partial successes on paper, but forming lasting alliances across ethnic and racial lines. These immigrants again demonstrated

[277] Théolleyre, "Les travailleurs étrangers de Penarroya reclament," 1972.

their resolve to work with once distrustful labor unions. While existing colonial stereotypes about West African immigrants continued to pervade newspaper accounts of the resistance to the circulaires, left-leaning and centrist papers began to cover their resistance seriously during the early 1970s.

This is exemplified in the coverage of a 1972 strike at a Lyon factory run by the Penarroya group, a large lead producer.[278] The factory had a majority immigrant workforce, and the 1972 strike was not the first to occur at a Penarroya-run work site, as they were infamous for their unsanitary and dangerous working conditions as well as for the high risk of lead-poisoning.[279] The strike was in response not only to poor working conditions but also to the circulaires, which added to the stress and discrimination immigrants faced in France. The strike at Penarroya was covered by national and local newspapers as well as on television, though not all coverage of the strike mentioned the West African participants.[280] The most informative and comprehensive article about the strike came from the magazine *Jeune Afrique* in April of 1972. The magazine identified a large number of North African and European immigrants as participants in the strike as well as Senegalese and Malian workers.[281] It stressed the difficulty of cross-ethnic organizing for these immigrants as well as an inability to communicate with workers at different Penarroya companies like one in Seine Saint-Denis, stunting the strike's potential for growth.[282] Similar to the problems faced by organizers during the Boulogne-Billancourt strike during May 1968, the paper mentioned a problem with language because organizers were using

[278] Laure Pitti, "Penarroya 1971-1979 : « Notre santé n'est pas à vendre ! »," *Plein droit* 83, no. 4 (2009): pp. 36-40, https://doi.org/10.3917/pld.083.0036, 37.
[279] Ibid, 38.
[280] Théolleyre, "Les travailleurs étrangers de Penarroya reclament," 1972.
[281] Ania Francos, "La grève des exilés," *Jeune Afrique*, April 3, 1972.
[282] Ibid.

the *Cahiers de Mai* journals, created in 1968 to aid in organization, which were written in French and had only been translated into Arabic.[283]

Journalists in France recognized the strike as significant in the history of immigrant mobilization. In a March, 1972 article from the Christian testimony paper, *Hebdo T.C.*, journalist Dominique Martin wrote in support of the strike at Penarroya-Lyon as well as immigrant worker led strikes in Seine-Saint-Denis and Escaudœuvres, "Do not speak of tranquility or rest to the immigrant workers from the foyer at the Lyon factory, they don't really know what it is…It was necessary to put an end to this exploitation and to confront the management."[284] Martin noted that the Lyon strike lasted longer than the strikes at Seine-Saint-Denis and Escaudœuvres because the strikers had help from outside organizers including the CFDT and activists from different groups, who secured the support of farmers in the area to provide financial support for the strikers.[285] In an article from *Politique Hebdo*, the author discussed both the strike at Penarroya-Lyon and the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires, and stressed the importance of the participation of West African workers by dating the start of the immigrant resistance movement not to the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires but to the Ivry strike.[286]

The Penarroya strike received the most attention from the press, but there were smaller strikes earlier that year that gained public interest. A strike at the Girosteel company in Le Bourget was widely followed because of the strikers' intransigence.[287] There were immigrant-led strikes against Panot, a subcontractor of the SCNF transportation company and the Szakal

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[283] Ibid.
[284] "Penarroya: la grève des travailleurs immigrés," *Hebdo-T.C.*, March 2, 1972; "" HEBDO-T.C. " : Les restrictions de crédit menacent l'existence des petits journaux.," *Le Monde*, August 24, 1974, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1974/08/24/hebdo-t-c-les-restrictions-de-credit-menacent-l-existence-des-petits-journaux_2534103_1819218.html.
[285] "Penarroya: la grève des travailleurs immigrés," *Hebdo-T.C.*, 1972.
[286] "Au-delà des divisions nationales les immigrés se regroupent pour la lutte," *Politique Hebdo*, January 6, 1972.
[287] Théolleyre, "Les travailleurs étrangers de Penarroya réclament," 1972.

company.[288] Both strikes were supported by the Secours rouge, a solidarity organization that grew in the wake of May 1968, and both were ultimately successful in achieving at least some of their demands.[289]

West Africans can be located in the wealth of press coverage surrounding a different strike in 1973 again at the Renault factory in Boulogne-Billancourt. The largely immigrant populated Renault factories had long been symbols of the exploitation of immigrant workers, especially since the 1968 strike at the factory. Reflecting this motif of exploitation in their article about the strike, entitled "The New Slaves," Echevin and Lalu of *L'Express* returned to the symbol of the immigrant to France as a slave, noting "33 Africans" participating in the strike.[290] The journalists connected their narrative of the labor struggle with a description of the French police clearing a Tunisian-populated slum in the commune of Feyzin outside of Lyon and beginning deportation proceedings for the clandestine immigrants living there.[291] These immigrants then started a twenty-day hunger strike until they successfully received work contracts and escaped deportation.[292] Thus, Echevin and Lalu connected the widespread labor movements with the new immigration policy.

These hunger strikes only became more widespread and attracted further media attention. On May 16 of 1973 56 immigrant workers in Paris began a strike to obtain regularization in the form of a work card.[293] They explained to the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Marty upon his visit that the movement, "which has been going on for several months almost everywhere in France," was made up of "illegal" immigrant workers who were asking for the repeal of the Marcellin-

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[288] "Travailleurs immigres en lutte : après Penarroya Panot et Szakal à Grenoble," *Politique Hebdo*, March 9, 1972.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Lalu and Echevin, "Les nouveaux esclaves," 1973.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.
[293] "Le Cardinal Marty rend visite à cinquante-six travailleurs immigrés grévistes de la faim," *Le Monde,* June 2, 1973.

Fontanet circulaires.[294] This was not unique to Paris, with hunger strikes beginning in 1973 in both Montpellier and Aix-en-Provence. In the latter protest the immigrant strikers succeeded in securing work contracts and assistance with their cases.[295]

The growing number of hunger strikes and labor strikes and the extensive coverage given to the Renault strike in particular increased the pressure on the French government to resolve the issue of immigrant workers and their exploitation. It was in this context that the outgoing president Georges Pompidou encouraged the incoming d'Estaing administration to be "imaginative and generous" in regards to the demands of the immigrant workers.[296] This plea went unheard by the new administration according to Echevin and Lalu, who wrote, "On Tuesday at the Assembly [they] did not say a single word for these 2 million men who do not have the right to live like the others."[297]

Working Within French Institutions

Immigrant resistance to the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires largely took the form of labor strikes and hunger strikes. In labor strikes, which West Africans were more likely to participate in, immigrant workers challenged the French government under President Pompidou and then d'Estaing, to change its policies by refusing to accept the connection between limiting immigration and better housing conditions proposed by Marcellin and Fontanet. Instead, these workers protested the horrific working and living conditions they endured at the same time as they protested discriminatory new policies that would place them at even greater risk of being

[294] Ibid.
[295] "Plusieurs dizaines d'immigrés occupent à nouveau la direction parisienne du travail et de l'emploi," *Le Monde*, March 19, 1973.
[296] "La situation des travailleurs étranger," *Le Monde*, April 21, 1973; "M. Pompidou : le gouvernement doit se montrer « imaginatif et généreux », notamment à l'égard des immigrés," *Le Monde*, April 9, 1973.
[297] Lalu and Echevin, "Les nouveaux esclaves," 1973.

exploited. To conduct this activism, these immigrant workers used connections with French leftist organizations and labor unions developed over the course of the 1960s and early 1970s to attract valuable media attention to their cause.

One case study that illustrates the importance of immigrant networks and relationships between individual immigrants in sustaining the movement is the case of M'Paly Gassama. Gassama, a Malian immigrant, was sentenced to six months in prison in 1972 for "violence against an agent."[298] *Le Monde* and a communist newspaper called *Le Prolétaire Immigré*, the two papers which covered this incident, reported that he was attempting to defend a friend by finding his identity papers as the friend was detained on the bus under suspicion of being in France clandestinely.[299] This action would have been increasingly dangerous under the new policy. Mr. Gassama took on a high level of risk by attempting to assist his friend as he was then arrested and accused of being unemployed.[300] For an immigrant, not holding a job was now a crime, thus further solidifying the link between productivity, assimilability, and legality for immigrants to France, and especially for West Africans. Gassama could rely on intellectuals, like Jacques Debu-Bridel of the national secretariat of the labor union and Alain Terrenoire of the Union des Démocrates pour la République (Union of Democrats for the Republic - UDR), all of whom formed a support committee, wrote a letter on his behalf to Minister Marcellin, and drafted a press release to gain public sympathy.[301]

Union and leftist organization participation clearly increased during this period. They, especially the CFDT, began to accept immigrants as an important and active part of the labor

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[298] Ibid.
[299] "Travailleurs étrangers: des personnalités interviennent en faveur d'un immigré menacé d'expulsion," *Le Monde*, February 26, 1972; "Un ouvrier revolutionaries tué: encore un crime des capitalistes!," *Le Prolétaire Immigré*, February 1972.
[300] "Travailleurs étrangers: des personnalités interviennent," *Le Monde*, 1972.
[301] Ibid.

force, rather than a sub-proletariat that only undermined their bargaining power. The CGT and the CFDT tended to support immigrants in these protests.[302] The CFDT leadership did denounce hunger strikes, however, as unsanctioned as well as strategies that were not traditional union tactics.[303] In February of 1972, in the wake of the announcement of the circulaires, the two unions launched a "week of action for immigrants," calling for greater solidarity for immigrant workers.[304] Immigrant rights organizations like the Comité intermouvements auprès des évacués (Inter-Movement Committee for Evacuees - CIMADE), Associations de solidarité avec les travailleurs immigrés (Associations of Solidarity with Immigrant Workers - ASTI), Comité de defense des droits et de la vie des immigrés, and the Groupe d'information et de soutien aux travailleurs immigrés (GISTI) were helpful in bolstering press coverage and support for the movement against the circulaires.[305] The Association française des juristes democrats (French Association of Democratic Lawyers - AFJD), made up of lawyers, magistrate, and law professors, many belonging to the communist party or different leftist parties, published reports calling for an end to the "anarchic, complex, and irritating," current immigration laws and demanded that immigrant work contracts be written in two languages, not just French.[306]

After months of hunger and labor strikes, in 1973, the Minister of Labor, Georges Gorse, acceded to a three-month suspension of the circulaires to give more time to immigrant workers to adapt to the new requirements.[307] These reforms largely helped those immigrants already in France with irregular statuses, but especially those who had at one point obtained work contracts.

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[302] "Le châtiment des victimes," *Le Monde*, February 5, 1973.
[303] Ibid.
[304] "En marge des discussions de Salaires: C.G.T. et C.F.D.T. lancent une semaine d'action pour les immigrés," *Le Monde*, February 8, 1972; R. G., "Le gouvernement veut stopper l'immigration sauvage," *Le Monde*, January 8, 1972.
[305] "Le châtiment des victimes," *Le Monde*, 1973.
[306] N. C., "Les juristes démocrates proposent que les contrats de travail applicables aux étrangers soient bilingues," November 21, 1972.
[307] Francis Cornu, "Une nouvelle dérogation à la circulaire Fontanet," *Le Monde*, April 11, 1974.

They were mostly temporary. They included a three month residence permit for workers whose contracts were expiring, to provide them time to find a job as well as encouraged leniency by prefects in reviewing individual regularization of immigrants who had entered the country regularly, but lost this status.[308] This extension was supposed to last until September 30 of that year but after pushback from immigrants and from the press, Gorse extended it to October 31.[309] These reforms gave hope to clandestine immigrants looking to regularize their situations, but mostly to those who had once been regularized; immigrants who could show a one-year work contract would receive the three-month residence permit and aid from the National Employment Agency.[310] Furthermore, those immigrants who could prove they had been working for a year in France before June 1, 1973 would be issued a one-year work permit.[311] The reforms increased immigrant rights inside trade unions, scholarship percentages awarded to immigrants, investment in housing for immigrants, and reformed the social action fund. Ultimately, despite these reforms caused by the years of hunger and labor strikes, demonstrations, legal action, and other forms of resistance spearheaded by immigrants, the conservative immigration policy continued and was even strengthened in 1974 when the new President d'Estaing took office.[312]

The 1972 circulaires represented the French government's attempt to end the debate over immigrant housing and stop their increasing activism and resistance. Resentment that had been building over the course of the 1960s exploded with the announcement of the circulaires, and immigrants turned to networks and strategies that they had formed during their time in France. For West African immigrants this largely took the form of participation in labor strikes and

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[308] "La réglementation de l'immigration à l'Assemblée Nationale: M. Gorse annonce des modifications à la « circulaire Fontanet »," *Le Monde*, June 16, 1973.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States*, 50-51.

turning to their communities for support as they had done throughout their time in France. With the May 1968 movement, Ivry rent strike, and Aubervilliers tragedy fresh in their memories, these migrants linked their fates to the other immigrant protestors and stepped into the public eye. The success of this immigrant movement was not immediately apparent, but its legacy continues even today in France.

Conclusion

In October of 2015, almost twenty years after the *sans-papiers* occupied the Saint-Bernard Church and 43 years since the beginning of immigrant resistance to the Marcellin-Fontanet circulaires, *Le Monde* reporter Clarisse Fabre wrote an article about a migrant encampment in Calais, France, or what had become known as the Calais jungle.[313] Fabre compared the advocacy of French artists and celebrities on behalf of the Calais migrants to the *sans-papiers* movement of 1996, writing, "We must occupy the field and no longer leave the media space solely to anti-migrant remarks made by the far right…and a few prominent intellectuals."[314] In writing her article, Fabre invoked a history of alliance between immigrants and French leftist organizations and, specifically artists, writing that Calais should serve as a wake-up call for the left, "Today, the country's image, at least its reputation as a welcoming country, is at stake. "[315] While Fabre specifically discussed the involvement of French artists in solidarity with immigrants in France, she alluded to a broader history of leftist organizing in her reference to the *sans-papiers movement*. The makeup of union and leftist groups as well as the political landscape of France has changed since 1996 and even more so since 1972, with the continuous drop in the percentage of the French population involved in unions, weakening of the left during the presidency of François Mitterrand, and the rise of the far-right. Despite this, the importance of this relationship was still clear to many French who watched their government's

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[313] Clarisse Fabre, "A Calais et ailleurs, les artistes entendent réveiller les politiques," *Le Monde*, October 25, 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2015/10/28/avec-l-appel-de-calais-les-artistes-entendent-reveiller-les-politiques_4798100_3246.html; Maryline Baumard, "« Le camp de Calais n'est ni géré ni encadré » selon Médecins du monde," *Le Monde*, December 1, 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/12/02/le-camp-de-calais-n-est-ni-gere-ni-encadre-selon-medecins-du-monde_4822194_3224.html.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid.

treatment of the migrants at Calais with concern, many remembering the violent siege of the Saint-Bernard church.[316]

Some scholars of French immigration history like Gérard Noiriel and Patrick Weil have tended to downplay the discriminatory tendencies of the nation's policies by arguing that the French political process and media serve as a check against reactive and discriminatory immigration policies.[317] Works by historians like Gordon, Glaes, Germain, Prakash, and my own examination of West African immigrant activism, however, show that this is an oversimplification. When West African immigrants began to arrive in France in large numbers during the early 1960s, they faced extreme levels of alienation and economic difficulty due to the discrimination they faced from French society, the lack of an adequate social safety net provided by the government, and French governmental and police surveillance of their communities. French media narratives surrounding this struggle fed into a rise of xenophobia and racism towards immigrants that began in the mid-1960s with increasing levels of unemployment and fewer European immigrants who were seen as assimilable. This trend culminated in the early 1970s with a border closure and heightened policing of undocumented immigrants. Despite this, West African immigrants were able to use the same French press that had contributed to their demonization by activating their partnerships with French organizations and unions that had formed during three key moments, the May 1968 movement, the Ivry rent strike, and the Aubervilliers tragedy. This allowed them to launch a campaign against the border closure and aided them in securing some rights and chances for regularization, even as the border remained closed to continued labor immigration.

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[316] Ibid.
[317] Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot*, 259-61; Weil, *How to Be French*, 254.

While Fabre's article does not trace this partnership further than the *sans-papiers* movement, we can draw a line between the tactics used by the West African immigrants in the Saint-Bernard church and West African immigrants of the 1960s and 1970s in their use of partnerships and media to garner sympathy from the French public and change public opinion. West Africans immigrant workers in France during the early 1960s, represented a population isolated from the rest of French society by nature of their living situations, legal statuses, and relatively small community. During the later 1960s and early 1970s, as their housing conditions worsened and their rights were increasingly debated in the press, many of these immigrants chose to claim their rights in France by appealing first to leftist groups and then to the media to share their stories and struggles. Thus, Noiriel's theory that the media can mitigate negative public opinion about immigrants during times of upheaval is correct only when the credit is given to the efforts of the immigrants themselves, rather than media coverage, and it relies on the receptivity of allies within the native French population. The case of West African activism and resistance during the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates that even when immigrant rights movements fail to reach their long-term goals, the networks that they build and the models of organization that they develop can serve future generations in achieving the justice they could not themselves enjoy. West African communities during the late 1960s and early 1970s worked with unions, leftist groups, and intellectuals, seeking newspaper coverage to publicize their poor working and housing conditions. Decades later, the *sans-papiers* again contacted unions and immigrant-rights groups, using the power of television-news to broadcast their words and to document the brutality of their removal for the broader public. As the *sans-papiers* activist Mr. Sissoko said in *La ballade des sans-papiers,* "Some speak of manipulation by organizations. It's not true. We,

the families, organized ourselves. It is we, the families who decide. The organizations are there to support us for humanitarian reasons. They have a particular goal: solidarity and support."[318]

These histories have important implications for today's world where immigrants continue to stand at the center of larger political debates in France and globally. The experiences of West African immigrants in France illustrate the many ways that colonialism is still present in French media and politics today, as debates continue surrounding the integration of largely Muslim, African communities in France.[319] Immigrants and their advocates in France and elsewhere can learn about building networks of resistance and media strategies from the evolution of West African immigrant advocacy in France. Like their predecessors, they will continue to grapple with dehumanizing depictions of immigrants, especially those from the Global South, as well as the impact of changing economic fortunes on public perceptions of immigrants.

[318] *La ballade des sans-Papiers*, *Youtube* (Global Women's Strike, 1997), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFxQYWpeCXY.
[319] Sukhada Tatke, "'Not French Enough': What It Means to Be an Immigrant in France," Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, March 2, 2021), https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/3/2/not-french-enough-what-it-means-to-be-an-immigrant-in-france.

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