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## Demanding Citizenship: The Sub-Saharan African Experience in France

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*Demanding Citizenship: The Sub-Saharan African Experience in France*

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of the Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021



This is dedicated to my parents who have supported my educational journey and to my ancestors whose shoulders I stand upon.

Mom, I am grateful for all that you have taught me. On the many occasions where I felt lost you helped to guide me. I don't know what I would do without you.

Dad, thank you for being my partner in crime in regards to researching and exploring new things, political discussions, and digging beneath the surface on everything.

I love you both very much.

This is also dedicated to the French Sub-Saharan African community and all communities who have felt invisible and gone unrecognized.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Sub-Saharan African population of France serves as an interesting case study of culture, immigration, and survival. The relationship between the host country and descendants of former colonies speaks to a long history of domination and subjugation. It is a story of the desire for inexpensive labor so as to maintain and continue to build one's country. There was an unlimited supply of bodies to work, to fight and die on behalf of the conqueror's desires. I will look at the impact of immigrant life in France, as experienced by West Africans primarily from Senegal and secondarily, Mali. One must note that the sub-Saharan African French immigrants are made up of citizens from Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, the Congo, and other nations.

I was drawn to the question of whether West Africans residing in France considered themselves full citizens and if they were treated as such in French society or were they othered. West Africans' status as citizens in France is fascinating to unpack from a legal standpoint as well as from the viewpoint of social disenfranchisement and discrimination. I began with a focus on the modern perspective of this question in the context of France and French society but found it necessary to take this query and apply it to a historical context in French West Africa and in France in the 19th and 20th centuries. By doing this, parallels are revealed and it provides greater understanding to the often precarious citizenship that the immigrant community experiences. This topic of citizenship took me down many different paths regarding the experience of African immigrants. Through this citizenship lens, the history and context of the relationship between France and its former colonies in West Africa must be examined. I used Senegal as a primary

example because of several factors. Pre-independence, Senegal struggled with France over granting its people citizenship. There also is a (well-documented) history of Senegalese soldiers fighting for the French army in the *tirailleurs Senegalais*. Senegalese, especially the Soninke people, (as well as other nationalities) were also instrumental in the *Sans-Papiers* movement.

There were several examples of African immigrant communities experiencing discrimination to such a degree that their legal and societal citizenship has been threatened. Chapter 1 will provide some background to the African immigrant community currently living in France. It will also examine the relationship that this community, particularly young men, has with the police and where the status of citizenship intersects. The relations between police and the Sub-Saharan African community have been fraught with layers of power, citizenship, race, and authority. It is also a relationship that is not unique to France but is present in other countries as well. I chose to cover this in some detail because it is a glaring example of the difference in treatment by French authorities based upon skin color and the questioning of the citizenship of African immigrants. I dive into the precarious nature of the citizenship of African immigrants in France through discussion of the police and their identification and immigration status checks at train stations to the Pasqua Laws which led to a significant increase in the number of undocumented and spurred the *Sans-Papiers* movement.

In Chapter 2, I pose the question of who is considered a citizen in France and what rights and responsibilities are associated with that role. I then relate this to French West Africans and their status/or not as citizens and the political struggles regarding that demarcation, both during colonialism and in a modern setting in France. To understand the societal conflicts of Africans in

France today, one has to look at the history of these formerly colonized people and what rights were allocated to them whilst living under official and legal French domain.

In Chapter 3, I speak specifically about the Senegalese and Malian communities in France. Many Senegalese and Malian French are of Soninke heritage which is a crucial part of understanding their successes and plight. I explore where legal citizenship and integration into French society has been challenged. It has not only been a story of resistance on the part of the French but there has also been significant instances in which immigration was welcomed.

In the Spring of 2019, I embarked upon my first international trip to France as part of Bard's French Language Intensive. The program and international experience was rewarding in many different ways. Living with a host family, immersing myself in the French language and culture, as well as living somewhat independently in a foreign country broadened my worldview. One thing that stood out to me was the African presence in France, especially the Sub-Saharan. As part of the Language Intensive I would attend the Institute de Touraine to take classes during the weekdays. The Institute was located in the Loire Valley city of Tours, an hour and a half outside of Paris. On the first day of attending classes I boarded the tram to travel from my host family's house to the Institute. On that first tram ride I heard a woman in a seat nearby speaking with a distinctive Liberian accent. As I am of Liberian heritage it was immediately recognizable. I turned and saw two West African women in headscarves conversing with each other. I had not expected to see many Africans or Black people generally outside of Paris. Hearing an accent close to home as well as one from a non-former French colony in West Africa was a pleasant surprise. As I spent more time in Tours I realized I underestimated the diversity of the city. I

witnessed a significant North and Sub-Saharan African population as well as non-French European and a smaller Asian population. It was the Sub-Saharan population that intrigued me, however. Visiting Paris increased my interest in Sub-Saharan Africans living in France tenfold. I visited the 18th arrondissement and the commercial district in Chateau Rouge. Despite the buildings being relatively the same, the atmosphere was completely different than anything I experienced in the rest of France or even in America. Men and women walking down the street dressed in full African apparel, the aromas of seasoned rotisserie meats wafting in the air, and an ever-present infectious energy permeating the streets. African owned businesses lined the streets as they were frequented by people doing their daily shopping. Witnessing such a strong and vibrant African community in Chateau Rouge and noticing more African people as I explored Paris prompted me to ponder some of the questions that I explore here. Why was there significant immigration to France from Sub-Saharan Africa and what were the characteristics of their communities in France? What are some events or experiences that have defined this immigrant life? I also explore this community's uncertain relationship with citizenship and the impact of constantly being in transition as it were.

## Chapter 1

### **Always a Stranger, Never a Full Citizen in Your Home: Sub-Saharan African immigrants in France**

#### **1.1 Colorblindness**

Today, France as a republic in northwest Europe, operates under its current constitution which has been in place since 1958. The first republic, however, was established in 1792 which succeeded several kingdoms. France, as one of the major colonizers, has experienced immigration over centuries with several different nationalities seeking to make the country their new home. France is also officially a colorblind society and prides itself on being so, meaning that it does not count its residents by race<sup>1</sup>. This policy has been offered as evidence of France's lack of racism towards its non-White members. There has been an increasing challenge of this policy by the French community as citizens are finding their voices in speaking out about the ubiquity of racism in French society. In particular, the descendents of Sub-Saharan immigrants have spoken out against racism, identifying it and calling for justice. Although the variety of immigrant groups have experienced oppression, Sub-Saharan African immigrant communities have been subjected to a specific type of oppression aimed at those identifiable as African and also those whose family structure and religion were vastly different from the French.

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<sup>1</sup> John Frederick Drinkwater. "France." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed on May 4, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/place/France>

France is a country that does not count racial data but does keep track of immigration data and the origin countries of immigrants. In France one is required to change their nationality when s/he becomes a citizen of France. Therefore, if a Senegalese national acquires French citizenship then s/he becomes a French national. Despite the lack of official racial data, immigration data and surveys have been used to aid in estimating the number of the Sub-Saharan African population at three million, which would constitute four percent of the French population<sup>2</sup>. This number includes foreign nationals and second-generation immigrants<sup>3</sup>, a majority of whom are from Francophone African nations. These nations include Mali, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Mauritania, Ivory Coast, and Republic of the Congo. In 2015 there were 619,000 legal residents who were Sub-Saharan African nationals and there existed a large number undocumented nationals. The top three countries represented in this number are Mali (76,500), Senegal (67,000), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (64,000)<sup>4</sup>. Like many immigrant groups, Sub-Saharan Africans migrate to France for various reasons. An ANRS Parcours Study conducted from 2012-2013 in 74 health structures in the Ile-de-France region found that the primary reasons given for the decision to emigrate were the need for employment and to make a better life in France. Other reasons include joining a family member, escaping persecution, pursuing education, and also for medical reasons. These statistics varied between men and women with twice the percentage of men saying that they were “trying

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<sup>2</sup> “Immigrants and descendants of Immigrants in France.” Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques. 2012 édition. <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4238373?sommaire=4238781>

<sup>3</sup> The children of individuals who arrived in France in their teen or adult years

<sup>4</sup> David Lessault and Cris Beauchemin. “Migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe,” *Population and Societies* 452 (January 2009).

<https://www.ined.fr/en/publications/editions/population-and-societies/migration-from-sub-saharan-africa-to-europe-s-till-a-limited-trend-en/>

their luck” (looking for work and a better life) than women. Women, at more than triple the percentage of men, reported that they were emigrating to France to join a family member. There was less disparity between men and women when considering those who migrated for study or people who felt threatened in their home country. We see numbers such as 19% of men and 13% of women in pursuit of education and 22% of men and 16% of women fleeing because they experienced danger at home<sup>5</sup>.

Before the decolonization of Francophone African countries, there weren't many Sub-Saharan African immigrants in France. The popular French viewpoint of Black residents in France was that they were African American or part of the small community from the Antilles and living in the Montmartre section and other cosmopolitan and bustling parts of Paris. They were heavily associated with Jazz music and its heyday of clubs and musicians in Paris. Many viewed them as part of Vogue Negre and that White Parisians could enjoy them in that limited and non-threatening role. Vogue Negre describes the impact that Black culture had on Paris with Black nightclubs and performers being abundant in certain parts. A common side effect that accompanies exoticism is that the subjects are often de-humanized, as strange creatures to be studied. Another space in which this dehumanizing exoticism was displayed was the Colonial Exposition<sup>6</sup>. The Colonial Exposition began in May of 1931 and served as a showcase of French colonial possessions in Paris. The aim of this exposition was to portray an image of French power as well as to give metropolitan French an “international experience” without needing to

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Gosselin, Annabel Desgress du Lou, and Parcours Study Group. “How long do Sub-Saharan Migrants take to Settle in France?” *Population and Societies*. 2016

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Anne Boitton, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. Accessed December 5, 2020.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dfnshk>.



cross borders<sup>7</sup>. The exhibits displayed colonial subjects from different French territories and in some cases even recreated villages and temples to actualize the image metropolitan French had of their colonies. These were used as a justification of colonization by showcasing the progress that the French had made in “civilizing” their “savage” subjects<sup>8</sup>.

Sub-Saharan African immigrants are not a monolith and it is important, I believe, not to view them as such. There are ethnic, regional, gender, class, and age differences in this umbrella: Sub-Saharan African. This paper does not cover all of the different communities that constitute Sub-Saharan African but will discuss a portion of these. There are variations within the broader West African immigrant community, in particular gender and generational differences. There are many that face chronic poverty as well as having a relatively high attainment of education, 45% having attended secondary education in 2008. 42% of Africans live in poverty and unemployment among men is 16% and for women it is 20%<sup>9</sup>.

One such populace of Sub-Saharan Africans are young male African migrants in France who are called adventurers. Labeled with this term by the media, these men have embraced it and claimed it for themselves<sup>10</sup>. Not only is the journey to France physically an adventure but anthropologist Sylvie Bredeloup notes that this term also refers to the spiritual and mental adventure that these men experience when given tough situations and challenges to face. These men hail from different cities and regions in Francophone West Africa and are followers of the

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<sup>7</sup> “The Colonial Exhibition of 1931,” Palais de la Porte Dorée. Accessed on May 3, 2021. <https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/en/colonial-exposition-1931>

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Chandler, “Empire of the Republic,” ArthurChandler.com, Accessed on May 2, 2021. <http://www.arthurchandler.com/paris-1931-exposition>

<sup>9</sup> “Immigrants and descendants of Immigrants in France,” Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques. 2012 édition. <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4238373?sommaire=4238781>

<sup>10</sup> Sylvie Bredeloup. “The Figure of the Adventurer as an African Migrant.” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 25, no. 2 (2013): p. 170-182. Accessed May 3, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42005317>.

Muslim faith. These men are at the focus of Julie Kleinmann's ethnography of Gare du Nord and have a tense relationship with police which will be later expounded upon in this chapter<sup>11</sup>.

World War 1 saw the first occurrence of significant West African immigration to France. West African and Malagasy soldiers, in concurrence with North African and Chinese labourers, assisted with the war effort in France. The 134,000 soldiers were men and some joined the existing Black communities in Paris. In Paris, soldiers who were regulars in the jazz scene shared spaces with white women with whom some made friendships, romantic relationships, and married. This became a concern for French spies and police as they feared a reversing of the colonial order should European women's object of desire become Black men. Additionally, Black musicians were in such demand in the Jazz scene that some soldiers also took side jobs as pianists, drummers, horn players, etc <sup>12</sup>.

The number of female immigrants was significantly surpassed by that of males in these early immigration waves. Going into the 1970's however, women increasingly joined men in immigrating to France. These included spouses of male laborers already living in France. Female workers also immigrated without attachment to male immigrants. These women sent money to their home countries in support of their families left behind. According to the Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, the number of women immigrating from Sub-Saharan African countries increased tenfold from 1968 to 1982. Between 1982 and 1990 Sub-Saharan African females were primarily from Mali and Senegal<sup>13</sup>. Women were not allowed

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<sup>11</sup> Julie Kleinman, *Adventure Capital: Migration and the making of an African hub in Paris*. 2019. University of California Press.

<sup>12</sup> Gillian Glaes, "Policing the Post-Colonial Order: Surveillance and the African Immigrant Community in France, 1960-1979." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 36, no. 2 (2010): 108-126. Accessed December 1, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41403695>.

<sup>13</sup> *Immigrants and descendants of Immigrants in France*. Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques. 2012 édition. <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4238373?sommaire=4238781>

to live in the hostels in which African male laborers stayed, called *foyers*, yet they would visit friends or family and attend social gatherings there. Some women entered the workforce in industries such as cleaning, restaurant and hotel work, child and elderly care. Others were a part of an informal economy of their own creation such as running small businesses or cooking in the *foyers*. One difference with female migrants was that social organizations were formed by them or as in service to them whereas men's hostels and jobs produced the social organizations<sup>14</sup>.

## 1.2

### Male Migrants and Labor Unions

Despite not being a part of social organizations that catered to women, male laborers were able to socially and politically organize themselves through labor unions. These unions, however, were French in origin and serviced workers of all backgrounds. West Africans did not make significant social, political, or economic progress because the unions would not acknowledge the effects of the French colonial system on its then subjects as well as the factor that race played into the disenfranchisement of these workers. In the early days of the active courting of West African male workers by France these workers joined unions and had primarily good relations with the union. Marseille was a place where this political engagement in labor unions was common. This changed, however, after the Algerian War when the city saw an influx, that totalled in the hundreds of thousands, of Pieds-Noir (Jewish and French settlers) from

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<sup>14</sup> Helene Trauner, "Dimensions of West African Immigration to France." 2004.  
[https://stichproben.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/p\\_stichproben/Artikel/Nummer08/12\\_Trauner.pdf](https://stichproben.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_stichproben/Artikel/Nummer08/12_Trauner.pdf)

Algeria. They competed with Africans for jobs and also outnumbered them significantly.

Marseille began to look less attractive for these job-seekers who saw Paris as their new haven<sup>15</sup>.

The *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) union in Marseille, “ the first union to establish contact with the African labor migrant community” (Germain, 2016, 119), also courted and advocated for immigrant workers of European descent in ways that they did not for Africans. CGT actively sought European members and not African members because Europeans at the time could be used as political pawns since those migrants significantly outnumbered Africans<sup>16</sup>.

After Africans began migrating to Paris in increasing numbers, another union was successful in recruiting African workers. This was the *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* which recruited activists from the African community to attract African members and serve as intermediaries between African members and the union. The union believed that all working class who were negatively affected by capitalism should unite. This core idea would later manifest itself into a problem for African union members. The CFDT believed that professional training and achieving class advancement would heal the societal ills of Africans living in France. This organization, like the CGT, also ignored the ways in which racism and colonialism affected the experience of their Black members<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974*, 117-140. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016. Accessed April 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctt1bkm6rf.12>.

<sup>16</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974*, 117-140. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016. Accessed April 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctt1bkm6rf.12>.

<sup>17</sup> Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974*, 117-140. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016. Accessed April 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctt1bkm6rf.12>.

French government policy has long been one of surveillance and distrust of a growing Sub-Saharan African population. Once the immigrant population from Francophone Africa grew significantly in the mid-20th century, post-decolonization, the French government restricted the ease with which people from former colonies could emigrate. At this time, economic issues began to arise in the Senegal River Valley. In the interest of Europeans, cash crops that grew groundnuts were cultivated in this region in order to gain more profit. Many of these crops replaced lands devoted to food crops leading to starvation and later economic instability<sup>18</sup>. Prior to 1965 work permit visas were not required for immigrants from former colonies. The government also reduced the number of African immigrants allowed into France.

There also has been significant political posturing and propaganda regarding increasing African population. The perception that Africans were moving into social housing was focused on Malians. This was communicated at the very highest level of government through a speech made by President Jacques Chirac in 1991 saying that African fathers move into social housing with three or four wives, 20 children, and an income of 50,000 franc not from work but social services. He continued on to say that the average French worker looked on them with disdain because they had to work hard for their income unlike their counterparts and Chirac sympathizing added, they contributed to noise and scent pollution.<sup>19</sup> This speech followed a protest led by Jean Marie Le Pen, the leader of the far right party Front National, against the Mitterand government's immigration policies. It came as a surprise that the leader of the

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<sup>18</sup> "Peanuts and Economic Dependence in West Africa," Commodity Histories, accessed on May 3, 2021. <https://www.commodityhistories.org/research/peanuts-and-economic-dependence-french-west-africa>

<sup>19</sup> Helene Traunner, "Dimensions of West African Immigration to France." 2004. [https://stichproben.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/p\\_stichproben/Artikel/Nummer08/12\\_Trauner.pdf](https://stichproben.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_stichproben/Artikel/Nummer08/12_Trauner.pdf)

center-right Gaullist Rally for the Republic party would rail against Mitterand's immigration policy and immigrants in general in such a harsh manner<sup>20</sup>.

### 1.3

#### Policing

Julie Kleinman describes in her book *Adventure Capital*, that the profiling of young African men is pervasive in modern French society. She talks about an experience with one of the young men she was working with for her ethnographic work whose identification was checked by a police officer at a train station. The officer only checked those of Black men and other young men at the station agreed that French police often profile African men. Even a police officer, from Madagascar, that Kleinmann interviewed corroborated this. The men with whom she was meeting also asserted that cops from the Antilles are also perpetrators of this kind of profiling. This creates an interesting dynamic in which Black Caribbean cops have placed themselves in a middle agent role enforcing racist practices in favor of those in power, White French, against those placed at the bottom of the social totem pole, African immigrants<sup>21</sup>.

Nicolas Sarkozy, President of France, between 2007 and 2012, often stressed the need to quell riots and increase surveillance in spaces such as rail stations<sup>22</sup>. In 2007 Sarkozy stated that he would put surveillance cameras everywhere in Gare du Nord, a major train station in Paris.

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<sup>20</sup> Alan Riding, "Immigrant Unrest Alarming French," The New York Times. June 23, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/23/world/immigrant-unrest-alarming-french.html>

<sup>21</sup> Julie Kleinman, *Adventure Capital: Migration and the making of an African hub in Paris*. 2019. University of California Press.

<sup>22</sup> Julie Kleinman, *Adventure Capital: Migration and the making of an African hub in Paris*. 2019. University of California Press.

The choice of this particular station is significant because it has been a shared space between French and Africans and has been perceived as a location which attracts crime. In Kleinmann's ethnography of Gare du Nord, one of her interviewees, named Lassana explained that these surveillance cameras were to track African men who spent “too much time” at the station and profile them for identification checks. The official reason for this according to the Paris police chief is that Black youths bother actual train passengers and do not respect “the norm of civil inattention.” Not being seen is an important attitude that ties French policies and attitudes towards Black French. Another Senegalese man named Sans Souci explained that a spectacle was created around the installation of one camera in Gare du Nord. The police incessantly warned the men who hung around the station that the camera was being installed and said that they would be watching how much time the young men spent there. The young men, however, expressed to the police their lack of concern about the presence of the cameras which signifies the low level of understanding between the two parties. There is also surveillance or “vigilance” on the other side at Gare du Nord. The young men who socialize at the train station keep vigilance in an attempt to escape police observation<sup>23</sup>. Random public searches can be embarrassing to the subjects and avoiding being detained by the police is an understandable wish.

The relationship between French police and Sub-Saharan Africans is one of mistrust and violence especially directed at youths. Paris' suburbs and *banlieues* are hotspots for these types of interactions. The practice of stop and frisk is directed with impunity at Black and Arab people in some areas despite its illegality. During police encounters as recounted in anthropologist

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<sup>23</sup> Julie Kleinman, *Adventure Capital: Migration and the making of an African hub in Paris*. 2019. University of California Press.

Didier Fassin's *Enforcing Order* it is common for officers to insult the people they're interrogating with racist, classist or anti-immigration remarks. Police have responded with violence in several instances when they felt that civilians, who they are in the process of questioning, verbally undermine their authority or return insults. Police often patrol the suburbs, where a majority of immigrants and economically disadvantaged people live, at night and stop-and-frisk (illegal action in France) teens they encounter whilst walking. Many of these are carried out by the Anti-Crime squad, a unit of the French National Police, which have a tenuous relationship with local police departments as well. This relationship between police and Blacks and Arabs is drawn in contrast to that of the police and Roma in Fassin's *Enforcing Order*. Whereas there have been instances where Black and Arabs have verbally engaged with police officers, Roma do not. Police, despite believing that Roma are inferior, are pleased that they capitulate completely to them. This places them above Blacks and Arabs who not only do they see as inferior but also insolent by "filing complaints"<sup>24</sup>.

The police however do not share this same attitude towards people they describe as "honest citizens" who are often White and live in financially well-off areas with detached houses<sup>25</sup>. Arguments could be made that the police are simply unprofessional or have a rough demeanor but the targeting, language and violence that is directed towards Africans versus those who are not African, indicates an issue of systemic racism in the French police department.

It was clear that Africans and African heritage people in general were seen in very specific roles in French society in the early 20th century. Their ability for freedom of movement

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<sup>24</sup> Didier Fassin, *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing*. 2015. Cambridge.

<sup>25</sup> Didier Fassin, *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing*. 2015. Cambridge.



and expression was quite restricted. This is exemplified by the story of Agent Joe who was in the employment of the Centre des Affaires Indigenes (Center for Native Affairs) a subset of the Ministry of Colonies. In reaction to the Vogue Negre movement, the French wished to expand their consciousness to the outer realms of the French Empire which included Sub-Saharan Africa. This organization, however, was involved heavily in the surveillance of African and Carribean people and communities in France. Agent Joe worked for this agency, his full name being Edmond Thomas Ramananjato. Ramananjato was originally from Madagascar and ended up in France as one of the African soldiers who aided the French in World War 1. After being naturalized in France in 1924 he moved into the Montmartre neighborhood, in close proximity to Moulin Rouge, where Blacks were exoticised. He was a prolific member in the Malagasy community and was an employee of the French government. This, however, did not stop the French police from detaining him because he did not fit in the role of entertainer or soldier in their viewpoint. This arrest occurred at the 1931 Colonial Exposition where Agent Joe was on the job informing his superiors on the African and Carribean communities in Paris. He was sent to the Colonial Exposition to observe and record the correspondence of politically militant Black men as well as keep track of whom they were speaking with. Before he could enter the gates, he was detained by French police and taken to a police station to be questioned. They were not convinced that a Black man could innocently be at the Colonial Exposition, not working but attempting to observe, without nefarious intentions<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Anne Boitton, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. Accessed December 5, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dfnshk>.

Cultural differences are magnified into racial tensions in shared spaces like the Gare du Nord and other commercial centers. It is not only the visible physical differences but also the different behaviours that lead to tensions. One shop owner at Gare du Nord described that Black and Arab teens could be seen singing and dancing and do not greet with the customary *bonjour*<sup>27</sup>. Having been to France myself, I understand the importance of this greeting to many French. France is also known for its populace not being particularly friendly or ebullient in demeanor.

The French police's antagonistic relationship with the Sub-Saharan African Community is not a new phenomenon. One would think that in an egalitarian society would target certain communities in such an abusive manner. They have had such relationships with other immigrant communities such as the Roma and North Africans. This presents an impediment to a successful re-homing of Sub-Saharan Africans into French society. It also interferes with the subsequent generations of Sub-Saharan Africans as they're targeted for the worst police behaviour.

I would like to have done further investigation into the immigrant population itself, where it does succeed? How and why? In terms of social and economic success I wonder what would be the impact of class, especially had I more sources about the middle and upper class. Also, how gender impacted the subsequent generations of West African heritage people in France especially as I read about the hostile relationship men have with the police. We see from this chapter that there are parallels and differences between the experiences of early and later waves of immigrants to France which reflect a story of survival.

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<sup>27</sup> Julie Kleinmann, *Adventure Capital: Migration and the making of an African hub in Paris*. 2019. University of California Press.

## Chapter 2

### On the Margins: The Precarious Citizenship that Africans face in France

#### 2.1

##### France Defines Citizenship

French citizenship, as a concept, has shifted both in definition and in practice as the country has developed and evolved through several iterations of its identity—from monarchy and empire to republic.<sup>28</sup> Those who are considered citizens in France have also changed not only based upon the political and social implications of the time but also as defined by needs such as defense, labor, and societal cohesion. Citizenship is a legal relationship between the state and individuals and it promises inclusion by the state of specific individuals. It also creates a relationship between people's rights and the state's obligations to its citizens. Nationality, on the other hand, refers to a natural relationship based upon the country in which a person is born. Nationality can be exchanged or replaced through a legal process.

Jus soli (birthright citizenship) was the primary criteria for French citizenship in the 18th century but ended due to the French Revolution. Birthright citizenship was seen as supporting feudalism to which the revolution was in violent opposition. After the revolution fewer people were granted birthright citizenship. The civil code of 1804 granted birthright citizenship only to those with a French born father, either living in France or abroad.<sup>29</sup> Today, a child born in the

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<sup>28</sup> "French Governments timeline," Preceden.

<https://www.preceden.com/timelines/243116-french-governments-timeline>

<sup>29</sup> Anne Morddel, French Nationality Laws Through the Years (n.p, 2017), n.p.

<https://french-genealogy.typepad.com/genealogie/2017/06/on-french-nationality-through-the-years.html>

country is given French citizenship if at least one of their parents was born in France. Also, a child born in France before January 1, 1994 and has at least one parent from a former French territory (before separation from France) is given citizenship<sup>30</sup>.

## 2.2

### **Early Positions on Immigration**

In 1889 France passed a comprehensive immigration law that automatically granted third-generation immigrants French citizenship. This law was implemented due to the need for a larger military. Foreigners born in France who had come of age and did not formally surrender their French citizenship, became citizens of France. The French army suffered over a million casualties in World War 1 and many of the survivors became handicapped, as a result, the French labor force was missing a significant portion of working men. The government loosened restrictions on immigrants who could be added to the labor pool. Working men who had lived in France for three years could apply for citizenship. Also, the children of married French women and immigrant foreigners became French citizens<sup>31</sup>.

The first specific definitions of “immigrant” and “emigrant” were produced at the 1924 International Convention. There, however, have been subsequent conventions that have altered the legal framework of refugee and legal immigrants. Nation states navigate their own legal documents, which often vary, to formulate their immigration policy<sup>32</sup>. Throughout this paper we have seen this be the case with France and the formulation of their immigration policy.

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<sup>30</sup> “Citizenship of France,” Inimix: Immigration, Residency, News, and Services.  
<http://immigrationeu.com/en/citizenship/citizenship-of-france/>

<sup>31</sup> Morddel, French Nationality Law Through the Years, n.p

<sup>32</sup> Gerard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.83

## 2.3

### **Intermarriage between French and Foreign Nationals**

One way that immigrants' citizenship status cements itself is through intermarriage with French citizens. Immigrants who arrived in France before the mid-20th century, primarily European, had high rates of mixed marriages especially by the third generation. Additionally, the size of an immigrant group correlates with the rate of mixed marriage. The most populous immigrant groups today have the highest rates of mixed marriages.<sup>33</sup> This is the case today with North African nationals constituting the majority of mixed marriages at 37% whereas Sub-Saharan African and Asian nationals are in the minority at 14%. European nationals constitute 22%.<sup>34</sup>

The 20th century saw a sharp increase in mixed nationality marriages and they skewed towards marriages consisting of foreign born men and native women. Beginning in the 1920's Belgians were the largest group in mixed marriages with French (37% of Belgian men). A decade later, however, Italians took the lead and held this until the 1980's when the Portuguese and Algerians took the lead. Additionally, the socioeconomic status of the immigrant population correlates to the rate of mixed marriages. In the 1930's, 18% of Swiss immigrants were white-collar workers and 80% were in mixed marriages. Poles, however, did not have many white-collar jobs and therefore mixed marriages between Poles and French were low.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Noiriél, *The French Melting Pot*, p. 150-153

<sup>34</sup> "How many mixed marriages are there in France?," Institut national d'études démographiques. June 13, 2017. [https://www.ined.fr/en/everything\\_about\\_population/demographic-facts-sheets/faq/mixed-marriages-france/](https://www.ined.fr/en/everything_about_population/demographic-facts-sheets/faq/mixed-marriages-france/)

<sup>35</sup> Noiriél, *The French Melting Pot*, p.152-154

The early immigrant groups have higher rates of naturalization because length of stay is correlated to rate of naturalization. Sub-Saharan Africans are a relatively recent immigrant group compared to many immigrant groups of European origin in France. Few are in white collar professions and there is a high unemployment rate among Africans living in France. Not only is this due to socio-economic status or length of time residing in France but also to hiring discrimination. There is a high degree of social segregation and occupational segregation between Sub-Saharan Africans and French natives<sup>36</sup>. Mixed marriages are at low rates because of this segregation as well as residential segregation. The lower rate of mixed marriages as well as the racialization of darker-skinned African heritage people contribute to African immigrants having a different experience with citizenship than other immigrants.

## 2.4

### **Citizenship Degraded**

The unsteady relationship to citizenship that Africans faced from the French government began decades before there came to be a significant number of immigrants on French soil. The right to and quality of citizenship was an enduring question in the French colonies as well. The *Four Communes* of Senegal (Dakar, Rufisque, Saint-Louis, and Goree) were the only parts of

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<sup>36</sup> Rebecca Tesfai (2020) Immigrants' occupational segregation in France: "brown-collar" jobs or a Sub-Saharan African disadvantage?, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 43:15, 2724-2745, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2019.1686162](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1686162)

French West Africa where its inhabitants had French citizenship during colonization.<sup>37</sup> Female residents, however, would later face their own struggle over their rights as citizens.

The French Empire was nearing an end but the desire to profit off of the resources of its colonies was not at an end. Additionally, France was economically devastated and much of its infrastructure destroyed after World War 2. It sought to maintain its economic ties to West Africa through labor migration, trade from a position of dominance, as well as maintaining the *tirailleurs senegalais*. The concept of creating a French “community” was unsuccessful because rights were not meted out equally. One such incident of who was treated as a citizen with equal rights and who was not, occurred in Senegal. French women gained the right to vote in 1944. Women from non-West African colonies, such as Algeria and Madagascar, were granted the right to vote as well. Senegalese women who lived in the *Four Communes*, however, were not granted the vote despite being French citizens. This is an early example of the acute and targeted discrimination that French citizens from West Africa faced. The attitude of the French government was that they could arbitrarily give and take away rights as they pleased and this stems from a history of colonizing and subjugation of people around the world. Pierre Cournaire, the Governor-General of the AOF<sup>38</sup>, believed that allowing the voice of Senegalese women would dilute the vote represented by European French. To ensure that the Senegalese did not have the voting power of their real numbers, France took away the right of their women to vote<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Maelenn-Kegni Toure, “Four Communes of Senegal (1887-1960)”, BlackPast. March 8, 2009. Accessed on May 4, 2021. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/four-communes-senegal-1887-1960/>

<sup>38</sup> The AOF stands for Afrique Occidentale Française which was a federation of French West African Colonies.

<sup>39</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p.45-50

The injustices did not go unnoticed by the Senegalese. French African assemblies established in Senegal were angry about the tenuous status of citizenship as well as their limited powers. In January of 1947 the territorial assembly of Senegal suspended work and refused to act on a budget. There was also a bit of a power struggle between the Governor-General and native Senegalese political leaders who wanted to turn the territorial assembly into a mini-parliament.<sup>40</sup>

Questions of citizenship of French Africans were taking place before large-scale immigration to France occurred. Article 80 of the Constitution did not expressly say that inhabitants of the overseas French empire were citizens. Rather the wording was that inhabitants of overseas colonies had acquired “the quality of citizenship.” What does this mean? Are they entitled to the same rights as French citizens? Additionally, does this give France a loophole to avoid being equitably responsible to its colonies or in the case of future French immigration, the freedom to legally be able to restrict immigration or deny citizenship? In 1947 the Ministry of Overseas Affairs expressed that there wasn’t a need to specify the citizenship referred to in Article 80 of the Constitution as being “French” because there was no other citizenship that it could be<sup>41</sup>.

Article 81, additionally, defined who had citizenship of the French Union. Those who lived in the French metropole, overseas departments and territories, Algeria, Cameroon and Togo which were trust territories, and Associated States. Inhabitants of Cameroon, Togo, and the Associated States, however, did not have French citizenship whereas the others did. Post World War 2 all French nationals were French citizens but one could be a French “citizen” without being a French national. Citizenship of the French union would coincide with the country’s

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<sup>40</sup> Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*. p.141-142

<sup>41</sup> Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*. p.126-127



citizenship and also entitle them to the rights written in the preamble of the constitution as well as civil service jobs.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.5

### Conservatism and Criminalizing Humans

We see a more conservative approach to citizenship begin in the 1970's and make a reappearance in the 1990's as the number of immigrants from North and Sub-Saharan Africans increased. Despite some instances of this selectivity occurring *de jure* (by right) it has been more commonplace *de facto* (in practice). Some West African immigrants, especially those who practiced Islam, had to be verified by a member of their community that they were in good standing and could adopt French values. The supposed clash of Islam with French values was a widespread viewpoint and targeted North and Sub-Saharan Africans. The surveillance and checking of visas and immigration papers that young African men have to endure at public spaces such as the Gare du Nord train station in France suggest the perception that Africans in France are not full citizens or treated as such. In the Gare du Nord, Black people are viewed with judgement and the assumption that they are probably undocumented and therefore must be restricted. The constant checking of identification is also to sort who is illegal versus legal.<sup>43</sup>

The Sans-Papiers Movement that began in the 1990's challenged the notion of what the definition of being a citizen was in France. The movement began in 1996 when 324 undocumented immigrants occupied the Church of Saint-Ambrose. Some were asylum seekers

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<sup>42</sup> Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*. p. 127-129

<sup>43</sup> Julie Kleinman, *Adventure Capital: Migration and the Making of an African Hub in Paris* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019). p. 61-65

and others were long-term residents whose citizenship had been put into question due to legislative changes. They demanded to be allowed to stay in France and the right to have documented status.<sup>44</sup> The *Sans-Papiers* were primarily West African though some had origins in the Maghreb, Central Africa, and the Caribbean.<sup>45</sup> The movement grew from that and other *Sans-Papiers* organized all across France and conducted hunger strikes, demonstrations, and more church occupations. The *Sans-Papiers* movement was supported by a majority of the French populace but they faced several hurdles when it came to the government meeting their demands. In 1997, the French government regularized the citizenship of 78,000 migrants due to the pressure from the movement and after one *Sans-Papiers* died after the hunger strike. This was not completely representative of the response from French authorities, however. Some people who occupied churches were evicted and demonstrations tear gassed by French police<sup>46</sup>.

After the 1990's the *Sans-Papiers* movement did not garner the same media attention it did in '96 and '97, however, the movement was still alive. Labor organizations, ethnic organizations, and neighborhood organizations were advocating for migrants who were *Sans-Papiers* even as mainstream politics and media moved away from viewing undocumented migrants as a priority. The President of France at the time of the protests, Jacques Chirac, at first agreed to review the cases of the undocumented protesters but reversed his decision by arbitrarily giving 22 people temporary status.<sup>47</sup> Chirac was known as the "first cop of France" and his

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<sup>44</sup> Anne McNevin, *Contesting Citizenship: Irregular Migrants and New Frontiers of the Political* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 93

<sup>45</sup> Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 48

<sup>46</sup> Anne McNevin, *Political Belonging in a Neoliberal era: The Struggle of the Sans-Papiers*. (n.p, 2006), p.146. DOI: 10.1080/13621020600633051

<sup>47</sup> Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*, p. 34

successor Nicolas Sarkozy, the “top cop.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the grassroots efforts and public support for *Sans-Papiers*, the French government responded with a conservative shift towards immigration policy and rhetoric.

What it means to be a citizen of France and who is considered one has shifted over time. Before significant African immigration, the requirements to become a citizen of France were adjusted to fit the economic or political needs of the time. The intent behind these laws spanned from boosting the economy to separating post-revolution France from feudalism. As the numbers of Africans living in France rose exponentially during the mid-twentieth century, a concerted effort to heighten the restrictions on who could become a citizen began to take place through legislation and in practice. This sudden desire to restrict immigration, is not surprising considering the struggles of West Africans, during the colonial period, to be recognized as French citizens and to acquire the rights of citizens. The French had exhibited an attitude of superiority and intolerance for the West African immigrants more than they had towards immigrants of European descent. This attitude stemmed from ethnocentrism and colonial views of Africans being subhuman.

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<sup>48</sup> Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France*, p. 40

## Chapter 3 A Closer Look: Senegalese and Malian immigrant Communities

### 3.1 Colonization: A Long Relationship

We will look at some of the legal measures employed by the French government to make citizenship uncertain. These measures targeted the Senegalese and Malian communities acutely. The Senegalese community in France is a prominent Sub-Saharan African community. Because France does not collect statistics on racial or ethnic data, one approach to determining the size of the Senegalese population is to count the number Senegalese nationals residing in France. Senegalese nationals (not including those born in France) rank second in the population of Sub-Saharan African nationals, just behind Mali at 67,000<sup>49</sup>. They were also the first visible Sub-Saharan African community in France due to waves of immigration that began earlier than other Africans such as the Malian, Ivorien, or Congolese. I intend to delve deeper into some of the factors that compelled the Senegalese to leave their home country and migrate to France.

Senegal was a colony of the French empire beginning in the 19th century. There was already a history of Senegalese soldiers being recruited to help France fight wars. Louis Faidherbe, the military governor of Senegal, created the first battalion of *tirailleurs senegalais* in 1857. The recruitment of men for the *tirailleurs* had its roots in slavery. The military would pay slavemasters an “enlistment bonus” to recruit enslaved men for a period of 12-14 years.

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<sup>49</sup> Ministre de L'Europe et Des Affaires Etrangères, “The African Diaspora in France” <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/africa/the-african-diaspora-in-france/>

Faidherbe was also able to recruit young men who weren't enslaved and of a higher socioeconomic status by creating permanent Senegalese units and making it a legitimate profession. This battalion was very useful for the French by the time World War 1 broke out in 1914. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* had an enlistment of 31,000 at the beginning of the war and 161,000 at the end of the war in 1918. There was also a smaller number of Senegalese soldiers dubbed *originaires* who were not in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* but instead were a part of the general metropolitan army. This was because these soldiers were from the *Four Communes* of Senegal, which were Dakar, Goree, Rufisque, and Saint-Louis, where residents were given the same rights as French citizens<sup>50</sup>.

Senegalese immigration to metropolitan France in the 1960's was dominated by men working in low skilled jobs such as factory workers. This led to a concentration of migrants working in specific industries. After World War 2, France had an active recruitment policy directed at Senegalese male workers. France's economy and infrastructure were devastated, post-war, and France needed others to help rebuild. Senegalese males from the rural Senegal River Valley were dealing with an agricultural crisis in their own homeland which led to an economic recession, so many were unemployed and eager for work to feed their families. These workers were primarily of Soninke and Toucouleur descent<sup>51</sup>. As in the 1930's, there would be a second increase in highly educated migrants. Some were students who immigrated to France in

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Fogarty, "Tirailleurs Sénégalais." International Encyclopedia of the First World War. 2016. [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/tirailleurs\\_senegalais](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/tirailleurs_senegalais)

<sup>51</sup> Felix Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974*, p.117-140. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016. Accessed April 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctt1bkm6rf.12>.

order to complete their education, particularly higher education, at French institutions. Others were educated workers coming from Dakar and other cities in Senegal<sup>52</sup>.

## 3.2

### The Negritude Movement

Around this time France also experienced an influx of Senegalese students pursuing education in France, primarily higher education. The Negritude movement has also been well documented and consisted of many Senegalese, including Leopold Senghor, the first president of Senegal. Students from Dakar, as well as other African and Caribbean nations encompassed the Negritude movement. Allioune Diop was one of the most prolific members of the Negritude and created much of its infrastructure. Senegalese born and French educated, Diop created a Black publishing house in Paris and an interdisciplinary journal focusing on anti-colonial and pan-African publications. The publishing house was named Presence Africaine and founded in 1947. The presence of Presence Africaine appealed to Senegalese students as they could work with anti-colonial scholars and writers that inspired them and use their Parisian education to create their own publications. Additionally, a majority of these students lived in *foyers d'étudiants des colonies* (dormitories for students from the colonies) and these became safe havens, so to speak, for African and Caribbean students to share ideas and writing without the interference of White French academiciens. Presence Africaine did not initially begin as a home for anti-colonial writers and text. Its aim was to highlight the accomplishments and history of

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<sup>52</sup> Sorana Toma & Eleonora Castagnone, What Drives Onward Mobility within Europe? The Case of Senegalese migration between France, Italy, and Spain (n.p: Institut national d'études démographiques, 2015) p. 6-8

Africans. The anti-colonial movement that took off in the 1950's, however, was the catalyst for a shift in direction for the publishing house<sup>53</sup>.

### 3.3 Senegalese Women

Men dominated the makeup of Senegalese during the early waves of migration. Men migrated to France, primarily for economic reasons. In Senegal, women had less ability to migrate individually but as a wife, she could emigrate in order to reunite her family. In metropolitan France, however, women often found themselves having to join the workforce in addition to their work as mothers (if they were parents) and wives. These jobs, like jobs for men, were often filled through personal networks with current employees. Employers preferred this set-up because it saved them in recruiting costs as well as provided some assurance that the Senegalese woman would be a valuable employee as there was an employee that could attest to her character.<sup>54</sup>

Rural Senegal experienced severe economic hardships due to deregulation of the groundnut market. Groundnut was the primary crop and economic driver of rural Senegal. In the early 1980's, Senegal went through a liberalization of their economy and opened up the groundnut market. This did not help alleviate any of the agricultural crises that Senegal was

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<sup>53</sup> Felix Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974*, P. 1-2. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Pau Baizan & Amparo Gonzalez-Ferrer, What drives Senegalese migration to Europe? The role of economic restructuring, labor demand, and the multiplier effect of networks (n.p:Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, 2016) p. 12-14

facing at the time but rather exacerbated the problem. The deregulation caused rural households' income to decrease and poverty became widespread after the government ceased financially supporting farms<sup>55</sup>.

### 3.4

#### **The Willing Migrants**

*Willing Migrants* by Francois Manchuelle goes into detail about the Soninke migrants who came from a region that covered parts of Mauritania, Mali and Senegal. The 1960's saw a "labor migration" of Soninke migrants which denoted an intention for temporary settlement with economic motivations rather than permanent settlement. The first study of Black African labor published by Souleymane Diarra in 1968 found that 85% of Black labor migrants came from this region that has a Soninke majority. The Soninke are no strangers to migration as they have a history of migration within Africa. They migrated to Senegal as peanut farmers and agricultural laborers in the 19th century and over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries have communities across West and Central Africa as well as North Africa, Europe, and the United States<sup>56</sup>.

In my research I have been searching for explanations of the social and economic trajectory of certain West African groups in France, primarily from the 1950's to the present day.

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<sup>55</sup> Justine Dodgen, "Immigration and Identity Politics: The Senegalese in France." (n.p: Claremont Mckenna College Senior Theses, 2011) p.23-42. Paper 284.

<sup>56</sup> Francois Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997) pg. 2-3



In *Willing Migrants* I was looking for information about Soninke migrants who emigrated to France and comprised the majority of Sub Saharan African labor migrants between 1945 and 1968<sup>57</sup>. Instead I found much written about the socio-political set up of France and the changes it went through. Additionally, the time frame that was primarily discussed was pre-1950. I discovered this in many books and scholarly articles but most notably in *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960*. Per the title, my expectation was that the book would primarily focus on the Soninke Migrants in France. I, however, was not aware and learned through my research that Soninke diasporic communities are found all over the world. Soninke populations reside in other countries in West Africa such as Ivory Coast and the Congo as well as North Africa, Western Europe, and even in New York City. The reason for such a widespread migration pattern is found in the history of the nature of Soninke society. The Soninke have a background in trading that predates the colonial period of Africa. There still are a significant number of Soninke who are traders and merchants today in West Africa.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.5

#### Second Generation

Second-generation Senegalese who were born in France have a different experience than that of their parents. They are being raised in a cosmopolitan France with different customs than Senegal. Additionally, experiencing one's childhood in a country with a racist structure alters one's psyche from a young age in a way that parents who grew up in West Africa did not have to

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<sup>57</sup> Francois Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997) pg. 2-3

<sup>58</sup> Francois Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997) pg. 1-3

face until adulthood. By the age most Senegalese immigrants relocated to France they already had a mental and emotional formation in a place where the majority of the country is Black.

Many Senegalese youths in France grow up in *banlieues* or other urban working class neighborhoods in France and primarily identify as being French. Many of these areas are diverse and these children grow up side-by-side with North Africans, Carribeans, and poor White French. Despite identifying as French, Senegalese heritage youths are not treated as French and experience social exclusion. Rap has served as a chronicle for these Senegalese youths living in banlieues. Racism and urban poverty have fostered the rise of Rap as a popular music genre in France. Rap in France, unlike in America, has not historically been associated with one racial group. Rap is as diverse as the centers of urban poverty and the working class from which they originate. North African, West African, and White artists and audiences have all found a home in French Rap<sup>59</sup>. Rap, however, is not the music of the Senegalese who migrated in the mid-20th century. It developed from younger generations growing up in France who infused Afrobeats with hip-hop that spoke to their origin culture as well as their present experience in Metropolitan France.

### 3.6

#### Colonization

The emphasis on pre-1950's France as well as French West Africa is an attempt to provide a historically based socio-economic context for today's relationship between African immigrants and French society. In order to provide explanations for the social issues of African

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<sup>59</sup> Justine Dodgen, "Immigration and Identity Politics: The Senegalese in France." (n.p: Claremont Mckenna College Senior Theses, 2011) p.23-42. Paper 284.

immigrants who reside in France there has to be an acknowledgement of the effects of colonization in immigrant's home countries. Colonization is the reason the Senegalese, Malian, Congolese, Ivoirien, and other West African nations speak French. The economic and cultural ties that countries such as Senegal have made with France are due to colonization. France has long been one of Senegal's primary trading partners after Senegal was part of the French empire. Also, being a part of the French Empire, having a colonial French population, alongside French legal and education systems led to a strong French influence that is ever present in Senegal.

Citizenship became precarious for Senegalese as well as other immigrants from former French colonies who were automatically French citizens by law. Charles Pasqua wrote and introduced the laws in 1993 that caused the church occupations, hunger strikes, and the inception of the *Sans-Papiers* movement. Pasqua was the Interior Minister of France at the time in the administration of Jacques Chirac. Before 1994 foreign nationals could become French citizens automatically by the age of 18. The law was changed and after January 1, 1994, children born in France have to apply for citizenship between 16 and 21 to show "genuine" desire to be French citizens<sup>60</sup>.

This law as well as underlying issues regarding undocumented immigrants in France led to the beginning of the *Sans-Papiers* movement. They could not provide the essential services or resources necessary for their children. There were others who were born in colonial French West Africa who were French citizens but because of the Pasqua laws were no longer considered citizens. *Sans-Papiers*, in protest, occupied churches around the Paris area.

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<sup>60</sup> Migration News, "French Police Remove Immigrants from Church." Volume 3, Number 9. September 1, 1996. The Regents of the University of California, Davis

### 3.7

#### **Pasqua Laws and the *Sans-Papiers***

The Pasqua laws introduced new requirements to the process of becoming a French citizen, making it more difficult for immigrants to become citizens. It also introduced a more stringent immigration process. This also created a legal conundrum, of which many of the *Sans-Papiers* fall under, where the child is a citizen but the parent is undocumented. It also got rid of automatic citizenship for those who were born in France instead requiring people from age 16 to 21 to apply for citizenship. One of Pasqua's stated goals through implementation of these laws was to reduce by half the amount of labor immigration from former French colonies<sup>61</sup>.

This change of immigration laws and its effects was the catalyst for the first church occupation that began the *Sans-Papiers* movement. Demonstrations occurred at several churches including the Church of Saint-Ambrose and Saint-Bernard. 220 men, women, and children occupied the Church of Saint Bernard. Some of these protesters launched a hunger strike which garnered the attention of the French and forced the hand of the government to at least respond. The government decided to only review individual cases and the police evicted the protesters on August 23, 1996. 57 out of the 220 ended up getting deported<sup>62</sup>. On August 6, 1998, four African immigrants and five allies occupied the papal nuncio (nunciature) and demanded permission to

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<sup>61</sup> Migration News, "French Police Remove Immigrants from Church." Volume 3, Number 9. September 1, 1996. The Regents of the University of California, Davis

<sup>62</sup> Migration News, "French Police Remove Immigrants from Church." Volume 3, Number 9. September 1, 1996. The Regents of the University of California, Davis

stay in France. These four were part of the over 200 who occupied the Church of Saint Bernard in 1996. There was resentment over this newly elected Socialist prime minister because the Socialist party was seen as allies to immigrants during the reign of the Chirac government which included the Pasqua laws. Prime Minister Juppe showed up at *Sans-Papiers* protests and promised to review the cases of 150,000 undocumented immigrants but later announced that 70,000 did not meet the criteria and had to leave the country<sup>63</sup>.

One woman who was a *Sans-Papiers* protestor migrated to France to assist her sister with her children, who was already living in France. She was born in West Africa before independence so she was born as a citizen of France. After the Pasqua Laws in 1994, she became undocumented. She had a child who was born in France who was therefore a citizen. This became a very difficult situation for her because her child was allowed to go to school but still denied many basic services; also, the mother was not allowed to work or gain many social services so she could not provide for her child<sup>64</sup>.

The documentary *The Ballad of the Sans-Papiers* (1996) does an excellent job of incorporating the voices and stories of participants from a firsthand perspective. The filmmakers (Samir Abdallah, Raffaele Ventura) are present at these demonstrations on the streets and in the churches. They also highlight an important spokesperson for the movement, Madjiguene Cisse, as well as some of the non-African allies of the movement such as the Cartoucherie theatre's director Ariane Mnouchkine. The latter was instrumental in attracting mediators and

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<sup>63</sup> Craig Whitney, "African Immigrants in Paris Occupy Nunciature for 5th Day" *International Herald Tribune*. August 6, 1998.

<sup>64</sup> *La Ballade des Sans-Papiers*, Directed by Samir Abdallah and Rafaele Ventura: Paris, 1996.

representatives from the government to meet with the *Sans-Papiers* and hosted *Sans-Papiers* demonstrators in her theatres. The documentary also caught footage of some of the initial responses from the government officials who were brought in to address the concerns of the *Sans-Papiers* as well as answer questions. Ariane Mnouchkine and actress Emmanuelle Beart handcuffed themselves to protestors participating in a hunger strike in the event that police took action against them<sup>65</sup>.

They also show quick snapshots of local French people who are in opposition to the *Sans-Papiers* making quick comments on the demonstrations that they were witnessing. I think that it is a useful reality check because the movement was unsuccessful in enacting any substantial legislative changes. Also, it's one thing to portray the movement only in an aspirational way but it is more accurate and provides more context of public opinion when a reader or viewer finds out that the demonstrators were unsuccessful in many of their efforts in the 1990's. This shows that despite many members of the public supporting the movement, it did little to change the legislation enacted. One such encounter, a poignant moment in the film showed a White French passerby walking his dog. He complained that they were walking up a one way street the wrong way as well as stating that they would soon take over anyway and "kick us out." This speaks to an earlier discussed theme of policing of public space. I previously examined how this type of policing took place at Gare du Nord. French shop owners complained about the use of space by African and Arab teens and specifically where it differed from how others usually used or operated in the space<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> *La Ballade des Sans Papiers*, Directed by Samir Abdallah and Rafaele Ventura: Paris, 1996

<sup>66</sup> *La Ballade des Sans-Papiers*, Directed by Samir Abdallah and Rafaele Ventura: Paris, 1996.

The “kick us out” sentiment spoke to the “immigrants taking over our country” paranoia that the far-right and center-right capitalize upon in order to make political gains. This also correlates to similar thinking opined by public officials in the mid-twentieth century when the African population in France first became visible. As we learned in *The French Melting Pot*, modern France is a country of immigrants but the colonial perception of Africans remains pervasive. The need for people to be controlled or frowned upon if they do not act according to standards in which French people are accustomed to is an example of this<sup>67</sup>.

### 3.8

#### **Ethnocentrism in Action**

The documentarians also frames the narrative of the *Sans-Papiers* protestors as parents, especially mothers, being concerned about their ability to take care of their children because they’re undocumented. They filmed lots of mothers who were protesting and had children who were documented but they were not. They also filmed some fathers who expressed grief at not being able to work and provide for their family. These protestors were filmed as wanting to live normal lives as many of them did before the Pasqua laws, living in houses, creating families, and working in France. I think this was very intentional because it combats the narrative of immigrants attempting to live off the state when they arrive in a nation. This was a common refrain for anti-immigration sentiment in the mid-twentieth century when Africans began emigrating to France in larger numbers than seen previously<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> *La Ballade des Sans-Papiers*, Directed by Samir Abdallah and Rafaella Ventura: Paris, 1996.

<sup>68</sup> *La Ballade des Sans-Papiers*, Directed by Samir Abdallah and Rafaella Ventura: Paris, 1996.

Not only did the Pasqua laws strip people of citizenship it also threatened the traditional family structure of many Malian immigrants. Polygamous relationships were banned with the Interior Minister Charles Pasqua stating that the family reunification process could occur only once, one spouse and her children<sup>69</sup>. Polygamy was deemed to be “contrary to public order” and could be grounds for losing benefits from social services, including health care, as well as deportation<sup>70</sup>. “Secondary” wives living in France could not renew their 10 year visas. One of the most controversial aspects of the Pasqua Law was that women who bore children on French soil, as well as said children, would no longer be awarded citizenship. Due to vocal opposition they allowed “secondary” wives who had lived in France for at least 15 years and their children to remain in France. Additionally, polygamous couples who had immigrated to France between 1986 and 1993 could also stay if they legally divorced and lived separately<sup>71</sup>. There is discontent among many Malian women living in France about polygamy which has been well documented by the media. This is a natural position from the broader French perspective and in keeping with goals of assimilation. Pronatalism, however, is strong among Malian men and estimates have counted that approximately 30% of Soninke, who are the majority of Malian immigrants, are in polygamous marriages<sup>72</sup>.

This reflected a shift in policy from the Socialist government of President Francois Mitterand which directed social and health care workers to respect polygamous families and

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<sup>69</sup> Sargent, Carolyn F., and Stéphanie Larchanché-Kim. “Liminal Lives: Immigration Status, Gender, and the Construction of Identities Among Malian Migrants in Paris.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 1 (September 2006): p.17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764206289652>.

<sup>70</sup> Sargent, Carolyn, and Cordell, Dennis. “Polygamy, disrupted reproduction, and the state: Malian migrants in Paris, France.” *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 56, Issue 9, 2003. p. 1966

<sup>71</sup> Sargent, Carolyn F., and Stéphanie Larchanché-Kim. “Liminal Lives: Immigration Status, Gender, and the Construction of Identities Among Malian Migrants in Paris.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 1 (September 2006): p.17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764206289652>.

<sup>72</sup> Sargent, Carolyn, and Cordell, Dennis. “Polygamy, disrupted reproduction, and the state: Malian migrants in Paris, France.” *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 56, Issue 9, 2003. p. 1963



marriages as a Muslim custom. This was part of the government's stance on immigration which included amnesties for undocumented immigrants as well as less restrictive policies in granting residency and work permits. Mitterand's government also represented a shift from the 1970's when France was restricting West African immigration. The 1980's, however, also represented a rise in public support for the far-right political party Front National as backlash for the pro-immigrant stance of the Mitterand government. The backlash also turned into legislation as is evident with the Pasqua Laws.<sup>73</sup>

Stigmatization of Islam has taken many different forms in France and the controversy over headscarves worn for religious reasons has taken the forefront of political and cultural debate. The far right, first led by Jean Marie Le Pen and now under his daughter Marine Le Pen, have capitalized on this issue as well as that of muslims and immigration in general. It, however, is not just the extremes embracing a headscarf ban for minors but mainstream politics as well. President Emmanuel Macron, despite not being the author of this specific amendment, did introduce the bill from which this amendment originated. This bill's stated goal was to combat Islamic extremism and separatism in France. Macron stated that this bill would combat "parallel societies" being developed<sup>74</sup>.

The centrist Macron government is embracing right wing immigration policies as these policies are introduced into the mainstream society. As France does not count data based upon race or ethnic background, there is a feeling of invisibility in the Sub-Saharan African community. This is a dangerous combination for Sub-Saharan Africans because society can discount the experiences of discrimination and social disenfranchisement; attributing these

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<sup>73</sup> Carolyn Sargent, and Dennis Cordell, "Polygamy, disrupted reproduction, and the state: Malian migrants in Paris, France." *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 56, Issue 9, 2003. p. 1966

<sup>74</sup> Eleanor Beardsly, interview by Ari Shapiro, *All Things Considered*, NPR, April 8, 2021.

experiences to the struggles of being a first-generation immigrant rather than to racism, which is an institutionalized system. Additionally, there would not be an incentive to enact policies whose aim is to end this discrimination or support the socioeconomic mobility of Africans. Rather, there would be incentive to create new laws that would continue to infringe upon the rights of immigrants, e.g., the Pasqua Laws and the headscarf ban.

### **Note on Terminology**

I use terms such as “French” and “France” in broad uses of the words. There are regional, cultural, political, and other differences among the French citizenry and in the Republic. In an attempt to frame the governmental response to West African immigration and sometimes societal, I use these terms to reflect the responses that affect the lives of West African immigrants the most especially in terms of legislation or policy. When I use the term “African” or “Africa,” I am referring to Sub-Saharan Africans. I interchange this term with Sub-Saharan Africans or West Africans. When referring to North Africans specifically, I use the term North Africans. It was my intention in the beginning of this project to use original sources and frame this work from the perspective of French Africans.

I was limited in the research that I could do due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was limited to online research and some books that I could acquire from Bard’s Stevenson Library. Possibly, sans COVID, I would have been to travel to France and visit local businesses or

organizations as well as talk to people to get their accounts and perspective on living as an African in France. A second limitation was language barrier, as many of these primary sources are written in French.

This is unfortunate because the concepts raised with this community and its positioning in France are relevant globally. Citizenship across the world is controversial and many nations are selective in who they deem to be citizens and the permanency or temporality of such a demarcation. Statelessness is an issue that a subset of French Africans faced post Pasqua Laws. Gaps in nationality law and racially exclusive citizenship laws are primary causes of statelessness<sup>75</sup>.

Racial discrimination and the perpetration and effects of colonialism are not exclusive to France either. The Scramble for Africa of 1884 transferred all of Africa's land, except Liberia and Ethiopia, to European control. The French, Belgian, Germans, British, Portugese, Spanish, Italians all owned territory in Africa. These European powers also redrew the boundaries of formerly independent states, nations, and kingdoms which split cohesive ethnic groups. The Soninke, whom I mentioned before, occupied an area of land which encompassed parts of Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania. The ramifications of colonialism still have an impact on the quality of life for formerly colonized peoples and formerly colonized nations. This as well as ongoing racial discrimination in the west are experienced so severely that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention declared racism a public health threat<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> "Ending Statelessness," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/ending-statelessness.html>. Accessed April 30, 2021

<sup>76</sup> Marcia Frellick, "CDC Declares Racism a Public Threat," WebMD Health News. April 12, 2021. <https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210412/cdc-declares-racism-a-serious-public-health-threat>

## CONCLUSION

I began this research with broad questions on the general community that needed to be narrowed. The concepts I wanted to explore included class, community, and social integration. I had trouble finding information on some of these topics, partially because France doesn't count race in its population data. I began by searching for general demographic data and descriptions of certain communities and neighborhoods. This did not prove to be so successful. I also intended to use the Library of Congress' vast collection but as we were in a pandemic I did not have access to the institution. Where there were more resources I focused my writing. Researchers and scholars have covered citizenship from many different perspectives and I found their data useful. I was able to utilize a variety of books and articles that discussed and described policing, citizenship in France and its relationship to French Africans.

French Citizenship as desirable and as a right is an essential tenet of the Sub-Saharan African community in France. The struggle for this right has directed the lives of members of this community for hundreds of years. Citizenship also has been used as a political weapon and has been a goal and an achievement to use political struggle for. Citizenship has also been used by the French government to other this group successfully.

I found success in focusing my research on specific events or topics that spoke to larger questions of citizenship and race in France. Looking at citizenship, I was able to understand the precariousness of the status of Africans in France as well as the impact of being excluded from the larger French society. Starting with examining the precarious nature of their existence in France there are several different avenues to traverse further. The characteristics and experiences

of these Sub-Saharan African communities are varied and diverse but many of the narratives I found focussed on certain experiences of labor migrants, policing, immigration, and citizenship shared by most. The transformation of the makeup of Sub-Saharan African immigrants from single men filling roles in labor or military service and students from West Africa to families and women and children has changed the dynamics of the community as well as its relationship with broader French society.

The French Sub-Saharan African community's narrative is one that is underrepresented, especially in English language works. North Africans and other immigrant groups have a larger population presence in France and there are more written sources about them. This paper attempts to add to the narrative of the Sub-Saharan African experience in France. One acute aspect of this experience, which I have attempted to make clear, is that over the past 60-70 years France has held onto colonial thinking and tropes regarding Africans. This, unfortunately, has added another dimension to the normal difficulties associated with immigration. We see this with the early reception of a newly visible African community in the mid-20th century to the 1990's with the Pasqua Laws and the *Sans-Papiers* movement that it initiated. This paper has unpacked these repeated instances in which the citizenship and belonging of Africans in France comes into question.

Due to the unfortunate history of enslaving various nations, then normalizing the domination of said people through "ending" slavery but maintaining control over these societies we find that the French governing structures have the same goals, the same attitudes, and utilize many of the same oppressive techniques as they did centuries ago. Therefore, the struggle for

rights on the part of those whose people were once conquered, may have a different appearance though in essence it has been the same for centuries.

As I pursued my project, I was impressed by this community's perseverance through extraordinary and sometimes seemingly insurmountable circumstances. When it was politically convenient, The French Government attempted on many occasions to restrict immigration and criminalize Africans. They, however, had no qualms about letting in people, especially men, when it was beneficial to them. When the French saw that Africans could be beneficial to their efforts in military campaigns and economic growth, there was support for their active recruitment into the labor force and the military. To experience having one's citizenship removed when you are a settled homeowner or renter, with a job and children is, at the minimum, destabilizing. The participants in the *Sans-Papiers* movement did not give up or acquiesce but instead they harnessed their collective energies and fought back.

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