FEMINIZING THE WEST AFRICAN DIASPORA IN FRANCE: 1974-2005

BY

ELIZABETH ADAMO

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2021

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Tamara Chaplin, Chair
Associate Professor Teresa Barnes
Professor Antoinette Burton
Assistant Professor Felisa Vergara Reynolds

ABSTRACT

Since 1974, thousands of women have migrated from Africa to France, completely changing the dynamics of the diaspora in France. My dissertation examines their experience from 1974-2005, in order to explore what it meant to be African, black and female in France, a country where citizenship has long been premised on an abstract model that is understood as white and male and in which the French are implicitly viewed as culturally superior to their former colonial subjects. “Feminizing the African Diaspora in France 1974-2005,” explores African women’s contributions to the formation of the diaspora by investigating how they asserted their voices and pursued their goals in France during the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Using previously unexplored sources from print, literature, film, TV, radio, and interviews, and focusing on women of West African heritage in France, my work constructs what might be termed an aspirational history of diasporic society and culture. While as entrepreneurs, creators and artists, these women were a minority within a minority, they were nevertheless key actors in making the African Diaspora in France visible in French culture. Whether as consumers and producers, or as the subjects of film, music, or other media, my work demonstrates how African women helped to reconfigure what it meant to be female and French, thus irradicably changing the socio-cultural makeup of both contemporary France and of urban space more broadly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As my prologue will divulge, this dissertation has been a long time in the making. First and foremost, I would like to thank Tamara Chaplin, my dissertation director who was my history professor in undergrad and has been my advisor and mentor for six years. She has given me so much knowledge and advice and always supported me. I am equally thankful to my amazing committee of strong role models for their hard work on my behalf. Interestingly, all of them happen to be women; Antoinette Burton, Terri Barnes, and Felisa Vergara Reynolds. I would also like to thank Beatrice Guenther at Bowling Green State University for pushing me early on more than anyone had before.

I am also indebted to my friends, neighbors, students, and co-workers in Cameroon all of whom supported my curiosity and taught me so much. I thank Souleymane Coulibaly, who met me in Saint-Denis in the summer of 2017 and showed me around in the *foyers,* and Sylvie Kandé, who also shared her story with me on that trip. I am also indebited to Paul Dakeyo, whom I tracked down on Facebook in 2017 and met in Paris in 2018. Thérése Kuoh also taught me so much and met with me several times in Paris in 2019. I absolutely must thank my Montreuil flat mates who supported me during my research year, were the best flat mates ever, and brought joy to a stressful year. My students (who I taught English) also probably taught me more than I taught them and they also brought me joy and inspired me (along with my students in Cameroon) to teach high school. My students at Richards Career Academy have also changed how I view and write this story. Additionally, I thank my Teach for America coaches and mentors who supported me finishing this while beginning TFA and a very demanding career. They allowed me to flourish when I easily could have failed.

Finally, I am indebted to my family who all supported me in different ways during the past nine years in graduate school, especially my parents, sister, and cousins (especially Jen for her home cooked meals). Without the assistance of these individuals, this dissertation would never have come to fruition.

To Scarlett. You're amazing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE: WHY FRANCE, WHY RACE, WHY GENDER? AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

I went to Paris in September 2005 to study abroad for the academic year. Little did I know that I would witness the riots of 2005 that sent the entire country of France into chaos just one month after my arrival. I lived at the Cité Universitaire and attended school in the 6th arrondissement. In October we started to hear about protests. At the time I thought that it was students protesting, probably because we were around the Latin Quarter, an area where students tended to hang out, and close to the Sorbonne. We kept hearing that the protests were spreading and that they were about people being against the government and the educational system. Aside from seeing protestors on the Boulevard Saint Michel and in the courtyard at the Sorbonne, I have one vivid memory. My best friend Bethany (who was also studying abroad) had some friends visiting and we went to a café near Saint-Michel right on the Place. There we were, twelve obnoxious American college students, when we heard protestors coming our way down the Boulevard. The restaurant employees rushed over and closed the doors, locking us in. A few of the girls noticed and asked us, "should we be concerned?" because we were the "locals" with a whole month—six weeks tops—of Parisian experience under our belts. Bethany and I replied, "Oh no, everything's good." We also got texts from family back home asking if we were ok. They saw cars burning on the news. This was the first but not the last time that I have been away and received texts like these, where something is occurring around you in the city but you yourself are not even really aware of it. The news back home generally spectacularizes whatever is going on, often broadcasting the most extreme examples, like burning cars. My dissertation ultimately builds up to the moment when these riots erupted in France. But my path to writing it

was a longer one and it is premised the combination and culmination of a set of experiences and awareness related to the topics of France, race, diaspora, and gender.

A year after I returned to home to Chicago from Paris, I graduated college. That year, 2007, the recession hit, and I found myself working in Banquet Sales (and on weekends as a Banquet Server), not able to afford anything in the city of Chicago and feeling empty and unfulfilled. I started volunteering because I needed some meaning in my life. I tutored reading skills to middle schoolers from underserved communities in Chicago. One of my students was a 7th grader named Maria. She was a great reader. I remember her telling me that she couldn't trick or treat because it was too dangerous to go outside in her neighborhood. Halloween was my favorite holiday. I did not realize it at the time, but Maria's revelation was pivotal for me. It pushed me to think for the first time about my privilege as a white person who grew up in the suburbs and had an excellent education and a safe childhood. By then I also had an undergraduate degree in French. I began, at the same time, to realize that the French that I had learned was also a product of white privilege. However, I could speak decent French, enough to get by. I wanted to use it somehow. All those years of learning it. I had started Freshman year of high school. I liked volunteering and knew I couldn't work "for the man" in the future. I wanted to help people. I felt that this would give me more satisfaction in life.

So, I joined the Peace Corps in 2010 at the age of 25. I knew after speaking to recruiters that my chances of going to West Africa were very high since my French was decent. I had also been volunteering at the Alliance Française Médiatheque. One day I was sitting in the lobby of the Alliance, and I struck up a conversation with a woman from Cameroon. I had a feeling that this experience would presage something important, and it did. In July of 2010 I received notification that I had been assigned to go to Cameroon to be a high school English teacher. I

could write pages and pages about this experience, but what is relevant here is that my time there stimulated a profound curiosity about Africa, colonialism, and postcolonial studies. I also found it curious that I had finished an undergraduate degree in French yet knew virtually nothing about the Francophone world beyond France, the world where the majority of the globe's French speakers are from, today.

While my primary assignment was teaching English in a high school, the Peace Corps allowed me to shape my experience as a volunteer, quickly leading me to become focused on working with girls in my community, regionally, and nationally in Cameroon. I did this by establishing a girls club in my high school, training them as peer educators, forming partnerships with other agencies in my community to establish girls clubs in the local primary schools, coordinating and directing girls camps in my town and region during the summers, and participating in the Youth Development Program steering committee for Peace Corps, which formed a new program with a focus on girls' empowerment (This effort was to be short-lived; only a couple of groups were sworn in as Girls Empowerment volunteers before the area erupted into violence at the hands of Boko Haram). This experience taught me how gender functioned differently in the specific context that I was in, and that it was shaped both locally and globally.

The two years I spent in Cameroon also spurred my future research in that it made me question what it meant to be Black and Francophone. My Bachelor of Arts in French taught me a very whitewashed version of the Francophone world, and I was curious to learn more after observing in Cameroon many aspects of life that before I would have associated with Frenchness like baguettes, French language, and the Baccalaureate, (a French term for the high school diploma which is known colloquially as the Bac). I felt like colonialism's legacy was so palpable

in Cameroon. What was the West African diaspora like in France? Later I would find out for myself.

After the Peace Corps, I entered a dual master's program at Bowling Green State University, moving directly to France from Cameroon to begin an academic year abroad at the Université François Rabelais in Tours. What I encountered in Tours further sparked my interest in studying postcolonial France. This was evident in several ways. The first concerned how I experienced the French language after having spent two years in Cameroon speaking French on a daily basis. I now had a different accent and extended vocabulary in French, an accent that people would comment on, looking at me strangely and saying, "Where'd you learn French?" or "Where'd you learn that?" about a particular word or expression that I'd picked up in Cameroon. For example, one day after a party I was cleaning up with some friends. We were talking about which food needed to go in the fridge and which didn't. I said "ça va gater" meaning—as we said in Cameroon— "That will spoil." My white French girlfriend remarked, "I understand what you're saying but I would never say it like that myself." "What would you say?" I asked. She replied, "ça peut pourrir." This was one of the first times that I reflected on the way that despite a common language, geographic and cultural differences rendered both expressions and experiences radically different and that these differences can be both racialized and gendered.

My experience interacting with African American friends in Tours also pushed me to reflect both on my positionality as a white person and on the nature of the African Diaspora in France. I met Joyce and Andre who were working as au pairs in Tours while I was studying there. Naturally, I spoke to them about my experience in Cameroon since that was where I had spent the previous two years. They remarked that it was odd to hear about Africa from a white person. One time I was dancing, and they were like "where'd you learn to dance like that?"

When I said Africa and they exchanged a look, but then Andre said, “she can say that because she’s been there.” This experience and my interactions with them made me realize that as a white woman, the only reason that it was acceptable to Black people for me to speak about “Africa” was because I had spent a significant time there. I also realized that both my race and my gender determined where and when I could say certain things, and to whom. This pushed me to question who is allowed to speak about or for other groups. The experiences I had this year furthered my journey towards studying postcolonial migration to France while heightening my awareness of my own whiteness.

I returned to Paris for my research year in September 2018. I also applied for and was accepted to the Teaching Assistant Program in France (TAPIF), which offered me a position as an English Language Assistant at a Secondary School called *Lycée Jean Jaurès* in Montreuil, France, bordering Paris. As such, I would be an employee of the French government. On my application, I had requested to be placed at a ZEP (*zone d’éducation prioritaire*/ high needs area); this was why I had been assigned to Montreuil, in the *banlieue*, a town of a little over 100,000 people in Seine-Saint-Denis County that is known as “le petit Mali” or Little Mali. Montreuil has the most Malian residents of any town in France; they make up about 10% of its population. I was extraordinarily lucky because the Lycée Jean-Jaurès is the primary public high school in Montreuil, so it has an attached middle school and a large campus with housing for staff. All the language assistants (including Chinese, German, Italian, and middle school English) shared a small dorm like apartment in one of the buildings. Each of us were provided with a tiny twin bed in a shared room for free. Needless to say, I accepted this economically attractive if unconventional housing arrangement and lived in Montreuil at the high school/middle school where I taught.

One of my first duties as an English Assistant was to report to county-wide orientation for Seine-Saint-Denis. During this training, the facilitators, who were district Supervisors, started speaking a lot about the "9-3." Despite my prior education, experience and research on France, I had no idea what they were referring to. But my attention was captured by the defensive way they talked about it. If I were to paraphrase, it would be something like this: "Don't be scared to be in the 9-3. The students really are nice, and there *are* some good students. Your school will help you with whatever you need. It will be very difficult because the places you are going to do not have a lot of resources. You should not be teaching your own class or more than 12 students at a time, and no more than 12 hours per week. If your school asks you to do more than this, let us know. Good luck." It was only after I realized that all the zip codes of the towns in the county began with 9-3 that I began to suspect that the term was code for a tough zone, a ghetto. And I was right: Montreuil's zip code is 93100 (Saint Denis addresses are 93200). As the year progressed, I began to understand the significance of the "9-3" in the social imaginary in France. Once it was on my radar and I too had a 9-3 address, it seemed to come up everywhere. My experiences teaching in the "9-3" completely changed the lens through which I wrote the dissertation. If I had to explain the "trope" of the "9-3" to an American, I might compare it to our idea of "the hood" or "the inner-city ghetto" in the States. These are areas with a high population of immigrants from North and West Africa, mainly Muslim faith, and modest means.

When I reported to work with the head of the English department, I was given a tour and introduced to some teachers in the teacher's lounge. They proceeded to tell me about the school and the town. Then they began to speak about the students. Someone got out a map. They explained: Montreuil has a big hill. There is upper Montreuil (*haut-Montreuil*) to the north. And there is lower Montreuil (*bas-Montreuil*) to the south. Jean-Jaurès is located a little bit up the

hill. That's why you have to climb or take the stairs to get here. The projects, they told me, are in upper Montreuil. People there tend to be working class and poor. There are a lot of immigrants. And then there is lower Montreuil. That is where downtown is, the mayor's office, library, businesses, and restaurants. People who live there tend to be more well-off, middle class. In racial terms this meant that people of African origins (both North and West) were the majority in upper Montreuil whereas the white middle-class people lived around the center of town in lower Montreuil. My lycée had students from both upper and lower Montreuil, so the student body was very diverse. I found myself in a town where many people went by in West African style clothing, there were numerous accents and dialects, and most of the residents appeared to be North or West African in origin.

Most of the teachers at my school were white. Many of them lived in Paris and took the metro out of the center of the city. There was a nice young white English teacher at my school who was using the newest teaching techniques and held the students to high standards while basing the curriculum in their realities (a key component of Culturally Relevant Teaching as I later learned). She was torn between staying at a school where she knew that she was needed and requesting a position in a more sought-after location in Paris with white, middle class or even upper-class students, rather than the diverse populations she taught in Montreuil.

In French high schools, students choose a track, similar to a major. Literary, economics and socials sciences, and scientific tracks are general tracks and lead to university. Our high school also offered one technical track, meaning it was not meant for students to continue to university, but led rather to other specialized, shorter post-secondary options, or to employment straight away. The students were considered "less serious" in these sections than the students in the other tracks. I observed classes from each track once before diving in as an English assistant,

taking my own small groups to another room for additional instruction, usually focusing on conversation skills. The first class I observed was from one of the technical tracks. Then I went to a scientific track class, and the demographics changed drastically. In the first, I was one of three white people in the room out of about thirty. In the second (the science track) there were clearly more white students. For many of the girls in the classes, the "French headscarf ban," a law passed in 2004 that prohibited "ostentatious" religious symbols in public places such as school, dictated the way they could dress at school. Most of our students were Muslim, so there were a number of girls who wore a hijab. One day I showed them a picture of an American high school class. They immediately pointed out one student hearing a hijab. "You can wear those in school there?" they asked with awe. I later learned even more about how the educational system plays a role in perpetuating inequality in France. I elaborate on this in the coming chapters.

In October of 2018 the so-called yellow-jacket (*les gilets jaunes*) protest movement began in France. The name referred to the yellow high visibility jackets (similar to what a crossing guard wears here) the protestors wore in order to be easily recognized. Anger over high fuel prices and taxation pushed people from the middle and working classes to take to the streets in protest. One of the issues concerned changes to the university system which would put people from the *banlieue* at more of a disadvantage. As a mixed town of working and middle-class people, Montreuil became a hub for yellow jacket activism. They began congregating in the center of town near the Croix de Chavaux metro stop. At first there were just people gathering there, but soon a little hut was constructed from pieces of wood and found objects. Eventually they added a couch, and even hosted movie nights outside on a big portable screen. When I discussed this with my students, (sophomores, juniors, and seniors), they expressed a variety of opinions. Some did not care, others were on the fence, but some actually participated, even

wearing yellow jackets of their own. There came a point when some of my students were in fact blockading the doors to campus and protesting. One day I showed up for 1st period classes and one lone student came in. She said the doors were blockaded (I didn't realize this because I lived on campus so I was already inside) and that fires had been started, so students would probably not enter. Graffiti appeared on the doors of the school. I took these photos:

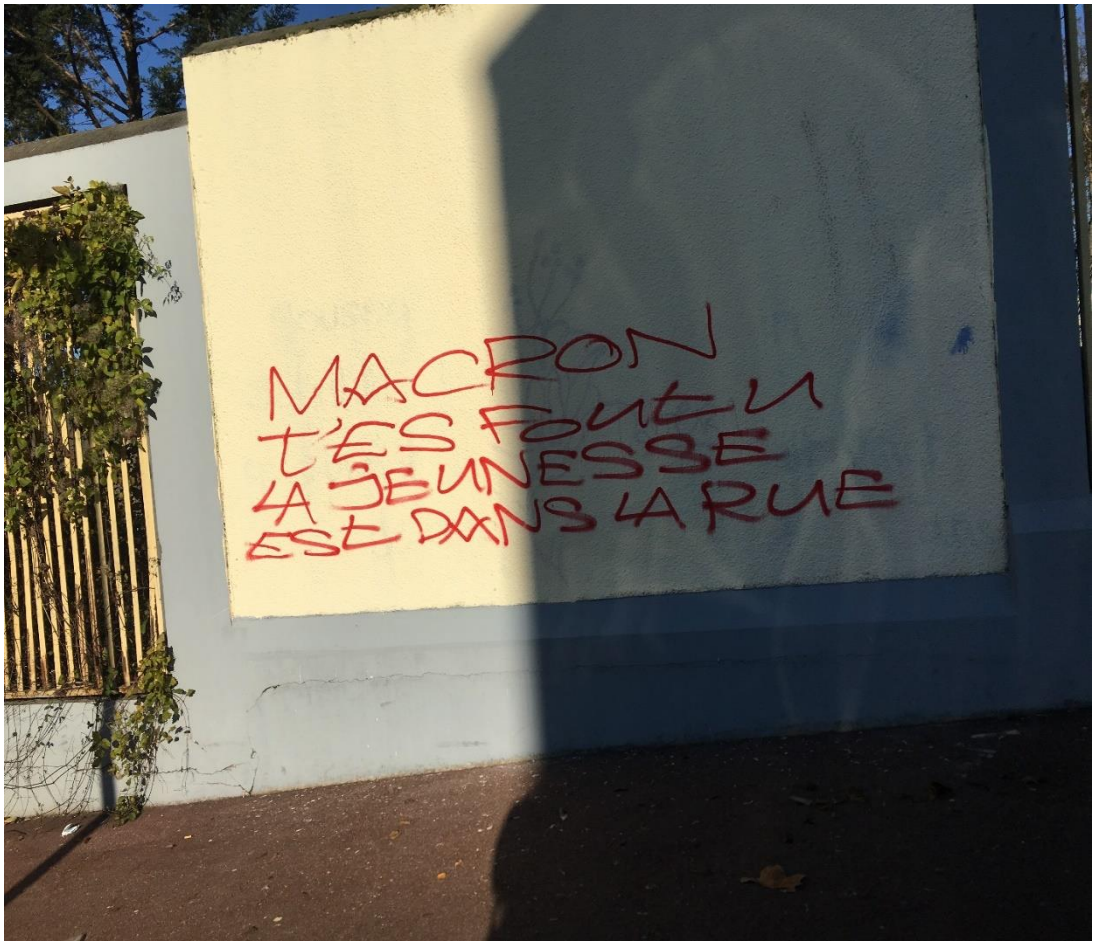


Figure 1. "Macron [the French President] you're screwed- youth are taking to the streets"

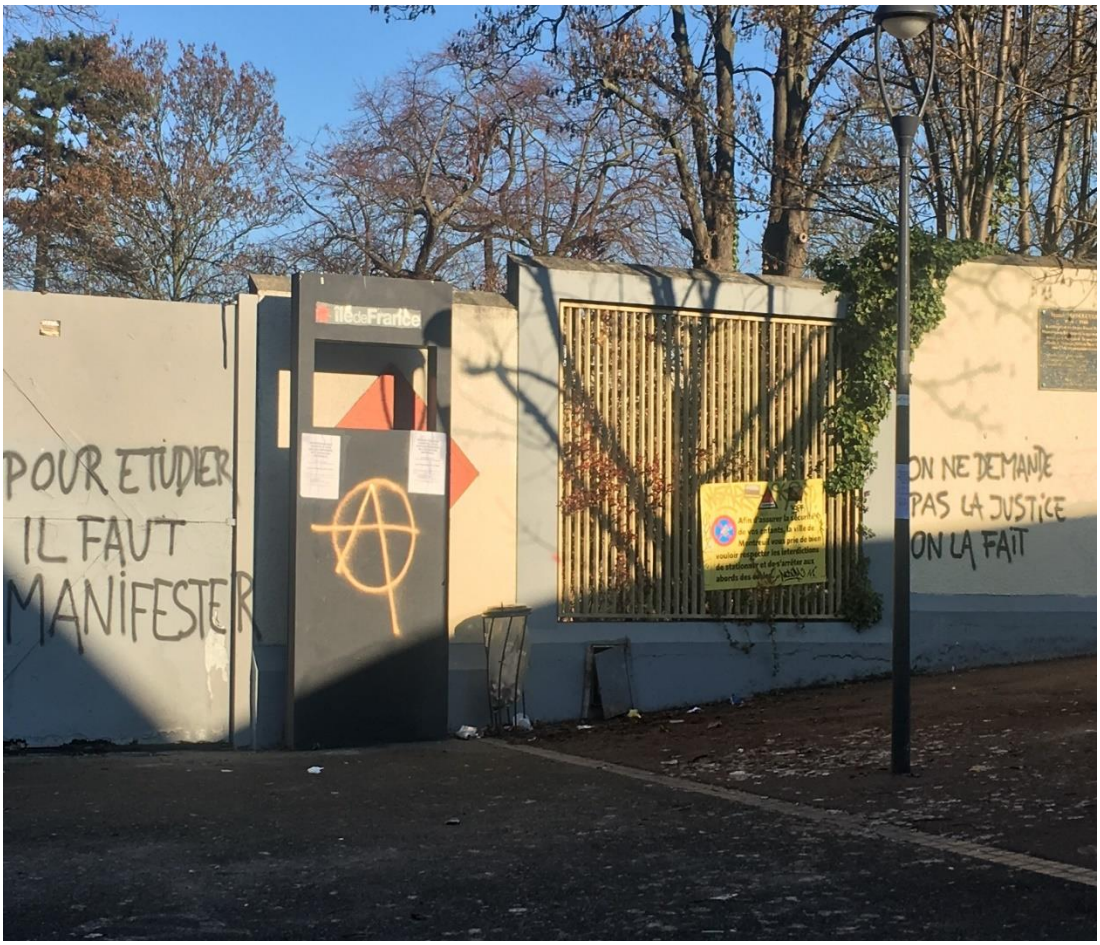


Figure 2. On the left: “In order to study, it is necessary to protest,” on the right: “We don’t ask for justice, we make it.”

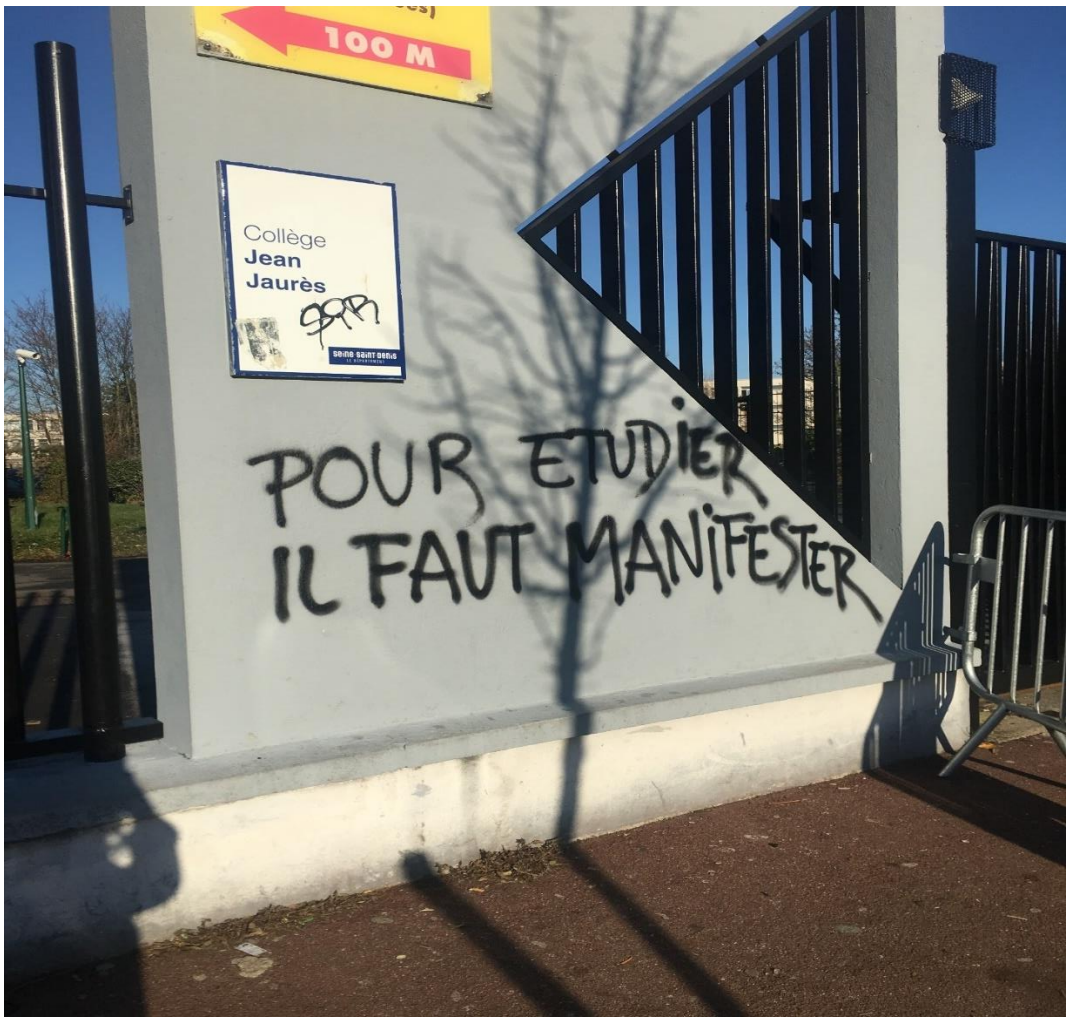


Figure 3. This is a close-up of the door to the middle school. I lived right inside.

I returned to the United States in August of 2019. I began compiling my research and drafting my first chapters. Shortly thereafter, a call for papers went out for the first major conference on Black women in France: Black Feminisms in a French(post)imperial Context. This was intended as a first opportunity for both academics and non-academics to contribute to the history and status of Black feminisms in the Francophone context. Participants and organizers alike saw the widespread interest that the conference generated as a sign that French academia and French society writ large are becoming more accepting of the need to study and

teach these histories. The conference celebrated being the first conference solely devoted North, West, and Antillean descended women's histories. My dissertation contributes to this work.

Figure 4. A conference photo. I'm in the second row, fifth from the left. This picture includes people from all over the world who research Black women in the francophone context.

INTRODUCTION

As Gertrude Mianda observed in 2014, "West African women, as producers of knowledge in feminism, have been seriously overlooked."[1]This dissertation aims to correct this elision. Post- World War Two, migration from West Africa to France was overwhelmingly male. One of the reasons for it derives from the history of African immigration to France. However, in 1974, because of an economic recession (and although it allowed family reunification to continue) the French government prohibited labor migration into France, transforming the face of immigration. This policy change, coupled with the economic downturn which also made it difficult for migrants to return to their countries of origin, spurred the feminization of West African migration to France. Since 1974, thousands of women have migrated from West Africa to France. Between 1982 and 1990, the population of West African women in France increased 70% from an estimated 42,400 to 73,000. My dissertation examines their experience from 1974-2005 in order to explore what it meant to be West African, Black and a woman in France, a country where citizenship has long been premised on an abstract model that is understood as white and male and in which the French are assumed to be culturally superior to their former colonial subjects. For this reason, women of West African origin experienced migration, education, work, family, and social life differently in France than West African men and other groups. This wave of migration also spurred fundamental changes in French media, culture, and politics. My dissertation explores the historical development of these events by investigating

[1] Gertrude Mianda, "Reading Awa Thiam's La Parole Aux Négresses through the Lens of Feminisms and English Language Hegemony." *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice/Études Critiques Sur Le Genre, La Culture, et La Justice* 36 (2): 2014, 8–19. When I use West Africa I mean the former French West Africa (Afrique-Occidentale française also known by the acronym AOF in both French and English which included Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo and Niger). and French Central Africa (Afrique-Équatoriale française or the AEF which included Chad, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, and Gabon).

how women from the West African diaspora asserted their voices and pursued their goals in France during the 1980s, 90s, and into the twenty first century.

The presence of larger numbers of West African women in France in the final decades of the 20th century and into the 21st century disturbed the French nation and drove its people to re-examine the meaning of Frenchness in the postcolonial moment. Their presence challenged the future of France as a racially white, secular nation. Family reunification meant women brought the children into France. Husbands no longer had a reason to go back home for extended visits. Wives joining their husbands in France could have more children now that they lived together. "Noise and Stinkiness" (*Le Bruit et L'Odeur)* is the colloquial title to some comments Jacques Chirac made about the African immigrant family in France in 1991. He rhetorically asks his audience what the French worker should do when faced with these families composed of one husband, three or four wives, making 15,000 francs and receiving 50,000 in welfare. Add to this the "noise and stinkiness."[2] This callous discourse from a government official caused a stir but by no means discredited him from politics; he was elected president four years later.

Feminizing the West African Diaspora in France analyses images of West African women in French media: television, magazines, Feminist publications, and film. It also analyzes images, texts, and films West African women produced about their own realities and experiences in diaspora. In the 1980s and 90s, West African families were surveilled by television news for squatting, polygamy, excision, living in poverty and being unable to take care of their families. However, an examination of West African women's experience from a variety of different media calls into question this narrative, as well as the notion that French Republican universalism and its colorblind model create equity in France. The examination of West African women's lives in

[2] A2 Le Journal de 13H, "Chirac et l'immigration : "Le bruit et l'odeur" aired on *Télévision Française 1* June 20, 1991.

France reveal structural racism in French social welfare and housing, the labor market, urban geography, feminist activism, and the film industry. Moreover, it reveals that West African women participated in, developed, and employed many different strategies to succeed in France and exerted their influence on many aspects of the diasporic experience, such as: resistance and protest, family life, entrepreneurialism, beauty, fashion and modelling, women's activism, acting, writing, and making films.

The French conception of citizenship, instead of preventing discrimination based on race or ethnicity, formed a large barrier to belonging for West African women immigrating to France. The relationship between minority rights and the state is dictated by the policy of universal abstract republican citizenship in France. This idealized view of citizenship supports what scholars call a "colorblind model."[3] The logic behind this policy is that if racial identities remain in the private realm, there will be fewer opportunities for structural racism. Those that invoke the colorblind model argue that identity politics can actually generate racism by giving people the opportunity and vocabulary to discuss race, thereby exacerbating racial difference rather than minimizing it. In practice, however, as historian Joan Scott reveals, the French abstract citizen has long been embodied as a white male; bodies of other races or genders are marked not as abstract and universal, but as different.[4] Ruth Lister observes that in this type of civic republicanism "political participation designated to further individual or group interests is

[3] Daniel Béland, "Identity Politics and French Republicanism," *Society* 40, no. 5 (July 2003): 66-71, Christophe Bertossi, "The performativity of colour blindness: race politics and immigrant integration in France, 1980–2012." *Patterns Of Prejudice* 46, no. 5 (December 2012): 427-444, Marie des Neiges Léonard, "Census and Racial Categorization in France: Invisible Categories and Color-blind Politics," *Humanity & Society* 38, no. 1 (February 2014): 67-88, Thomas Martin, "SOS Racisme and the Legacies of Colonialism 2005–2009: An Ambivalent Relationship," *Modern & Contemporary France* 23, no. 1 (February 2015): 65-80, Vincent Tiberj and Laure Michon, "Two-tier Pluralism in 'Colour-blind' France." *West European Politics* 36, no. 3 (May 2013): 580-596.
[4] Joan Wallach Scott, "French Feminists and the Rights of 'Man': Olympe De Gouges's Declarations," *History Workshop*, no. 28 (1989): 1-21.

deemed outside the pale of citizenship."[5] As scholars like Lister and others have shown, this view relegates racial, ethnic, and gender identity to the private sphere, making it difficult to address the lived reality of social discrimination based on race in France.[6] Identity politics based on characteristics such as race or ethnicity are condemned as politics of multiculturalism or *communautariansme* (understood as politics centered on minority or identity rights) that have been imported from places such as the United States or Britain, and which are presumed to have no place in France.[7] Emily Marker argues that the rhetoric of colorblindness and the use of code words to speak about race coalesced in the postwar years when colonial deputies (West African, Antillean, and Malagasy) in the French parliament attempted to engage in direct discussions about race.[8]

Historically, government policy in France has appeared more accepting towards minorities than it has in the United States, for example.[9] France never formalized segregation, never outlawed interracial marriage, and it formally recognized a third category of what is called "*métis*", or mixed race heritage. Indeed, France served as a refuge for the African American community beginning in World War One. However, Fred Constant identifies three obstacles to the universalist idea of the nation in practice: the recognition that some French people are not white, the economic empowerment of non-European immigrants, and the call for political

[5] Ruth Lister, "What is Citizenship?" in *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, 2nd ed. NY: New York University Press, 2003 [1997], 25.
[6] Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall, ed, *Black France: France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness.* Durham: Duke, 2012, Léonard, "Census and Racial Categorization in France: Invisible Categories and Color-blind Politics." 67-88, Tiberj and Michon, "Two-tier Pluralism in 'Colour-blind' France." *West European Politics* 36, no. 3 (May 2013): 580-596, Ndiaye, Pap. *La Condition Noire: Essai Sur Une Minorité Française*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008.
[7] Dominic Thomas, ed, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.
[8] Emily Marker, "Obscuring Race : Franco-African Conversations about Colonial Reform and Racism after World War II and the Making of Colorblind France, 1945–1950," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33 (3): 2015, 1–23.
[9] Fred Constant, "Black France" and the national identity debate: how best to be Black and French?" in *Black France/France Noire: The History And Politics Of Blackness*. eds. Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Tyler Edward Stovall, Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, 123-144.

representation of non-white French people. Indeed, Pap Ndiaye argues that despite its republican tradition, French history has a racial logic because racial ideas have been used throughout its history in order to justify domination. The arguments that follow demonstrate that discourses in French media and culture absolutely rely on a racial logic complete with a linguistic code, such as *banlieue, zone chaude* (a rough area, literally a hot zone), *Magrébin(e). Feminizing the West African Diaspora in France* interrogates the meanings of words like *Africain(e),* squatters, polygamists, integration and assimilation, Pan-African, activism, and the 9-3 in order to uncover the processes of racialization and gendering at work in late 20th century France.

Scholars in recent years have begun to address the history of racial discrimination in France by studying race, the West African diaspora and Black France as categories of analysis. The most comprehensive study of West African descended people in France is Pap Ndiaye's *La Condition Noire: Essai Sur Une Minorité Française.* In this work, Ndiaye stresses that Black people in France are invisible both as a social group and as an object of academic study. His work seeks to rectify this in multiple ways. He theorizes the meaning of Blackness in France, discusses colorism (the hierarchization of light skinned over darker skinned people), gives an overview of the history of Black people in France, and elaborates on anti-Black racism, racial discrimination, and movements of racial solidarity in France.[10] His work joins a growing body of literature about Blackness in France. These studies form the backbone of the historical context of *Feminizing the West African Diaspora in France*. And yet, they do not articulate the extent to which both race *and gender* shape West African people's daily lives.

The most comprehensive history written to date on black women in France is Felix F. Germaine, Sylyane Larcher and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's *Black Women and the Struggle*

[10] Pap Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire: Essai Sur Une Minorité Française*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008.

for Equality, 1848-2016.[11] Curiously, none of the chapters in the book concentrate on the last few decades of the 20th century. The authors therefore agree that Black women in France played a role in French history before and after the period I concentrate on, but their volume did not bridge the gap between the post-World War II moment and the 21st century. The period I study is essentially this bridge. How did West African and West African descended women experience life in France in the 1970s and 80s? What does their experience show about belonging, citizenship, race, gender and the formation of the West African diaspora in France during this time?

History of Black France

Black people have been part of the history of France since at least the 17th century, but their contributions to shaping the nation remain obscured, caricatured, or fragmented. During the French Revolution in 1789, there were only an estimated 4,000 Black people in France.[12] However, France was a major player in the Atlantic slave trade, transporting over a million West Africans to the Americas through ports in Dakar, Nantes, Bordeaux, and Marseilles, for example.[13] Lorelle Semley's recent work on Marseilles in the 18th century focuses on the lives of enslaved and free people of color, arguing that a black community existed there at that time that included men, women and children.[14] However, slavery was in principle not supposed to be practiced in the French metropole. Indeed, in *There Are No Slaves in France*, Sue Peabody details how slaves who were brought to France effectively sued for their emancipation during the

[11] Félix F Germain, Silyane Larcher, and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, eds. *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016* . Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018.
[12] Thomas, *Black France*, 2007.
[13] Tyler Stovall, "Race and the making of the nation: Blacks in modern France" in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*. Ed. Michael Gomez, New York: New York University Press, 2006.
[14] Lorelle Semley, "Beyond the Dark Side of the Port of the Moon: Rethinking the Role of Bordeaux's Slave Trade Past." *Histoire Sociale- Social History* 53 (107): 43–68, 2020.

eighteenth century because slavery had not been legalized in the metropole.[15] The French nevertheless transported slaves to the Antilles to work on plantations in Saint Domingue, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. The images of the slave trade and the colonized were the first images of Black people in France, and the ethnographic writings of travelers and colonial officials often justified the *mission civilisatrice*, depicting people from Africa as savage and uncivilized.[16] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's work shows that Black women in particular were sexualized in French men's travel writing, a trend which continues into the twentieth century.[17] When the Society of Friends of Black People (*Société des Amis des Noirs*) was established in Paris in 1788, it became the first French group promoting racial equality and devoted to the abolition of the slave trade.

The Great War marked a large increase in the population of Black people in France. The first Black neighborhoods were established in Marseilles and Paris, and the population of West African descent in France rose to half a million people.[18] The war also brought the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to France, as well as African American soldiers. Some *tirailleurs* stayed in France after the war to work in factories, gas, and transport companies, or as sailors and dock workers in Marseilles.[19] The interwar years saw the flourishing of the Black press and Black activism in France. Jennifer Boittin's *Colonial Metropolis,* for example, details how interwar Paris was home to the construction of Black cultural and urban spaces.[20] As Brent Hayes Edwards argues, Paris was an integral part of the Black Atlantic, connecting Harlem, London, the Caribbean, and Paris

[15] Sue Peabody, *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
[16] Thomas, *Black France*, 2007.
[17] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.
[18] Stovall, "Race and the making of the nation: Blacks in modern France" in *Diasporic Africa*, 2006.
[19] Mar Fall, *Des Africains Noirs En France: Des Tirailleurs Sénégalais Aux ... Blacks*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986.
[20] Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

through global Black activism and publishing.[21] Aimé Césaire, the renowned poet and politician from Martinique, helped pioneer a flourishing Black press and Black associational life in the metropole between the wars, giving rise to the *Négritude* movement. Césaire's journal, *L'étudiant noir*, marks the first Black publication in Paris. Not only did Black internationalism thrive in Paris during this time, but the city developed into an intercultural meeting place, where Black French subjects formed alliances with other groups; Boittin explains how colonial subjects in the metropole found common ground with white French feminists on the issue of anti-colonialism, while Hayes-Edwards shows how colonial subjects from Africa connected with those from Indochina in the metropole through the communist party.[22]

It is well-known that the post-war years marked a shift in attitudes towards colonialism, especially given that the colonized had fought and sometimes died serving France in two world wars. Most of the Free French forces were colonial subjects, for example, a fact that, according to Tyler Stovall, was far from common knowledge for many years.[23] Consequently, in 1946, West Africans in French West and Equatorial Africa became citizens of the French Union, and in 1955 they were given freedom of movement to and from the metropole, a right that continued until 1974.[24] Nineteen forty-six also saw Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guiana, and Réunion become overseas departments, which means they effectively became an extension of the state of France.[25]

These changes, however, were insufficient in the postwar years to stifle the tide of nationalism in the French Union, as it was then called. France first fought bloody wars of

[21] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003.
[22] Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 2010, Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Shadow of Shadows." *positions: east asia cultures critique* 11, no. 1 (2003): 11-49.
[23] Stovall, "Race and the making of the nation: Blacks in modern France" in *Diasporic Africa*, 2006.
[24] Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire*, 2008.
[25] Stovall, "Race and the making of the nation: Blacks in modern France" in *Diasporic Africa*, 2006.

independence in Vietnam and Algeria. Not wishing for another conflict, Charles De Gaulle collaborated with West African leaders such as Léopold Sedar Senghor and Félix Houphouët-Boigny to agree to independence for the new nations formerly known as French West and Equatorial Africa.[26]

Even though the overseas territories had freedom of movement to France, migration from these areas was largely limited to elites (who had the means to travel or study) until the French government created the *Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer* (Office for the Development of Migration from overseas departments- BUMIDOM) program in 1963. As a result of this program, men and women from the Antilles came to France to work in the public sector in positions such as the postal service and the health sector.[27] This marked the first time that Antillean women of African descent made their way to France in significant numbers. However, this program is remembered by the people it concerned as a failure, especially for women, whose opportunities were primarily limited to gendered work in cleaning and healthcare.[28] Opportunities and resources for upward mobility were severely limited in Guadeloupe and Martinique, even though they were regions of France. France's need for these workers thus further demonstrates the vast difference in resources and infrastructure between French overseas departments and the mainland.

France has long been a country that opens its borders to immigrants.[29] However, when the migrations began to come from formerly colonized areas, the French state changed its tune. The latter decades of the twentieth century marked an increase in anti-immigration rhetoric,

---

[26] Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa : France's Successful Decolonization?*, Oxford : Berg, 2002.
[27] Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire*, 2008.
[28] Jackie Bastide, *BUMIDOM, des Français venus d'outre mer*, Temps noir Productions, France 2, 2010.
[29] Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

represented by the rise of the National Front Party in the 1980s. Maxim Silverman argues that until the 1960s, French national identity was defined as metropolitan, in opposition to the regions of France and the colonies. When immigration from the Antilles and North and West Africa increased, surpassing migration from other European countries, immigrants figured as the antithesis of French national identity. This dichotomic relationship resulted in a more profound view of the difference between Europeans and non-Europeans, or as Silverman terms it, a "national racism."[30] In the 1960s, France signed bilateral agreements with a number of newly independent West African countries allowing labor migration to France. This was in the midst of what has been called the *trente glorieuses* in France, a period of unprecedented postwar economic expansion. In 1964, the number of West African descended people residing in France was an estimated 50-60,000. By 1984, that number more than doubled to 130,000.[31] In 1974, as noted earlier, a worldwide recession caused the French government to discontinue labor migration from Africa. However, family reunification continued, and the feminization of West African migration to France began. In 1974, women comprised 15% of the migration to France from Africa. By 1990, that percentage was up to 40%.[32]

Feminizing the West African Diaspora in France challenges the narrative of France as a colorblind nation and a refuge for immigrants. This dissertation shows that West African immigrants faced discrimination in French society at the levels of housing, education, employment, and politically, as demonstrated in the experiences of West African women in the pages that follow. Nevertheless, they found ways to flourish in many different areas of urban life in France.

---

[30] Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism and Citizenship in Modern France*, London : Routledge, 1992.
[31] Fall, *Des Africains Noirs En France: Des Tirailleurs Sénégalais Aux ... Blacks*, 1986.
[32] Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire*, 2008.

Theorizing Race and the West African Diaspora in France

Tyler Stovall asserts that the central question of the study of the West African diaspora concerns the relationship between Black people around the world: it asks whether and on what grounds—social, political or cultural—Black unity might exist. He points out that this question is particularly relevant to the Afro-European diaspora, since comparatively few people of West African descent emigrated to the continent and Europe continues to be defined as a white space. However, the cultural impact of Black people has been significant in Europe, he asserts, through histories of colonialism. He grounds diaspora studies in the nation state as a way of examining local diasporic formations. Looking at how diaspora has shaped national identity, he argues, allows for the study of the particularities of the Afro-European diaspora.

My dissertation follows Stovall's lead in concentrating on the French nation state but expands the scope of his work (which concentrates on West African Americans in France in the early to mid-twentieth century) to address the experiences of Black women from the West African continent in the latter half of the twentieth century. It shows that Black unity could exist in different ways, in different spaces, and in different mediums. For example, it could exist on the basis of an expansive definition of Pan-African cultural nationalism which could include people from North and West Africa. It might even be based on Pan-African cultural expression in fashion, beauty, film or activism. As French Republican universalism functions in tandem with laïcité, sometimes a Muslim or Christian identity may be more salient in different contexts, especially related to discrimination in housing, social welfare, and family life. In regards to the beauty industry, a Black unity based more on race than nationality or even language, might exist. In filmmaking, the West African diaspora might appear more global through the eyes of a diasporic filmmaker.

For the purpose of my work, I find Pap Ndiaye's proposal for the definition of Blackness useful in responding to this quagmire. He distinguishes between thick Blackness, or a definition of Blackness based on a shared culture or identity, and thin Blackness, a definition based on the shared experience of a proscribed identity.[33] He argues that the definition of Blackness in France should be based on thin Blackness, due to the heterogeneity of Black people's experience in contemporary France, and to their differing national origins, ethnicities, and religions. Ndiaye argues that discourse constructs a Black minority in France which is subject to racial discrimination based on color, and that discrimination also varies in severity according to the darkness of skin tone. He writes in *La Condition Noire*, "s'il n'existe pas de "nature noire," il est possible d'observer une "condition noire. "[34] My work builds on Ndiaye's by emphasizing how gender and sexuality inflect these processes.

The complicated nature of the West African diaspora in France makes it easy to conflate terms like Black, West African, *noir*, Caribbean, Antillean, North African, Maghrebi, and more. In French, the term *africain(e)* signifies signifies anyone that appears both black and from the former French West and Equatorial Africa. Throughout this work I have tried to position my research subjects clearly while keeping Ndiaye's concept of thin Blackness in mind; this vision unites Black people through their shared experiences *as Black* in France rather than through biological, innate, or even acquired qualities. It is also important to remember that diaspora is a process and a condition, not a static category itself.[35] The same can be said for any racial or ethnic category, as the definitions of these are constantly shifting and reconfiguring. In general, I use the terms "West African" for people born in the areas in formerly colonized West and

[33] Ndiaye, *La Condition Noire*, 2008.
[34] Ibid,45.
[35] Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 11-45.

Central Africa, and "West African-descended" if individuals were born in France to West African parents. I also identify the specific country that my subjects are from because of the problematic nature of the term West African when its origin is colonial itself. In general, the West African subjects I write about are primarily from West and Central Africa, i.e. formerly French West and Equatorial Africa, including Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Cameroon, Côte D'ivoire, and Guinea. If a subject is from North Africa, I specify the country of origin, such as Algeria, Tunisia, or Morocco since the concept of North Africa is also a Western construction. The French translation of "North African" is *Maghrebi*. Individuals from these nations are more likely to identify with their country of origin (as for example, Algerian, or Tunisian) than as North African or *Maghrebi*. As for Antilleans, I translated the term used, such as Antilleans, Martinican, Guadeloupean, etc.

Focusing on the West African diaspora begs the question of if, how, or when a Black consciousness arose. Mar Fall asserts that the interwar years in France were a period marked by an awakening consciousness of race amongst Black people in the metropole. As examples, he cites the rise of the French version of the Pan-West African Congress, *La ligue universelle de la defense de la race noire,* the establishment of the *L'union intercoloniale* in the communist party, the West African American diaspora in France, publications such as *La Dépêche Africaine* and *Légitime Défense,* and activist groups such as the *Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire en France* (Black West African Students Federation in France or FEANF).[36] Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga asserts that because of their differing colonial histories West Africans and Antillians had separate identities in France until 1974, when, the 2nd and 3rd generations of people born and raised in France continued to face anti-Black discrimination. As a result, these separated

[36] Fall, *Des Africains Noirs En France: Des Tirailleurs Sénégalais Aux ... Blacks*, 1986.

identities started to find solidarity under a Black identity rather than other regional, national or ethnic identities.[37] Fred Constant argues that French Arab consciousness came to fruition in the 1980s, while Black France culminated in the 2005 establishment of the Conseil Répresentatif des Associations Noires de France (CRAN / Representative Council of Black Associations in France) because they asserted their stance based on racial solidarity rather than on the nation or culture. Pap Ndiaye likewise finds a number of competing self-definitions of Black indentification in France. According to Ndiaye, the largest majority of Blacks in France identify as having a hyphenated identity, such as French-Senegalese. The second largest number identify as Black French with positive connotation of Blackness, while the 3rd largest group identify as Black French without this positive association. Another smaller group identifies as métis, and the smallest number identify simply as French without qualifiers.

The following chapters will reveal how this nebulous Black consciousness functions during the latter decades of the 20th and early 21st century. During the housing shortage in the 1980s and 90s, West African immigrants resisted attempts to evict them from their squats by drawing on their identity as French residents with the right to adequate housing despite media portrayals of West African families as Black, Muslim, Immigrant, and Polygamous. However in *Amina* magazine during the same time, a Pan-African cultural identity, inclusive of North Africans but largely racialized as Black and gendered female, emerges as more significant. In women's activism on excision, West African women's identities come to the forefront: as victims or culturally different in some French eyes and as West African or Black women to themselves. Finally, in cinematic depictions, we see a stereotype of the Black woman in a

[37] Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga,"Paint it "Black" : how Africans and Afro-Caribbeans became "Black" in France," in *Black France/France Noire: The History And Politics Of Blackness*. eds. Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Edward Stovall, Durham : Duke University Press, 2012, 145-172.

specific setting: the banlieue, with a specific socioeconomic status: poor in depictions by French filmmakers, but diasporic women filmmakers define their identity much more nationally (Franco-Senegalese, Martinican, French-Algerian).

Antoinette Burton and Tony Ballantyne assert that, “the centrality of bodies—raced, sexed, classed, and ethnicized bodies” have long been “sites through which imperial and colonial power was imagined and exercised.”[38] Black women have long been marginalized in both studies of the West African diaspora and in historical narratives writ large. Carole Boyce Davies, drawing on Audre Lorde's concept of "sisters outside" draws attention to the "absence of gender from the frameworks of analysis in early Black or left studies scholarship"[39] Similarly, in the case of francophone women, Sharpley- Whiting shows how women’s contributions were minimized in the history of the Négritude movement.[40] In his *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration and Transnationalism*, Dominic Thomas argues that "the location of the West African women is often overlooked, and West African examples of activism and feminism for the most part ignored."[41] As noted earlier, T. Denean Sharpley contends that Black womens’ bodies have been hypersexualized in the colonial context since the nineteenth century. Scholars such as Joan Scott and Françoise Lionnet demonstrate that these bodies are only evoked as instruments to confirm cultural difference and inferiority. Such claims are best exemplified in the debates about female circumcision in France, which I discuss in Chapter Three. As Françoise Lionnet has shown, French Republican values employed to prosecute the perpetrators of female genital cutting in France have served to promote the colonial legacy of imposing the cultural

[38] Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette M. Burton, *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005, 6.
[39] Carole Boyce Davies, "Sisters Outside: Tracing the Caribbean/Black Radical Intellectual Tradition." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal Of Criticism* 13, no. 1 (March 2009), 218.
[40] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
[41] Thomas, *Black France*, 2007, 134.

superiority of the West within the borders of France. The controversy over Black female circumcision thus masks patriarchal practices which discipline women's bodies in the West.[42] More recently, racialized female bodies formed the center of the "headscarf debates" in France in the 1990s.[43] Many proponents of prohibiting the hijab in public buildings, were feminists as well. Scott argues in *The Politics of the Veil* that factions of the feminist movement with a strong belief in laïcité were promoting or carrying out activism that reinforces racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia at the same time. These dynamics were already at play in the debates about excision in the 1980s.While the Black female body is frequently evoked symbolically in French racial politics, Black women's voices- and the quotidian topics that typically fill their lives- are rarely heard or addressed. A scholar of North African women, Caitlin Killian, underlines this when she states,

> "North African and Sub-Saharan immigrant women and their daughters are generating attention in France, but almost always around controversial and stereotypical issues that are sensationalized such as clitoral excision, polygamy, and veiling, issues that serve to further exoticize them. Rarely are the more mundane and constant issues they face, such as discrimination at work or which language to speak to their children, studied."[44]

While my dissertation will examine some of the controversial debates over West African women's bodies, its purview extends to other more quotidian aspects of Black women's lived experience from work, education, family, sexuality social life, to artistic creation.

---

[42] Françoise Lionnet, "Feminisms and Universalisms: "Universal Rights" and the Legal Debate Around the Practice of Female Excision in France' in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.
[43]Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics Of The Veil*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007.
[44] Caitlin Killian, *North African Women in France: Gender, Culture, and Identity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006.

My sources are culled from a range of public and private archives and libraries, including the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, the Bibliothèque François Truffaut, Inathèque and the Cinémathèque Française. In addition, I conducted interviews in Paris and corresponded through email with my research subjects. These sources form the basis of my chapters.

Chapter One employs television and radio sources gathered at Inathèque, the research arm of the national French television archive in Paris, to establish the broad social stereotypes associated with West African women and their families in France in the last quarter of the twentieth century. As a result of the migration of West African women, the first images of West African families living in France, rather than single students or workers, were televised in France. This chapter shows that these early depictions focused largely on two issues: evictions from squats and polygamy. Television coverage in France was framed in a way that ultimately contributed to anti-Blackness, differentiating the experiences of Black people in the diaspora from that of other nonwhite immigrants from North African countries. This chapter also argues that these families demonstrate the limitations of French universalism.

Chapter Two focuses on how the contributors to *Amina: le Magazine Pour la Femme*, the longest running women's magazine for Black Francophone women on the continent and in the diaspora, conveyed a hope that diasporic women's entrepreneurialism and creativity could uplift West African culture in France and Europe. Here, we can see how media coverage of Black women was deployed to help shape the image of the diaspora. However, in contrast to Chapter One, where the French media uses images and rhetoric of Black West African women and families to demonstrate the superiority of French culture, in this chapter diasporic subjects themselves employ rhetoric centered on Black West African women's roles in the diaspora to

uplift West African culture. An analysis of *Amina* between 1977- 2000, concentrating on those sections of the magazine that covered the diaspora, reveals the key role that the authors envisioned for diasporic women in Europe. Through close readings of the profiles, interviews, and articles it is evident that Black francophone women transformed urban space in France, established an economic presence as business owners and operators, and challenged European standards of beauty based on whiteness to promote Black standards of beauty as well.

Next, I turn to Black women's activism in France in the 1980s and 90s in Chapter Three. Intervening in previous scholarship on postcolonial and Black feminist critiques of white women's hegemony within feminist discourse, the chapter examines the interactions between French feminists and West African women's activists in France by focusing on the topic of excision. It draws on sources culled from archives of feminism at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Like practices of polygamy and poverty discussed in Chapter One, excision is a practice that becomes codified as Black and West African in France and comes to symbolize the failure or inability of West African families to integrate into French culture. Arguing for stricter immigration policies in the early 1990s, French politicians employed rhetoric about Black women's rights to officially outlaw the practice on French soil and tighten restrictions on immigration. Despite these mechanisms and a range of opinions even within the West African community, Black women activists developed strategies to work in tandem with French feminists with a shared goal. They strategically collaborated with French feminists for many activities like conferences, television, interviews, research studies, the list goes on. From the 1980s onward, West African women inevitably shaped French feminism and vice versa.

Chapter Four examines representations of the West African Diaspora in film, the images of West African women in these films, and the perspectives of diasporic filmmakers. It draws on sources found at the Cinémathèque Française (the French cinema archives), and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The first part of the chapter analyzes French ideas about race in the 1980s through a close analysis of the first French feature film to depict the West African diaspora in France, *Black Mic Mac* (1986). Next, I turn to an examination of the images of Black women, who were only legible at this time as subjects in the *banlieue* usually in the figure of the love interest or the matriarch. However the roles for women in *Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera* (2008) and *Bande de Filles* (2015), became more complicated. Finally, the chapter explores West African women in filmmaking, Euzhan Palcy, Alice Diop, Yamina Benguigui, and Dyana Gueye, to understand how they navigate their identities and the subjects of their work in the context of French universalism which makes the subject of race taboo.

Feminizing the West African Diaspora in France concludes by arguing that an analysis of women and gender in the postcolonial francophone context helps us better understand French media—television, print, and film—as well as Black Francophone diasporic women's activism and cultural productions of the late twentieth and early 21st century. Their trajectories, whether in symbolic discourse or in material culture and social interactions, shed crucial light upon the limitations of French republican universalism to provide structural equality for its citizens, particularly if they happen to be perceived as West African. However, the structural and social discrimination that Black Francophone faced in France, it nevertheless failed to stop them from becoming creators, writers, activists, and performers.

CHAPTER 1: CODING POVERTY BLACK: THE WEST AFRICAN DIASPORA ON FRENCH TV 1980-2005

Television coverage is key to understanding how negative stereotypes about French minorities were formed in the French imagination in the post WWII era. This chapter interrogates the origins of stereotypes of Black West African families in France by examining news coverage of West African immigrants in France in order to determine how and why these derogatory ideas formed. What the following reveals is that these stereotypes are not new; they are in fact re-iterations of colonial ideologies from a century before. The chapter thus sheds light on how these colonial ideologies transformed for the context of postcolonial immigration and diaspora in the Metropole. It further claims that the images of Black West African women and children are central vectors in this story. With the feminization of West African migration to France in the 1970s, TV coverage of West African families and women's issues played a significant role in shaping contemporary stereotypes and politics about West African people living in France. [45] During the 1980s, television news shows the first images of West African family units that had immigrated to France. More importantly, it uncovers the much-overlooked story of West African families' occupation of public spaces in order to protest the French social welfare system.[46]

The first and most predominant images of families from Africa living in France shown on television in the 1980s and '90s were in three contexts: squatting, polygamy, and excision.[47]

---

[45] Others have pointed out that the colonial representation of Black African women as simultaneously invisible and hypervisible, both sexually and erotically have had enduring power.[45] Hitchcott agrees, noting that Beyala played an ambiguous role on television since she herself embodied the image of African femininity in France, marrying two colonial stereotypes for women: the exotic beauty and the savage: Nicki Hitchcott, "Calixthe Beyala: Black Face(s) on French TV," *Modern & Contemporary France* 12, no. 4 (November 2004): 473–82.

[46] One of the only articles I have found on the subject is: Mireille Rosello, "Representing Illegal Immigrants in France: From Clandestins to L'affaire Des Sans-Papiers de Saint-Bernard." *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 1–2 (March 1998): 137–51.

[47] I will discuss excision in chapter four.

Most of the time, the women and children were silent; their images were used but they did not have the opportunity to speak. These representations of the West African family in France contributed to stereotypes of West African women and families as polygamous, Muslim, traditional, uneducated, and poverty stricken. In short, they were the ultimate symbols of otherness, not in line with French republican values, unable to integrate. On the one hand, they were seen as lucky to be able to take advantage of the generosity of the French nation. On the other, they were depicted as people who did not take advantage of the opportunities afforded them; they were delinquent, not following French laws on housing or monogamy.

Far from coincidentally, this gendered image of the West African diaspora in France coincided with the far right's promotion of "zero immigration," a policy formulated as immigration from Africa surpassed intra-European immigration into France. During this time, immigration numbers remained constant, but the visibility of the West African community rose, especially on French television. These broadcasts worked to codify poverty, unstable housing, women's oppression, and harmful environments for children as racially Black to condemn certain family formations like polygamy and those with a large number of children according to Western standards. However, examining television coverage from the 1980s to 2005 through the lens of the West African Diaspora on TV also reveals an important site of resistance to racism and islamophobia: West African people questioned the policies of the French state and fought for their rights as residents and contributors to France throughout this time. Indeed, in the face of a "zero immigration" policy, diasporic people asserted their right to adequate housing and insistently questioned France's professed "colorblindness," asserting that racism and discrimination played a crucial part in their lived experiences.

Television in the 1980s and 90s was also a space where defining the nature of West African immigrant family life in France became important. Following the lead of Tamara Chaplin, who pointed to the importance of television in shaping French national identity in the post-war era, this chapter highlights the importance of shaping "The Other" in the latter decades of the 20th century in France.[48] Scholars and activists have simultaneously acknowledged and attempted to address both the global numerical underrepresentation of *and* the negative images of minorities on television in France in the early years of the 2000s. As Hitchcott points out, until the 1990s, Black faces were not present on French television other than in news and TV documentaries.[49] Scholars have also focused on shows aimed at immigrant viewers, namely, *Mosaïque* and *Saga Cités* in order to determine the motivations behind these programs.[50] Their analysis quantitatively and qualitatively demonstrates a dearth of portrayals of visible minorities on French TV.[51] At the same time, those portrayals that did exist were powerful. In fact, Mattelart and Hargreaves, point out that the French state recognized the role of the media as one of the causes of the 2005 revolts, as exemplified by Jacques Chirac's speech on November 14th of that year.

This chapter explores the gendered images of West African families which circulated on French television in the latter decades of the twentieth century, leading up to the uprisings of 2005. First, I look at how the West African family was pathologized through news coverage of

---

[48] Chaplin, Tamara. *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

[49] Hitchcott, "Calixthe Beyala: Black Face(s) on French TV," 2004.

[50] Hitchcott very briefly discusses *Saga Cités* and Mattelart and Hargreaves discuss *Mosaïque* (see below)

[51] T Mattelart and A.G. Hargreaves, "'Diversity' Policies, Integration and Internal Security: The Case of France," *Global Media and Communication* 10 (3): 2020, 275–87. Mattelart and Hargreaves, for example, focus on diversity policies in their work on the first television program in France to target immigrant viewers, *Mosaïque,* a 90-minute program that aired on Sundays from 1977-1987 on France 3.[51] They note that the French administration made public funding available for *Mosaïque,* because it prepared immigrants for repatriation to their home countries. Mattelart and Hargreaves trace a series of reports on minorities on French television, published in 1991, 1995, and 2000.

evictions of squatters and of the subsequent occupation of public places by West African families in order to protest French housing policies. The second part of the chapter examines television news on polygamy in France, also coded as Black and West African on French television. These negatives images of the West African family, which categorized poverty and family dysfunction as West African, arose only after the feminization of West African migration to France. As the number of West African women and children began to rise, migration to France turned into settlement for families and possible future generations. West African women's migration played a key role in the French social imaginary, creating racial and gendered stereotypes which still exist today in the twentieth century. Television was a major vehicle in constructing these images.

"This is the reality they don't want to admit"[52]

> In the early 1980s, French society was coming to grips with a feminized migration from Africa and resulting social and national transformations taking place in the hexagon. The face of France was changing, but the media in France was slow (and still is) to include people of different backgrounds on television as part of the fabric which is France. Although these issues are covered in the press, television news offered French viewers unprecedented opportunities to actually *see* Black people. These images were far from welcoming to, however. During the 1980s and early 90s, at a time when few Black people were shown on TV, numerous broadcasts on primetime news, at 1 pm and 10 pm, showed images of Black West African families being evicted from squats. The riot police would be shown in full gear escorting families out of the premises with no place to go. The people would be carrying their belongings. The women in particular stand out

[52] Unidentified Antillean man, *Antenne 2 Le Journal de 20H* "Squat" aired May 13, 1983 on Antenne 2.

because of the vibrancy of their West African clothing patterns, and because they usually have babies tied to their backs as they carry their belongings out to the street. This was a scene broadcast into French homes multiple times during the 1980s and early 90s on a variety of channels.

During the 1980s, squatting, both a survival strategy and a political tool originally used by artists and students, came to be employed by West African families for the same purposes; not only did it provide housing, it also challenged the superiority of the French state by questioning the efficacy of its social assistance system.[53] The impetus for these transformations was the feminization of West African migration to France. When women and children came from West Africa to settle in France in the 1980s, the permanency of this migration became evident. An examination of television coverage of West African families during this time is essential to uncovering this process of coding poverty in France as Black. This first part of the chapter examines primetime news coverage, airing at mid-day and in the evening, which depicted the evictions of squatters from the early 1890s through the early 1990s. It was not until the late 90s that a few programs, namely *Saga Cités* and *Sans Aucun Doute* portrayed the heterogeneous experiences of West African families in France and challenged the narrative about squatting. Understanding how squatting transformed from being associated with students and artists to the symbol of West African poverty and familial dysfunction is essential to comprehending the social and political context codified by the immigration restriction in the Pasqua Laws resulting in urban protests in 2005. At the same time, television depictions of West African squatters are essential in understanding the experience of the West African Diaspora in

[53] Florence Bouillon, "Why Migrants Squats are a Political Issue : a Few Thoughts about the Situation in France", in Mudu, Pierpaolo, and Sutapa Chattopadhyay. *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy* London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

France and to explaining how it shaped the social and political realms during the late twentieth century.

In May 1983, the same year as the March For Equality and Against Racism, a report on the evening news on TF1 (Télévision Française 1) showed viewers the eviction of the largest squat in Paris by the French police.[54] During the broadcast, a map highlighted five buildings on the Rue de Flandres in the nineteenth district. Carrying out a judgement from three weeks prior, at 8:00 am about 300 riot police evicted the people from the buildings. The segments show shots of the squatters arguing with neighbors about their right to be there. The issue had come to a head because neighbors complained of drug trafficking, prostitution, and crime. Business owners cited lowered revenues as a result. Local officials claimed that the people evicted would get placed in *foyers,* very modest public housing for immigrants. Although local government asserted this was the biggest center for drugs in the east of Paris, only two people were arrested on drug charges. The alderman (*mairie*) of the nineteenth district stated, "we need the neighborhood to go back to how it was." Longtime residents and government officials continued to express nostalgia for the past, when neighborhoods were not as ethnically and racially diverse.

In contrast to previous studies of squatting, focused on Marseilles, by Francois Bouillon and Minayo Nasaili, squatting in Paris in the 1980s became racially coded as Black, West African, and Muslim.[55] These television news reports demonstrate how the stereotype of the Black West African family in France was a reiteration of old colonial ideologies about the

[54] Also known as the March of the Beurs, a series of demonstrations which took place in October to December 1983.
[55] Florence Bouillon, "Why Migrants Squats are a Political Issue: a Few Thoughts about the Situation in France," in Mudu, Pierpaolo, and Sutapa Chattopadhyay. *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy* London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, « Des migrants et des squats : précarités et résistances aux marges de la ville », *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, vol. 19 - n°2 | 2003, 23-46, T Aguilera, "Configurations of squats in Paris and the Ile-de-France Region" in Squatting Europe Kollective, ed., *Squatting in Europe. Radical spaces, Urban struggles,* New York: Autonomedia, 2013, 209–23. Minayo Nasali, "Citizens, Squatters, and Asocials: The Right to Housing and the Politics of Difference in Post-Liberation France," The American Historical Review 119 (2): 2014. 434–59.

superiority of Western culture. I agree, however, with Bouillon and Nasaili's assertions that squatting in the post-war period is a political act meant to challenge the superiority of the French state and the social welfare system it prided itself on in the era of human rights and the United Nations after World War II.

TF1's 1983 report estimated the number of squatters in Paris at 3,000-3,500.[56] In this evacuation, about 100 of the 500 squatters were found in the buildings during the eviction; most were Antilleans with papers. Reporters state that other "less threatening" squats were located at Crimée and Rue de l'ourq.[57] The police at Rue de Flandres in the nineteenth district of Paris in 1983, the broadcast defines a squat as a building set for demolition but occupied in the meantime. The fact that there is a need for a definition shows that this is not a common televised phenomenon. Why is it notable in this case? This group of five buildings on Rue Flandres had been condemned twenty years prior. It was now occupied by an estimated 300-600 unemployed, students, and artists of Antillean and West African origin who were being expelled from the building by about 200 CRS. French news television describes the conditions in the squats: there was no running water and tensions with the neighbors were "enflamed by racism." One public official states that the reason the CRS raided and expelled the squatters is that the neighbors could "no longer put up with the squatters," implying that it was the public who was pushing for the expulsion, not the police or French government. The broadcast repeatedly refers to drugs in the raid, although an Antillean man interviewed stated that only cannabis is dealt there: "heroin comes from outside. Heroin is not our culture." This man, and another man who speaks are simply identified as Antillean. Another man states, "people should know that human beings live

[56] *TF1 20 Heures le Journal* "Les Squatters" aired May 13, 1983 on Télévision Française 1.
[57] *Antenne 2 Midi : Emission du 7 juillet 1983* "Opération policière d'expulsion d'un squat du 19ème arrondissement" aired on July 7, 1983.

there and have a right to housing, this is always going to be a problem in France because France let them come here." A woman named Farah also explains her story. She had been expelled three times before, once while pregnant. She has a child born in France, who is French, and she was waitlisted for housing.

This short five-minute segment represents clear ideas about belonging in France in the early 1980s. Already, the association between Black people and poverty, crime and drugs in the urban space is forming. It is evident from the coverage that these Black people are not welcome in the neighborhood. Neither neighbors nor the state supports the changing demographics. The people in question are aware of these negative ideas about them and speak defensively, stating that hard drugs are not their culture, or that specifying that their children have French nationality. When one-man states, "France had them come here," he refers to the history of West African migration to France, which was encouraged during the 1960s for Antilleans and West Africans for labor purposes. In these televised testimonies, the efficacy and superiority of the French state is put on trial by people of the West African Diaspora. Through their speech, they underline histories of colonialism which exploited and de-humanized West African people and contrast that against the prosperity of the French nation which continued to promote labor migration from West Africa to France. Antillean people are of course French citizens, and yet they are identified with the racialized term Antillean in the news report. As French citizens and residents, they have the right to housing, which the French system of social welfare professes to provide. In another segment, a Chadian man brings attention to housing discrimination in France. He states that when you go to view a potential apartment, "they flat out refuse you because of the color of your skin."[58] Given this discrimination in the regular housing market, immigrants turned to the French

[58] *TF1 20 Heures le Journal* "Les Squatters" aired May 13, 1983 on Télévision Française 1.

government and public housing for assistance, but this aid was not efficient since supply did not meet demand and they were frequently simply placed on long waiting lists.

In the 1980s, France faced a housing crisis for low-income families. In fact, this had been the case since World War II; working class people had united for a time during the 1950s to protest a shortage in Marseilles for the same reasons.[59] This shortage, coupled with racial discrimination in the housing market, disproportionally affected West African families. When West Africans choose squatting as a means of survival, they shed light upon the deficiencies in the French social welfare system, and more broadly, French 'colorblindness.' West African families resisted their marginalized position in the French housing market through the practice of squatting, and when that was challenged by the French state through eviction orders and the riot police, through occupation of public spaces. Families who had legal immigration status and had completed all the necessary bureaucratic steps might still have to wait ten years for housing. In this situation, they occupied abandoned and condemned buildings rather than survive on the streets. These conditions were the result of the change in immigration practices from masculine labor immigration to family reunification. Until the 1970s, the *foyers* created for immigrants housed many of the men who came to work from Africa. In these spaces, they recreated village life. However, already overcrowded, with up to eight or ten men sleeping in a room intended for four, the *foyers* could not accommodate their families. To receive subsidized state housing (HLMs), families needed to apply through proper channels. But the results, as we have seen, were dire. West African families faced waits of several years. They also faced discrimination in the regular French housing market. In order to survive, they turned to squatting in abandoned buildings set to be demolished.

[59] Minayo Nasali, "Citizens, Squatters, and Asocials: The Right to Housing and the Politics of Difference in Post-Liberation France," The American Historical Review 119 (2): 2014. 434–59.

Television coverage of squatting associated people of West African descent with negative images such as poverty, criminality, and disorder in the French social imaginary. As the 1980s progressed, West African families became the embodiment, the symbol of poverty in the French state. This image was also employed by the National Front, rising to prominence in the 1980s to promote their anti-immigration stance. This ideology culminated in the passing of the Pasqua Laws in 1993, which tightened restrictions on immigration to the greatest extent since 1974.

In 1989, another news report covered the impending eviction of a squat in Belleville. The capital of the postcolonial West African Diaspora in Paris and home to people of a diverse array of origins, the Belleville squat illustrates another important phenomenon: the way in which the gentrification of neighborhoods in Paris which pushed lower income families, disproportionately people of color, to the suburbs.[60] Older buildings where with low-income residents lived were marked for demolition in order to construct newer buildings with higher rents not accessible to them. On this broadcast, one woman interviewed, Mahdia, lived in Belleville with her five children. She describes how difficult it was to get into public housing; she knew people who had been on the waiting list for ten years. The options, to her, were squatting or "exile in the banlieue."[61] The banlieue, or suburbs, meant more commute time to Paris, decreased access to public transportation, and social isolation.

1989 marks the rise of the strategy of hunger strike to resist housing discrimination and shortages. When a building in Paris was set for demolition, a group of about 40 West African workers who had been squatting in the building for six months protested by going on a hunger strike. The spokesperson for the group, Babakar Kebe, stated that they had been offered

[60] This became reality, as the suburbs of major cities in France are known as areas where immigrants and people of color reside: *A2 Le Journal de 13H* "Emission du 8 Octobre 1989- Les Squats" aired October 8, 1989 on Antenne 2.
[61] *A2 Le Journal de 13H* "Emission du 8 Octobre 1989- Les Squats" aired October 8, 1989 on Antenne 2.

temporary housing in *foyers*, but they refused because they demanded "an immediate and unconditional integration," meaning they wanted to live in Paris amongst the general population, rather than in social housing outside the city in the suburbs.[62] Another man asserts that finding housing is nearly impossible because of racial discrimination, "every time you call, they hang up, and it's because we are Black." With the *foyer*s above and beyond intended capacity, discrimination in the housing market and long waitlists for public housing left Black people without many options.

People subjected to this cycle of squatting and evictions became known in the French media as the "displaced persons" (*mal logés*). A news report on March 15th, 1990, describes how evictions resumed after the winter months, raising the rate of eviction to five times higher than four years before. Maniame Touré, a representative for the squatters who included six families (eighty-two people total), describes a "new generation" that desire and are capable of paying rent, but are unable to find housing. He also points out that they are occupying empty buildings, not taking housing from others, and asserts that there are currently 10,000 people on the waiting list for public housing. His group advocated for no evictions without housing alternatives. They were critical of the actions of local authorities who evicted large groups of people and proceeded to place police at the empty buildings to guard against people returning. Likewise, a news report later that month describes a new increase in squats to 190 buildings in Paris, with families having been on the priority waiting list for public housing for up to fifteen years.[63]

Beginning with an eviction at *Place de la Réunion*, ordinary people became activists fighting against housing discrimination and for equal access to housing. West African immigrants carried out the first highly publicized protest against these publicized evictions.

[62] *TF1 13 heures* "Squatt Paris" aired December 14, 1989 on Télévision Française 1.
[63] *A2 Le Journal 20H*, "A2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 16 mars 1990 » aired March 16, 1990 on Antenne 2.

After an eviction of fifty families from the *Rue Petite* in the nineteenth district, 200 people protested. The affected families were sent to a shelter for twenty-four hours, where their papers were verified so eligibility for public housing could be determined.[64] Then, also in the nineteenth at *Place de la Réunion,* more than 300 people evicted from a nearby building (including forty-eight families and fifty-three children), occupied the well-known square. The CRS gave out tents for the families. Activists formed the *Comité des Mal Logés* (Committee of Inadequately Housed People). They refused offers of housing in *hôtels* and *foyers* in the suburbs; they demanded housing in Paris. One government representative commented that it was "more than shocking that they are refusing to go to a close suburb." As a result, the Committee organized a protest march from Belleville to Barbès-Rochechouart (two neighborhoods with high numbers of immigrant residents) to demand housing for the families and more public housing in Paris. Seventy other organizations supported the march, including the French Communist Party and SOS-Racisme.[65] The Abbé Pierre, a Catholic priest and public figure who had played a role in the French Resistance during World War Two, joined in on the cause, participating in the actions, visiting the families, and eventually founding the *Fondation Abbé-Pierre* to assist the fight against the housing shortage.[66]

The situation came to a head during the early 1990s following a series of events tied to the "displaced persons." First, the protest and encampment at *Place de la Réunion* had continued four long months. Next, seven additional evicted West African families lived on the steps of Sacré Coeur for several nights. Then, twenty families camped outside the town hall of the eighteenth district.[67] In 1992, 150 Malian families slept on the street for seven nights. The mayor

[64] *TF1 13 Heures* "Expulsion squatters" aired May 4, 1990 on TF1.
[65] *TF1 Nuit* "Emission du 19 mai 1990: Manif Mal Logés" aired on May 19, 1990 on TF1.
[66] Ibid
[67] *Nuits Magnétiques,* "Paris: Place de la Réunion" aired on July 26, 1990 on France Culture.

of Paris had ordered their tents be taken down by the police, citing a report about evictions in Vincennes (a near East suburb of Paris). Two young Black girls who were interviewed on the evening news provide some of their context. One asserts that she is French. She was born in France in 1982 (making her ten years old). Other women shown sitting with their children argued that there were no unemployed people in the squat; everyone was employed and wished to pay rent, but they had been on the waiting list for ten or twelve years.[68]The actions of the city of Paris and the police, as well as the protests, continued to escalate.

These occupations were precursors to a highly publicized event known as the Saint Bernard Church protest in 1996 in the eighteenth district of Paris. A group of about 300 undocumented (*sans papiers)*, men, women, and children primarily from Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, staged a protest in the Saint Bernard Church. For two months, these families occupied the church to demand naturalization. Ten people also undertook a hunger strike for fifty days. Volunteers, doctors, and associations came daily to aid, and the media covered the strike extensively. The government ultimately squashed the protest by sending in 1,500 riot police to detain and incarcerate the protestors in a Vincennes detention center. Mireille Rosello asserts that the media coverage of the Saint Barnard protest changed the images of undocumented immigrants from *les clandestins* to *les sans-papiers,* from abstract, illegal figures to human beings subject to arbitrary laws that could be changed or challenged. According to her argument, the stereotype of the *sans-papiers* shifted from an Arab to a West African person in the 1980s and 90s, but the Saint Bernard occupation forced the media to differentiate between the 300 West African people inside the church, to tell multiple stories rather than a monolithic one. The protest

[68] *F2 Le Journal 20H*, " F2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 31 octobre 1992," aired on October 31, 1992 on France 2.

called the infamous Pasqua Laws into question, making French audiences interrogate their efficacy as the subjects in question were humanized in the media during those two months.[69]

Two years later, a TV program presented the diverse stories of squatters. A 1998 episode of *Saga-Cités* featured an in-depth investigation into the lives of squatters at 19 *Rue Petit* in the nineteenth district of Paris. From 1992-2002, *Saga-Cités* was a weekly television program on France 3 focused on filming the *banlieue*.[70] The 1998 episode elaborates on the earlier themes that reports on squatting presented to the French public. It begins with a description of how the neighborhood started to change in the 80s when the city constructed public housing there. By then it was home to fifty families of sub-Saharan West African descent. An interview with a neighborhood tailor, Armand Cisek, reveals the tensions about the changing demographics in the area. He states, "I am not a racist and you better show this, but letting them settle in the middle of a city and not taking care of them is a serious mistake. They are lost in the city."[71] Although one could argue that he is criticizing the state for not taking care of these people, I would argue that his statement about them being lost means they should be relegated to the outskirts, rather than the city center because of their foreignness, demonstrating the common desire to push West African people to the periphery of the city.

However, this episode delves into the stories of the individual squatters in order to show the multitude and complexity of their experiences. Fati Lamine, one of the squatters states, "It's humiliating to be a squatter, so I can understand how he [the tailor] mistrusts us when he is in a superior position." Fati had lost his job in 1992 and arrived on *Rue Petit* two years prior after

[69] Rosello, "Representing Illegal Immigrants in France: From Clandestins to L'affaire Des sans-Papiers de Saint-Bernard," 1998.
[70] Hitchcott, "Calixthe Beyala: Black Face(s) on French TV," 2004.
[71] Bernard Loche, Roger Telo, Sylvie Gilman, Theirry Vincent de Lestrade, Armand Cisek, Kadiatou Diabira, Fati Lamine, Jane Wintreber, et al. *Saga Cités "*Emission du 4 novembre 1998 : Dix-neuf rue Petit " aired on November 4, 1998 on France 3.

having stayed with friends for three years. He describes the hardships his family faced in the squat: cold, humidity, rats, and even lead poisoning because his children had swallowed some old paint. He adds that they pay their own electricity, water, and phone service. These are two-bedroom apartments and large families. He concludes that, "I didn't choose this life. This life chose me." Another squatter, Kadiatou Diabra, from Mali, had an engineering degree. She was unemployed for a long time and was currently working for an association helping the squatters formulate a collective request for housing, since the individual requests had been denied. In her work with the association, she was conducting an inquiry into the residents. In contrast to the common belief that squatters were unemployed and could not afford housing, her inquiry revealed that most of them were employed, about 90%, as cleaners or in construction like Fati Lamine, who was a trained carpenter. Two months prior, he had started his own company with two other friends to try to get out of the situation they were in. Men and women both worked, so these families could afford public housing if it were available. In contrast to short two to five-minute news coverage, this twenty-five-minute story delves into more detail about the life stories of the people involved rather than just portraying them stereotypically.

This *Saga-Cités* episode also featured two representatives from local government, demonstrating that there was not a monolithic response from state officials. The deputy alderman in charge of construction and housing, Michel Butle, had just obtained eviction orders for the squat on *Rue Petit*. He declares, "I am going to enforce this with the police, and we will try to find housing, especially for the families with children that we know have been there a long time. The others will be expelled. I can't find housing for all the squatters, and if they protest again to prevent the eviction with no solution, it will put people in precarious situations." His reference to possible protests demonstrates that this was anticipated as a strategy that West African people

might resort to in response to government action. The alderman, for his part, stated that he had requested a meeting with everyone involved in housing in the city of Paris for three years, to no avail. He argues, "To have the riot police come at six o'clock in the morning to put all these children on the streets, that's not the solution I want." In these interviews the audience hears differing opinions from officials, demonstrating the diversity of points of view even within local government.

The lack of action on both sides of the political spectrum frustrated neighbors as well. Some observed, "The left and the right have been promising [to address this situation] but fifteen, sixteen years later it's the same thing. I am angry about this system of laissez faire. They protest and get their way; Fifteen years is too long. Twenty years will be too long, and we have had enough of the neighborhood deteriorating." These statements made to the camera by Armand Cisek, the neighborhood tailor mentioned above, demonstrate that his anger stemmed from the actions of the group of West Africans moving into his neighborhood and the inaction of the government to stop the neighborhood from deteriorating. Cisek's stance illustrates the transitionary period that urban France underwent in the 1980s and 90s. Not only did groups of West African immigrants settle and claim in certain parts of Paris (and other major cities in France such as Marseilles and Lyon), they also settled in the suburbs, where the majority of HLMs were constructed. These patterns of urban transformation changed the *Ile de France* permanently, with the majority of immigrants settling in the east of Paris, both within the city limits and in the North and East suburbs. Tracing this history allows us to see how the Paris region that we know today was shaped during this time.

The derogatory vision that French people paint about how the arrival of West African immigrants impacted their [previously white] neighborhoods is a monolithic one shaped by

poverty, crime, and drugs. However, these people, even if they were squatting, made improvements when they could. The *Saga Cités* portrays one such story about the library in the 19 *Rue Petit* neighborhood. Three years prior the library had been vandalized. It was closed for a month, but a "local solution worked" when locals hired Boki Diawara as the librarian. Holder of an economics degree, he had lived in a *foyer* nearby for 20 years, so he was familiar with the local context. His strategy of speaking with parents and promoting the library as a way to keep children out of trouble and off the streets was effective and demonstrates local initiatives. He asserts, "we didn't bring our families here for pleasure, we brought them here to live with them in good conditions." He too was concerned with crime in the neighborhood and took steps to address it, but work like this was rarely acknowledged in the French media.[72]

West African families' strategies of squatting, protest, and occupation of public spaces brought to light rampant racial and ethnic discrimination in the housing market in France, undermining the myth that French republicanism is colorblind. A 1995 episode of *Sans Aucun Doute,* a news magazine show, featured an episode, "Racism in Housing" and shed light upon the complexity of the issue in France. [73] *Sans Aucun Doute* was a highly successful television show which ran from 1994 to 2008 on TF1 with an average of 2 million viewers. The episode featured Calixthe Beyala, a successful novelist from Cameroon, who in the 1990s became a sort of spokesperson for the West African community in France.[74]. The show included a series of experts, including Beyala, to speak to the issue at hand. It is Beyala who confirms that she knows from first-hand experience that racism in housing exists. In fact, she shared that she had

[72] *Saga Cités "*Emission du 4 novembre 1998 : Dix neuf rue Petit," 1998.
[73] *Sans Aucune Doute* "Emission du 8 décembre 1995 : Racisme dans l'immobilier" aired on December 8, 1995 on TF1.
[74] Rosello, "Representing Illegal Immigrants in France: From Clandestins to L'affaire Des sans-Papiers de Saint-Bernard." 1998.

experienced it recently with her brother who is a successful manager. His white French wife found an apartment for them, but when they both arrived to sign the lease, they were told that the property management would not rent to people of color. The show's undercover operation sent one man in to rent an apartment and when he mentioned to the landlord that his wife was Algerian, the landlord proceeded to state that that was acceptable, observing, "Blacks, on the other hand, are smelly; they leave odors, so [I] need to replace everything after." Next, an Antillean man went undercover to try to rent the apartment and as soon as the landlord saw him, she said it was taken. The broadcast's panel of experts confirm that these actions are in fact illegal discrimination based on race, but this was a widespread practice.

When poverty, crime, and polygamy became mapped onto Black bodies in France in the 1980s and 90s through television news coverage of evictions of squats and polygamy, anti-Blackness increased. Both of these issues point to the centrality of West African women to shaping the diasporic experience in France in the latter part of the twentieth century**.** When women and children migrated from Africa to join their husbands, the need for low rent options became higher. Squatting was a strategy used to survive in the urban environment. When they were evicted, they occupied public places in order to be heard. They inspired a movement, *Le Droit au Logement pour Les Mal Logés* (The Right to Housing for Displaced Persons), which garnered public attention as a human rights issue in a country that prides itself on a strong social welfare state. According to Florence Bouillon, it was the sight of women and children, even more than of men, occupying public spaces that tipped the French public's opinion that West Africans should not be on the streets.[75] In order to maintain this pride, they needed to provide these people housing. More HLMs were constructed, especially in the surrounding areas of Paris

[75] Bouillon, "Why Migrants Squats are a Political Issue : a Few Thoughts about the Situation in France," 2017.

since the city itself was already congested. These are the roots of the patterns of urban settlement, and segregation, that exist in France in the 21st century.

Polygamy on French TV

To reiterate the importance of the feminization of West African migration to France in the 1980s on race relations in France, I point once again to family reunification migration whereby wives and children who came to join their husbands and fathers in France and temporary labor migration became permanent settlement. This process also brought attention to a public housing shortage and gave rise to protests and organization for more housing and against evictions, particularly of women and children. In an effort to understand the complexities of West African migration in France, academics, primarily sociologists and anthropologists, have studied the population. One subject that piqued their interest was the phenomenon of polygamous families in France. According to these studies, the number of these households in France increased after 1974 for two primary reasons. First, scholars argued that West African men turned to polygamy because of social marginalization in France.[76] These scholars claimed that socialization for the most part happened in the *foyers* for men (thus their contact with women was limited). Other than work, their contact with people from other backgrounds, locals, was limited. Scholars further explain that these men did not have many options other than to look back home for a wife. Marrying multiple wives was also a means for acquiring social capital; in France, they did not have much at all, so they attempted to elevate their status via means that were familiar to them from their countries of origin. The practice of polygamy responded to this need.[77] The practice on French soil did not go unnoticed, and soon took a political turn. In the

[76] C Quiminal, "La Famille Soninké En France," *Hommes & Migrations* 1185 (January 1, 1995): 26–31.
[77] Ibid

1980s, the right-wing National Front party started to promote a policy of "zero immigration," they used polygamy as fodder for their case. In 1993 their position on zero immigration became law with the passage of the Pasqua Laws (which I will discuss shortly), tightening restrictions on non-European migration to France. [78]

The French media also took an interest in exploring the lives of polygamous men, their wives, and children, which, as in the case of housing shortages, became symbols for the inferiority of West African culture compared to French culture and further solidified stereotypes of West African families. The French media coded polygamy as West African, racially Black and religiously Muslim. With the portrayal of polygamy as oppressive to women and harmful to children, it confirmed that West African culture remained backward and traditional. This belief was certainly not new; a legacy of colonialism and the civilizing mission, it took a different iteration when West Africans lived in the hexagon. As outlined earlier, the second part of this chapter analyzes how French television depicted polygamy in three moments: 1) before it was officially outlawed, 2) after it was outlawed in 1993 through the Pasqua Laws, and 3) again in 2005 after urban uprisings. It is not surprising that these latter two events renewed interest in polygamy in the media, since they served to demonstrate that West African and French culture were incompatible and supported the idea that West African migrants to France should either assimilate to the superior French culture, or return home.

A 1991 report, "Polygamists in Paris," on TF1 demonstrates the tropes about polygamy that circulated in the French media before it was officially outlawed by the Pasqua Law.[79] It tells the story of polygamy in four parts, concentrating on West African men, women, and children. It

[78] Martin Schain, *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States : A Comparative Study*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
[79] *Reportages*, "Polygames à Paris," aired October 5, 1991 on Télévision Française 1.

consists of both narration and testimonies on camera (sometimes the audience can hear the questions posed, sometimes not). This TV segment consistently connects polygamy to West African 'tradition.' While the report depicts Islam as a secondary 'source' of polygamy, after West African 'tradition,' because "the Koran permits up to four wives," the narration also asserts that the roots of polygamy are in Africa where it existed "well before the Koran was written." Since polygamy practiced by North Africans or other groups outside of West Africa is not mentioned, polygamy is coded in these portrayals as: West African, Muslim, and Black. The voiceover identifies Senegalese and Mauritanian men as polygamous, asserting that "the majority live with multiple wives." The one and only polygamist couple interviewed in Senegal is characterized by an extreme age disparity; coverage of a twenty -six-year-old woman married to a seventy-seven-year-old man, for example, serves to underline how oppressive the practice is when practiced in the countries of origin. "In Africa, for a man, polygamy is a sign of a certain financial ease" the narrator asserts, further underlining how the practice contributes to patriarchal benefits. One man featured throughout the story is Diagouraga, a Malian man who had been living in France for more than ten years and had brought three wives to France. The reporter characterizes him as "loyal to tradition to the point that he imposes it here in Paris." West African tradition, reinforced later by Islam, is clearly the source of polygamy in these segments.

The questions the journalists pose focus on the issue of jealousy within the marriages. The broadcast characterizes polygamy as oppressive to women because of the jealousy between women that it inflames. One female TV reporter asks a male polygamist, "Who do you see first when you go home?" As one West African woman explains how polygamy functions in Africa, she asserts "in Africa, it's good. It's widespread there. There you can be in the same house, me on my side, you on yours, and we're all together." To which the interviewer replies, "Is there

jealousy?" The West African women responds, "Yes, there's jealousy, but it's not the same as here. Here we all live in the kitchen, both of us. We only separate at night to our bedrooms. Here we talk together all day, and the husband goes to work." The West African woman explains an important point about the living conditions in France, where polygamous families must share one apartment instead of a compound as they do in Africa with separate kitchens and living spaces for each wife. Importantly, her description is a critique of how French living conditions are harder on West African women, but the French journalist is only concerned about the existence of jealousy, the problem that a Western perspective identifies as emotionally oppressive to women.

Polygamy is also depicted as oppressive to women because men control most aspects of the practice. For example, it is a man's decision whether to take another wife, how many wives he will take, and how many children they should have. The voice over states, "Choosing how many children to have, to not be polygamous, it was never a question for these women. Their only outlet: the associations. There they learn about women's bodies, contraception, they get informed, they discuss."[80] Again, the questions posed reveal the preoccupations of the journalists rather than those of the women themselves. Other than that short sentence about the women's associations, the remainder of the interview focuses on the ills of polygamy. "Your husband could bring a co-wife?" one interviewer asks a West African woman who responds affirmatively: "Yes of course that could happen because men do it every day. Every man dreams of that." "What can you do to defend yourself, to say you're not ok with it?," the interviewer asks. "There is nothing you can do because it's our religion, it's our custom," she responds. One unidentified woman, Madame X, declares, "It's a life for men; it's not a life for any woman. The first, second,

[80] *Reportages* "Polygames à Paris" aired October 5, 1991 on Télévision Française 1.

third, all women suffer; they can't tell the truth but they suffer." The fact that Madame X's identity is hidden gives some weight to her statements as she is the only woman explicitly condemning polygamy. The narrator underlines this when he says, "it is difficult to break the walls of silence of these women" suggesting that they all agree with Madame X but are too afraid to say so.

The 1991 report goes into detail about how children are negatively affected by polygamous households. According to the broadcast, even before they are born, they are in danger. A doctor in Créteil, a suburb of Paris, argues that wives who do not have social security (only the first wife is eligible) hesitate to go to the hospital with complications in their pregnancies. "It poses problems. It's very difficult to pay [without social security]. We have a lot of examples of women who get checked, but there is this problem of jealousy and disagreements that when we ask about the second wife if they can be of help, we see a very closed face and we know that we should not insist," the doctor asserts. She once again mentions jealousy as a hinderance to the welfare of unborn babies because it inhibits the wives from supporting the health of the mother.

The primary family featured in this report, the Diagouraga family serves as the main image of how polygamous families in France lived in the early 1990s. According to their on air interviews, they had been squatting for two years. Diagouraga had three wives and thirteen children. The building did not have running water. "It is in the evening when there are difficult moments," the journalist asserts. "What happens in the evenings? Do you have trouble doing your homework?" the interviewer prompts. Bouba, one of Diagouraga's sons, and he responds: "Yes, I have trouble because my sisters and everyone makes a lot of noise, so I have to go into the bedroom to study. But sometimes there are people in there as well, so I have to go into the

living room. But then there is the TV and I can't concentrate." The interviewer responds, "What do you think of your father having four wives?" Bouba declares, "I think it's a bit much. The law here [in France] and the law in Africa says that you can have four wives. [My father] listens to his parents. His father had multiple wives. I don't know, he is obligated. As for me, I won't do the same." "What are you going to do?" the interviewer intercedes. He responds: "I will marry a woman, have three or four kids, and be satisfied." Bouba, a fifth grader, was born in Mali and was brought to France when he was eight. The narrator concludes, "five years in Paris surrounded by his father's three wives and twelve half brothers and sisters suffices for him to understand that he will not be polygamous. France is not Africa, Paris is not Bamako, from his native village he will probably be the first to marry just one wife, the first to break with the traditions of his ancestors," once again underlining the opposition between "traditional" Africa and France.

The far right in France won a victory for their objective, zero immigration, in 1993 with the passing of the Pasqua Laws which placed several restrictions on immigration. These measures included: access to French nationality was denied to undocumented immigrants, marriage to French nationals was restricted, family reunification was suspended for students, the Social Security administration was given permission to consult police records, and access to asylum was tightened.[81] Additionally, the Laws effectively banned polygamy, denying access to French residency for second (or more) wives. One TV report specified that the vote for the article on polygamy was unanimous in the French National Assembly.[82] In a short soundbite, one deputy stated, "we are fighting polygamy for women's rights." Black women's rights became a

[81] *F2 Le Journal 20H,* "F2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 2 juin 1993," "Immigration Polygamy" aired June 2, 1993 on France Télévision 2, *TF1 13 heures,* "Emission du 15 juin 1993 : Immigration Zéro," aired June 15, 1993 on TF1, *TF1 13 heures du 18 juin 1993,* "Polygamy," aired June 18, 1993 on TF1.
[82] *TF1 13 heures du 18 juin 1993,* "Polygamy," aired June 18, 1993 on TF1.

cover for anti-West African xenophobic immigration policy measures in 1993. Although only practiced by a minority of West Africans in France, television coverage that year showed a surge in reports about polygamy.[83] As one commentator put it, "it is true they [polygamist men] are only a small minority, so the measures [the Pasqua Laws] are symbolic and political."[84] Polygamy came to represent West African difference, inability to assimilate, and these images contributed to anti-Blackness more broadly.

West African women, for their part, were divided on the subject of polygamy. Some, like Lydie Dooh Bunya, Cameroonian and founder and president of the Movement for the Defense of Black Women's Rights (Mouvement pour la défense des droits de la femme noire/MODEFEN) spoke out against polygamy on French television. As an activist for West African women in France, she advocated for the ban on visas for co-wives to reduce the number of West African women in precarious situations. As detailed in the previous section, the living conditions for polygamous families were not ideal. Most of the wives of polygamous men did not have formal education or speak French, so their views on the subject are extremely hard to access. One news report demonstrated the precarity of their situation with a news story about a man, his two wives, and ten children living in less than 500 square feet. As the narrator revealed, "taking away the 10 year green card from a polygamous man could put the entire family in jeopardy."[85] Booh Dunya clearly made a distinction, however, between her advocacy for women and the views of Charles Pasqua and the so-called "feminist" discourse promoted by supporters of his laws: "Mr. Pasqua and MODEFEN are not for the same things; we are fighting for women's rights and he is

[83] *F2 Le Journal 20H,* "F2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 2 juin 1993," aired June 2, 1993 on France Télévision 2. very hard to determine an exact number, one report estimated 3-10K in France, the majority in the Paris region, statistics will be discussed later in the chapter.
[84] Ibid
[85] Ibid

fighting for zero immigration."[86] Her statement sheds light on the fact that the French government employed a rhetoric of women's rights (Black women's rights) to further a xenophobic zero immigration stance and demonstrates how West African immigration to France influenced political policy. Ultimately, the Pasqua law on polygamy was ineffective. West African immigrants circumvented the article; West African women who were second or third wives found work outside of the home in order to get French residency on their own behalf rather than through family reunification.[87] Nearly a decade later, the French government remained constant that the objective of the Pasqua Laws was "to increase favorable conditions, integration, and the flourishing of the children. It's very important for the future."[88] At the same time, French media news coverage of polygamy in France demonstrates how a "feminist" discourse about protecting women and children contributed to the heightening of anti-Blackness and islamophobia in France.

It is unsurprising that the 2005 protests spurred another wave of media interest in polygamy in France. The protests occurred in October to November 2005, beginning in Paris, and moving to major cities in France like Lyon, Marseilles. November sixteenth, 2005, a France 2 news broadcast quoted Jacques Chirac, former prime minister of France, calling for a strengthening of the Pasqua Laws, implying a belief that had arisen at that time: polygamy was one of the causes for the crisis in the suburbs.[89] The next day, a TF1 segment quoted a government official saying, "you can make a strong link between polygamy and violence."[90] The

[86] ibid
[87] *19 20 Edition nationale, "*Emission du 09 mars 2002- Polygamy" aired March 9, 2002 on France 3.
[88] Ibid.
[89] *20 Heures le Journal* "Emission du 16 Novembre 2005 : Le regroupment familial en debat à L'Assemblé Nationale," aired on November 16, 2005 on France 2, segment titled "La polygamie : un vecteur invoqué pour expliquer les violences dans les banlieues."
[90] *TF1 20 heures* "Emission du 17 Novembre 2005- Polygamy : difficultés de femmes africaines" aired November 17, 2005 on TF1.

narrator claimed there were up to thirty thousand polygamous households in France. Concern for the well-being of children is the focus of the report. Mariama, who was Malian and a second wife, had to leave her husband's household because French law forbade polygamy. She was currently squatting with her six children, living on a meager income cleaning and through welfare payments. Her husband moved back and forth between households. She testified that her boys had behavioral problems because of the situation. The voiceover attests that high school students in the *banlieue* face school failure, particularly in the Creteil District (*Académie de Creteil*) southeast of Paris.[91]

The next month, December 2005, France 5 aired a segment called "Polygamy, Immigration: Statistics and Fantasies," which centered on a debate about ethnic and racial statistics in France. As noted earlier, France (still) does not collect demographic statistics based on race or ethnicity. Proponents of this policy assert that the French Republican model forbids distinction based on race and ethnicity, that each person is just an individual with no marking characteristics according to the constitution. This segment examined this issue through a critical lens for statistics on two issues: polygamy and excision. Over the course of the program, journalists analyzed the statistics given for the number of polygamist households in France in ten television segments aired between 2002 and 2005. The journalists and experts tracked the statistics from 3,000 in March 2002, to 8,000 just eight months later in September 2002, to 20,000 two years later in 2006, and finally to a staggering 300,000 in 2005. Clearly, the number could not possibly have risen by tenfold in three years. They then try to identify how this radical increase could have been justified.

[91] *20 Heures le Journal* "Emission du 16 Novembre 2005 : Le regroupment familial en debat à L'Assemblé Nationale," aired on November 2005 on France 2.

One journalist who researched the subject for a month provided insights into the difficulty of gathering these statistics because of the taboo nature of the subject. One problem that the journalists identified was that in the TV segments analyzed, the same people and families appeared multiple times. They explain that it is challenging to find people to interview on the subject because polygamy is illegal and sometimes husbands speak on their wives' behalf. They assert that it takes time to build connections and find contacts on the subject. These barriers present difficulties in determining an accurate number of polygamous households in France at the time.

Michel Tribalat of The French Institute for Demographic Studies (*Institut National d'étude démographique*/INED), brings in the academic perspective, elaborating that in France the use of statistics based on ethnicity and race is not accepted because of Republican notions of citizenship. She asserts, "There needs to be a real desire to know and in France there isn't." "Know by who?" the others respond. "The citizens, the journalists. I think it's a general French trait," she answers. She describes her attempt in 1991 to include an ethnic variable in the census, when she was told, "it is not Republican. Everyone is French. We don't need to know where they came from." And yet the media, as detailed above, used statistics for polygamy that increased radically, Tribalat asserted, as the concern about immigration and the promotion of "zero immigration" politics increased. She brings to light the connection between anti-immigration discourse and rising estimations, "the more the panic increases [about immigration], the higher the numbers [of estimated polygamous families] become." She simultaneously reminds viewers, however that, since polygamy is "illegal, it is hard to get the actual numbers." Her estimate in 1993 was 9,000 families in France, whereas Christian Poirot, another scholar of West African

migration to France, estimated the number to be closer to 15,000 in 1992.[92] To put this into perspective, out of the 300 or so families that protested in the Saint Bernard church, an estimated 12 families, or about 4% of the group, practiced polygamy.[93]

Finally, Soumaré Diadié, president of the High Council of Malians in France (*Haut Conseil des Maliens en France*) speaks on behalf of the West African community in France on the France 5 segment in order to address the effects of these exaggerated numbers. He explains that West African societies provide social welfare through different means, namely, extended family formations including polygamy. These practices are the reason, according to him, that homelessness is not a problem there, and there is no need for senior facilities; individuals are taken care of by their extended family networks. When asked about the validity of the numbers of excisions, he says, "They have no foundation. You're telling me the majority of men are having their daughters excised? Are you serious? I think not. Stop this type of public message because it is very harmful." They probe further, asking him if he would like to see National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies in France (L'Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques/INSEE) collect statistics based on race and gender and he responds, "I'm for anything that says the truth. The problem is we speak about people who have no voice, and it is harmful. We are ready to work with people to tell them the truth and the truth will be there so that people do not continue to massacre us with the newspaper, the TV, with words, with racism. It is that which is harmful." His words point to the fact that, racial statistics or not, it is racism

[92] Nabil Wakim, "Pourquoi les chiffres sur la polygamie sont inexacts," *Le Monde* June 10, 2010 : https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/06/10/pourquoi-les-chiffres-sur-la-polygamie-sont-inexacts_1370633_823448.html.
[93] Catherine Rassiguier, "Ces mères qui dérangent : immigrées africaines en France," *Les cahiers du CEDREF* online, December 2004.

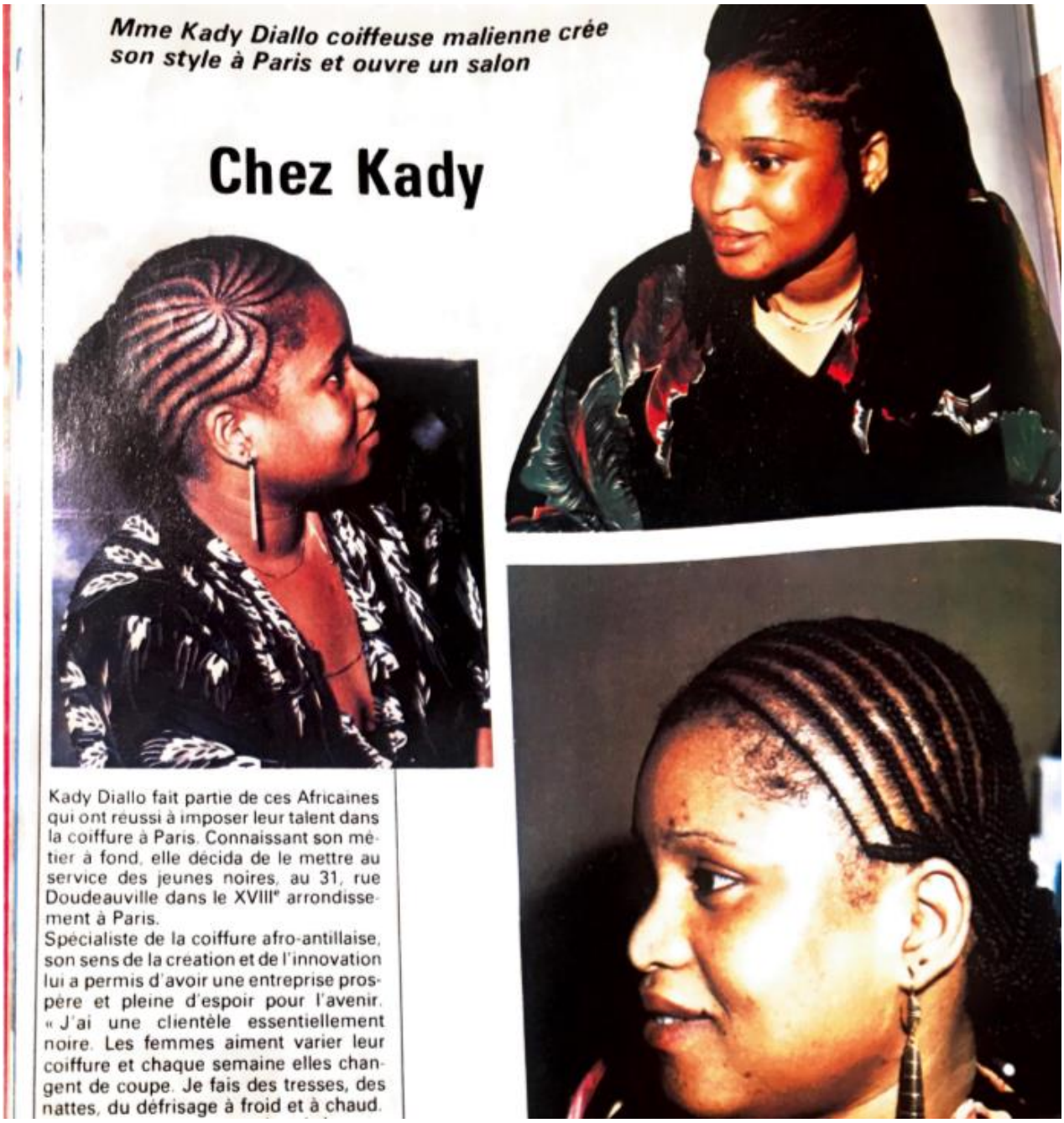
which is the root of the problem and the media is the means by which these falsehoods and exaggerations are spread.

By the early 21st century, the lack of statistics about racial demography appears to have done more harm than good for the West African community in France. This critical examination of the question of statistics in France was a step in the right direction, as it unveiled the difficulties of collecting data because of its taboo nature, due to the idea that the Republican conception of citizenship prohibits data collection on race and ethnicity, and zero immigration discourse. Furthermore, it uncovered how women's rights discourses about squatting and excision that circulated in the French political sphere and TV news coverage could contribute to the marginalization of Black Muslim women in particular in France since their voices were often missing from the conversation and debate. Soumaré Diadié, as representative of the Malian community and the greater sub-Saharan community in France, spoke out about the harm the racism of the French media inflicts on these communities. French republicanism claims to be colorblind to ethnicity and race. The experience of Black West African women in France in the 1980s and 90s interrogates the veracity of this claim. And yet, even while French television contributed to building stereotypes of the Black West African family in France, repeatedly associating it with poverty, tradition, and depravity, as the analysis in this chapter demonstrates, West African people continually used the same broadcasts to call French superiority into question with their televised testimonies about racism in France and how it functioned in the 1980s and 90s.

CHAPTER 2: CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND URBAN VISIBILITY IN THE BLACK WOMEN'S PRESS 1978-1998

Kady Diallo came to France in 1973 from Mali to join her husband. When she arrived, she first obtained a secretarial diploma. Next, she went to Pigier hair school, where she completed courses and internships in salons for three years, finishing with a Certificate of Professional Aptitude (*certificat d'aptitude professional*/CAP). In 1981, she decided to open her own salon in the eighteenth *arrondissement* of Paris**.** In addition to hair styling, her business included retail sales of beauty products. In an interview in *Amina* magazine, she stated that she would like to open a second salon in the future. Journalist Mousa Trouré states that Kady Diallo was a married mother of three who was able to balance all of her responsibilities "harmoniously," and who **"**with the help of her husband" was "able to overcome the difficulties" of opening her own business. He featured Kady Diallo in multiple issues of *Amina*, often showcasing her along with vibrant, color pictures of her original hairstyles (less prominent salons were printed in black and white).[94] However, to Kady, salon ownership is more than just a business, it is a creative calling in service of pan Africanism: "I think that West African women should wear their hair with dignity and express their personalities. In hair styling you need a solid basis, but you also need to give your imagination free reign."[95] Many of the Black women who worked and ran salons in Paris (and later cities such as Marseille and Lyon, also known for a strong West African urban presence) expressed sentiment that styling was not only technical but also a creative outlet to express themselves and Black beauty.

[94] Moussa Traore, "Chez Kady: Mme Kady Diallo coiffeuse malienne crée son style à Paris et ouvre un salon" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*, N. 118 September 1982,"Kady Coiffure" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 171, October 1, 1985, 29-30, "Salon Kady Coiffure" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No 194, October 15, 1986, 42-42.
[95] Ibid



Mme Kady Diallo coiffeuse malienne crée son style à Paris et ouvre un salon

Chez Kady

Kady Diallo fait partie de ces Africaines qui ont réussi à imposer leur talent dans la coiffure à Paris. Connaissant son métier à fond, elle décida de le mettre au service des jeunes noires, au 31, rue Doudeauville dans le XVIII[e] arrondissement à Paris.
Spécialiste de la coiffure afro-antillaise, son sens de la création et de l'innovation lui a permis d'avoir une entreprise prospère et pleine d'espoir pour l'avenir. « J'ai une clientèle essentiellement noire. Les femmes aiment varier leur coiffure et chaque semaine elles changent de coupe. Je fais des tresses, des nattes, du défrisage à froid et à chaud.

Figure 5. “Chez Kady" Sept. 1982. 31 rue Doudeauville in the 18th Arrondissment.

Kady’s story resembles that of many of the first-generation West African female immigrants to France who opened salons catering to Black women in major cities of France in the 1980s. Often, these women migrated to join a spouse or family member. Many of them moved to the east side of Paris, the tenth, eleventh, eighteenth, and nineteenth *arrondissements*

where housing prices were lower. Today, names like *Barbès- Rochechouart, Gare du Nord, Gare de L'Est, Strasbourg-Saint Denis/Château D'Eau,* and *Belleville* are synonymous with the West African Diaspora in Paris. The *boulevard de Strasbourg* and the surrounding area are the center of West African culture within the city limits. This diasporic location coalesced in the 1970s and 80s, due in large part to female business owners.[96] As more women and their families arrived during this time, they forged a community which created a demand for products and services targeting a clientele of West African descent. The neighborhood near metro stops such as *Strasbourg-Saint Denis* and *Barbès- Rochechouart* became their home away from home and provided them with the products and services they needed. In contrast with the *Gare du Nord* area, which Julie Kleinman's work describes as a masculine space, the area around the *boulevard de Strasbourg* was known by contemporaries as the "temple of Black beauty," a feminized space.[97] The Afro-Caribbean salons found there quickly became one of the most visible manifestations of the West African diaspora in France and remain so to this day.

This chapter argues that women were both symbolically and practically key to the formation of a Black diaspora in France in the 1980s and 90s. It makes this claim via a deep reading of *Amina Magazine*—the first magazine produced for Black Francophone women. Since 1978, *Amina* has published thousands of articles featuring women of West African descent who lived and worked in France. I focus on the first twenty years of the magazine's existence in order to demonstrate the crucial role played by Black West African women in promoting the project of Pan-African cultural uplift and transforming both the West African diaspora and the French

[96] In contrast to the history of Black-owned hair salons in the United States, majority owned by working class women with little formal training, whose "heyday" was described as the period of 1997-2006, as detailed in Julie Iromuanya, "Are We All Feminists?: The Global Black Hair Industry and Marketplace in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 16 (1): 2017, 163–83.
[97] Julie O'Brien Kleinman,"Dangerous Encounters: Riots, Railways, and the Politics of Difference in French Public Space (1860-2012)," Dissertation, (Harvard, 2013). "Boulevard de Strasbourg, Temple de la Beauté Noire" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* N. 156 Feb 1, 1985, 25.

beauty industry in late twentieth century France. This transformation has three key consequences: 1) it remaps the French urban infrastructure, making it both less white, and less male than it was previously; 2) it emphasizes the economic role that women played in this process, thus challenging Western gender stereotypes about the status and agency of women in West African culture; and 3) it reconfigures and challenges European standards of beauty, not only by promoting a vision of "Black is beautiful" but also by reminding its readers that Europe—and France—are also Black.

In order to address these arguments, I first provide a brief overview that places *Amina* magazine in the historical context of the worldwide Black diasporic and women's press. This bulk of this chapter then examines first, how colonial legacies made Pan-African cultural nationalism an integral part of the construction of the West African diaspora in France during this time. It then turns to the manifestations of the "Black is Beautiful" ideology in France and explores how Black women seized opportunities in fashion and beauty to carry out a goal of Pan-African cultural uplift. Through their entrepreneurial and associational activities, Black West African female immigrants forged new spaces in the urban landscape in France, and eventually throughout Europe, asserting that Blackness was and continues to be an integral part of European citizenship.

Most of these women were part of the emerging post-Independence West African middle-class; they hailed from primarily urban areas, arrived in France speaking French (a marker of a certain education level and access to French society), with at least some secondary education, and their parents also participated in the employment sector. This new generation of migration changed the infrastructure of the city of lights.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds played a large role in the French media's construction of a racialized "Other"; this construction read West African men as oppressive patriarchs and West African women as victims in need of French cultural and feminist salvation. In contrast, a close analysis of *Amina* reveals not only the presence of a more educated and economically successful Black West African female population in France, it also shows us how both these women, and the men who they were involved with viewed themselves and their place in their new nation. It demonstrates the crucial role played by the ideology of Pan-African cultural uplift in shaping the social experiences of Black West Africans in France in the last third of the twentieth century.

Amina promoted Pan-African cultural uplift through women's employment, particularly by vaunting entrepreneurship, associational life, and the pursuit of education. The mission to uplift West African culture was a specific feature of the diaspora in France because of its historically specific postcolonial context. At a moment when more and more women were migrating from the Antilles and West Africa to France, *Amina* challenged legacies of French colonialism, such as the ideology of assimilation, and asserted that West African culture was valuable, worth preserving and sharing, and could contribute to the cultural sphere in France, the West African diaspora, and the Francophone world at large.

A major aspect of this process of Pan-African cultural uplift involved destigmatizing historical images of Black women and promoting their beauty. In France, "Black is Beautiful" pushed back against colonial legacies that had either hypersexualized Black women, or equated Blackness with ugliness. The elevation of Black beauty bolstered Pan-African culture in France; its commercial promotion also provided women with opportunities for extraordinary achievement; they owned and operated businesses, traveled internationally, and acquired

economic mobility. In addition, the ideology of Pan-African cultural uplift provided women in the beauty and fashion industry with a way to find meaning in their work. Just as importantly, women-run businesses pioneered Black urban visibility in France. Consequently, the promotion of Black women's beauty not only challenged racial and gender ideologies, it also transformed the landscape of Paris and other major cities in the Francophone diaspora. The acquisition of a specifically French West African urban visibility was an essential first step in a process whereby Blackness became recognized as a force to be reckoned with in the French nation, both historically and in the contemporary moment.

The Development of a Black Francophone Women's Press

Amina is a women's magazine aimed at francophone readers in Africa and its diaspora. *Amina* magazine's profiles of women from the West African diaspora in France are a particularly rich source whose connections with the social and cultural history of the West African diaspora in France invite investigation**.** *Amina* stems from three areas of publishing in France: the women's press, the connections between the Black press as it emerges in France, and the French press in the former West African colonies.

The press in Francophone Africa was at first directed at colonial officials, not colonial subjects. This changed as colonial subjects began to go to the metropole to be educated as *evolués*, a controversial term referring to an elite group of West Africans who assimilated to French culture through education in France, speaking French, and adapting other customs regarded as French. The objective of this effort to assimilate a small number of West Africans was that they would eventually take positions in back in their homeland working for the colonial administration. In the interwar years in France, students from French West and Equatorial Africa

as well as Indochina met in Paris and began exchanging their experiences, debating and forming collaborations.[3] During this time, the largest population of West Africans in Europe resided in France, about 15,000 people. These men began forming solidarities and developed organizations, beginning with the *Union Intercoloniale*, and then the *Ligue Universelle pour la defense de la race noire* and the *Comité de Defense de la Race Negre.* Their organizations published journals in addition to their activities, giving birth to the Black press in France. These publications, banned in the colonies and distributed clandestinely by seamen, stimulated the *Négritude* movement, the first Black cultural pride movement in the Francophone world. While the African diaspora during this time was overwhelmingly male, Antillean, African American, and African women did play key roles in this and other cultural and artistic movements in France.

In some ways, the Black press in France after World War II resembles the early Black press in the United States Antebellum period**.**[98] Like that press, it was initially comprised mainly of a series of student newspapers, usually self-published that lasted for only a few issues. Titles include *Nation Noire* (3 issues, 1971), *Black Hebdo (*13 issues, 1976), *Black News* (22 issues, 1991-1995), *Souvenir et Devenir* (1963-70), *Gorée, Invariance Noire* (6 issues- 1986), *Le Monde*

[98] The Black press in the Unites States formed in tandem with the Negro Convention movement before the Civil war. This early American Black press, destined for middle-class free Black people in the North, concentrated on issues of abolition, racial uplift, and racial achievement. After the Civil War, the Black press focused on gaining civil rights and access to full citizenship.[8] Notable publications included the Chicago *Defender*, founded in 1905, Marcus Garvey's *Negro* World, founded in 1918, *The Crisis,* the voice of the NAACP, founded in 1910, and the *Atlanta Daily World,* founded in 1928. However, during the post-World War II economic boom, one man decided to target the rising Black middle and upper class who were increasingly participating in the consumer economy. His name was John H. Johnson. Johnson created the *Negro Digest* in 1942 based on the format of *Reader's Digest* but responding to the interests and lifestyle of middle- and upper-class Black people. In 1945 and 51 Johnson created *Ebony* and *Jet*, respectively, the first publications in magazine format to aim at a Black readership. The Johnson publications began a new trend in Black publishing, shifting its focus from political issues and protest journalism to entertainment and lifestyle matters. Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press In America, 1827 To 1860*, Westport, Conn. : Greenwood Press, 1993, Roland Edgar Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, Ames : Iowa State University Press, 1990, D'Weston Haywood, *Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth-century Black Press And A Manly Vision For Racial Advancement*, Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 2018, Edward Lewis, Audrey Edwards, Camille O. Cosby, *The Man From Essence: Creating A Magazine For Black Women*. New York Atria, 2014.

Négre (1983), *Black Match, Black News, Ubuntu* (4 issues, 1997-1998), and *Matalan.* Some titles have been lost, such as *Black'Art* and *Paris Black,* which are mentioned in *Amina* but were not saved in the archives I consulted. Paul Dakeyo, editor of *Nation Noire,* described this work as "a small student publication." Dakeyo, a well-known poet and publisher, went on to found the publishing house Silex, later Nouvelles du Sud in 1980. [99] Frankie Hutton, in his study of the Black press in the US, asserts that even though most of the early newspapers did not have long durations, they still provided a voice for Black people at a time when they did not have many other means of communication.[100] Dakeyo's story illustrates how publishing just a few issues of a journal may also be the first step in a lifelong career in publishing.

Scholars of the Black press in the United States define it as Black owned and operated for a Black readership. In contrast, Black ownership is not one of the defining characteristics of the Black press in France. Virginie Sassoon, for example defines the Black press in France as a press produced by and for Black people, for the purposes of building solidarity among Black people of diverse origins.[101] Leaving ownership out of the equation, (this scholar points to a lack of economic power of the West African diaspora in the 1970s), it also highlights the variety of backgrounds that the people in the diaspora in France stem from and how this diversity leads to shaping the discourse around a Pan-African message that would appeal to these diverse readers.

While the Black press in the United States existed since before the Civil War, the first magazine for Black women, *Essence,* was established in 1970, as the civil rights and the women's movement in the States in the 1960s came together to address a demographic that had not been served until that moment: Black women. Published by Johnson publications, *Essence*

[99] Dakeyo, Paul, in discussion with the author, January 2019.
[100] Hutton, Frankie. *The Early Black Press in America, 1827 to 1860* Westport, Conn. ;: Greenwood Press, 1993.
[101] Sassoon, Virginie. *Femmes Noires Sur Papier Glacé.* Médias Essais. Bry-sur-Marne: INA, 2015.

followed in the footsteps of *Ebony and Jet*, the first magazines for African Americans. These publications began a new trend in Black publishing, shifting its focus from political issues and protest journalism to entertainment and lifestyle matters.[102]

The success of *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence* did not go unnoticed in the francophone world, which also had a thriving women's press reaching as far back as the eighteenth-century salons, when elite women contributed to publications. After the French Revolution of 1789, the women's press in France established itself on the issues of full citizenship rights for women, with women's publications *La Citoyenne* and *La Fronde.* After World War II, women's magazines became more popular, catering to the woman as consumer with titles such as *Marie Claire* and *Elle*.[103] Soon, readers in the colonies would be targeted by publishers

Michel de Breteil began publishing women's magazines in multiple countries in Africa in 1970, but in 1972 combined them into *Amina*, which became the first and longest running francophone women's publication.[104] Breteil was following in the footsteps of his father, Charles de Breteil, who had established the first daily newspaper in Senegal, *Le Soleil* (later *Paris-Dakar*) in 1933. *Amina* was first published in Dakar in 1972 by Michel de Breteil and Simon Kiba, a Senegalese journalist. The first issues consisted only of photo stories**.** In 1975, they transferred publication to Paris for both economic and political reasons. The magazine at that time was dependent on advertising as funding, and Paris held more opportunities for generating

[102] Jerrika M Anderson Edwards, "The Beauty Standard Trade-Off: How Ebony, Essence, and Jet Magazine Represent African American/Black Female Beauty in Advertising in 1968, 1988, and 2008," April 1, 2013, Edward Lewis, Audrey Edwards, Camille O. Cosby, *The Man From Essence: Creating A Magazine For Black Women*. New York Atria, 2014, P. Gabrielle Foreman, "The books you've waited for" : Ebony magazine, the Johnson book division, and Black history in print" *Against a Sharp White Background : Infrastructures of African American Print* Brigitte Fielder and Jonathan Senchyne eds. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2020.
[103] Virginie Sassoon,. *Femmes Noires Sur Papier Glacé*. Médias Essais. Bry-sur-Marne: INA, 2015, and "La représentation du couple dans le magazine féminin *Amina* : une vision androcentrique. *Le Temps des médias*, 19(2), 145-158. (2012).
[104] Virginie Sassoon,. *Femmes Noires Sur Papier Glacé*, 2015.

advertising revenue. In addition, the political climate in Africa was becoming more difficult, given increasing government influence over the media resulting from political instability after independence. Aminatou Bah Diallo was editor and chief, and over the span of her 45-year career, she authored many of the articles in the magazine in addition to the editorial. While the circulation numbers for the magazine in the 1980s and 90s were lost, the figure in 2010 was 73, 289, 40% of which came from France.[105] *Amina* was the only publication aimed at Black women in the francophone world until 1987, when *Elite Madame* was established. Later publications such as *Miss Ebène,* beginning in 2001, targeted the generation of women born in France but of West African origins. In addition to Diallo's articles, *Amina* employed freelance journalists, the majority of whom were of men of West African origin.

Until 2001, *Amina* was the only magazine aimed at Black francophone women that was published in France.[106] Since then, twelve other magazines for Black women in France have been available, but these magazines do not reference colonial histories and promote an uncritical African American model of Black women's image.[107] This is all the more reason why an in-depth study of *Amina* during the 1970s- 90s is critical to understand the aspirational and social history of the Black francophone women's press and women's roles in diasporic formation during this key period of unprecedented feminine migration from Africa to France. *Amina* predates even the Black press in the UK, whose *Black Voice* began publishing in 1982.[108]

To my knowledge, only two scholars, Fila-Bakabadio and Virginie Sassoon have previously engaged *Amina* as a historical source. While they both see *Amina* as an important

[105] Ibid
[106] Sarah Fila-Bakabadio, "Media and the Politics of "Re-Presentation" of the Black Female Body" *Black French Women And The Struggle For Equality, 1848-2016*. Germain, Félix F., Larcher, Silyane,Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean,eds Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018, 169-184.
[107] Ibid
[108] Janine Tenor, "Verna McKennzie Parle de « Voice » l'Hebdomadaire Black de Grande Bretagne" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* August 1992, XVI.

source because it introduces readers to race—a point on which I agree—they make secondary arguments that I take issue with. Both, for example, argue that the magazine promotes a Western standard of beauty with France as the apogee of high fashion. According to Sassoon, it is also apolitical and male-dominated.

Fila-Bakabadio, uses the *Amina*'s history as a jumping off point for her argument about the directions that Black francophone women's magazines in France in the 21st century have taken. She argues that *Amina* "introduced its readership to race" and inserted Black women in France as a racial minority.[109] However, she contends that *Amina* promoted certain tropes from the time such as a preference for a western standard of beauty, and the idea that Paris represented high fashion while Africa represented tradition. I disagree. In her book, *Femmes Noires sur Papier Glacé,* Virginie Sassoon compares how *Amina* and two other women's magazines, *Brune* and *Miss Ebène* cover cultural belonging, represent role models for success, and depict images of beauty and gender.[110] She argues that Black francophone women have not yet completely emancipated themselves from a white standard of beauty espoused by Western culture and the beauty industry, an emancipation she defines as the production and dissemination of multiple identities or models of Black beauty. Similarly, in a separate article Sassoon examines the image of the couple in 2008 issues of *Amina* and argues that a male dominated vision of the couple predominated. In both her works, Sassoon stresses the apolitical nature of *Amina*.

Sassoon and Fila-Bakabadio both use *Amina's* history and content as historical context for their studies, but do not focus on the magazine's early years. I argue that these existing interpretations of *Amina* reproduce a common theme that postcolonial feminists have critiqued

[109] Fila-Bakabadio, "Media and the Politics of "Re-Presentation" of the Black female Body" *Black French Women And The Struggle For Equality, 1848-2016,* 194-195.
[110] Sassoon, Virginie. *Femmes Noires Sur Papier Glacé,* 2015.

about Western feminism; they lack an intersectional analysis and consistently find feminists of color lacking because they do not address the same issues or use the same methods as white Western feminists. Rather than focusing on how un-feminist *Amina* is, I suggest that we need to examine it as a historical source to discern what it in fact does tell us about the past, particularly in regard to the history of women in the West African diaspora in France.

Additionally, Sassoon observes that more of the contributing journalists of *Amina* are men, which may imply that Amina is not an "authentic" feminine voice. It is distinguished from the French women's press, for example, since it is not written exclusively by women. However, I believe the fact that men of West African descent contribute to the content of *Amina* is significant because it challenges stereotypes of West African men in the diaspora. Since the prevailing stereotype of West African men was a staunch polygamous patriarch, the fact that there were West African men actively contributing towards a magazine focused on informing and promoting women in the workplace and women's visibility in the media and in the city proves that this stereotype, as all stereotypes, do not apply to the entire group.

Amina's history also challenges stereotypes of West African women which depict them as dependent upon men. The most common occupation featured is small business ownership (be that a hair salon, restaurant, store, or travel agency). Other popular occupations include modelling, working as a fashion designer, or being a student. *Amina* offers details about how it was possible for women to build their careers in France. Sometimes the magazine profiled the same women multiple times, elaborating upon the professional trajectories of individuals. By far, most women came to study first, and then after finishing and working for a few years opened their own small businesses. Migration for education was therefore the most frequent means by which these women came to France. Some women came on scholarships and others were

financed by their families. The majority studied for secretarial degrees and hair styling degrees, usually a CAP, a professional certification requiring about 3 years of study and internships. Some women who migrated for secretarial studies ended up changing careers. It appears that while secretarial and hair styling certification were the most easily accessible and acceptable fields of study for West African women, training in these domains did not necessarily limit women to working in these fields after completing their studies.

Many factors contribute to the success and upward mobility of women migrants from Africa and the Caribbean**.** According to *Amina,* these women succeeded for four reasons: because of their education, the support of family, particularly their husbands, and their own perseverant characters. These aspects are repeated in nearly all of the texts, sometimes in the title, and sometimes verbatim. In contrast, in the French media and sociological studies, West African women were often depicted as victims of male domination, the most notorious example being via the cases of polygamy in France discussed in Chapter One and with excision (Chapter Three). *Amina's* articles almost exclusively state that women who owned businesses or came to study made the decision with the support of their husbands. While this suggests that their husbands' approval was needed, it also undermines the stereotype that West African women are unequivocally oppressed by patriarchy. The editorial content of *Amina* suggests that relationships were more of a partnership than a dictatorship, at least for middle-class women.

As early as 1979, a fashion designer from Benin often featured in *Amina,* Almen Gibirila declares: "To be an exemplary woman, it is no longer enough to be fulfilled in love and family life, a liberating career is also necessary now. The job market is hard, even harder for a Black woman."[111] This statement makes clear the construction of gender roles for West African women

[111] A. Diallo, "Une Fille aux Multiples Facettes Almène Gibirila" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* N. 90, December 1979, 8-11.

that encourages female economic power. It is a statement made in the context of a worldwide recession and the increasing disillusion with the promise of West African independence which left many disappointed. Instead of the hoped- for fast economic growth and the construction of necessary infrastructure post-independence, the continent faced continued dependence upon former colonial powers. This led to the widespread use of the term of neocolonialism, or in the context of the Francophone world, *Françafrique,* to describe continued power imbalances between France and Africa. Coupled with the phenomenon known as the "brain drain," the result was the dependence of West African economies on remittances sent from the people in diaspora. In this context, it became more and more acceptable for West African women to seek employment abroad, and as the quote above suggests, even necessary. The definition of women's duties was changing.

What the statement about women's work also alludes to is the reality of racism and sexism that Black women faced in the job market in the diaspora. This is acknowledged by most of the articles in *Amina* through the common question "is it difficult being a Black woman in your field?" or "is it difficult being mixed race (*métisse*)?" However, this is not the focus of the articles; it is, rather, merely acknowledged as a reality that must be accepted. For example, Josephine Groga, a woman from Abidjan who came to study business in Paris in 1977, states that, "I think a lot of men don't understand women in business and it's a shame. For some we are easy, for some we are crooks; it's hard for men to accept a woman often in the company of other people, strangers." However, Groga explains how she uses her femininity to her advantage in business. When asked if women are suited for business she replies, "Why not? I think it's even easier for a woman. She uses her femininity which disarms men; she is not a prostitute, but she is respected because she's a woman." Moreover, Groga offers a solution for finding a husband who

can accept a woman in business: "marry a businessman who understands the requirements of the job, like travelling, and so forth."[112] This interview thus conveys how to succeed, despite racial and gendered barriers.[113]

Amina's profiles of women in the diaspora, whether in narrative or interview form, usually contained the same type of information: Each woman profiled describes how and why she came to France, her educational and professional background, the challenges she faced, why she chose her field, the secret to her success, and what her future plans are. The editorial content therefore informs *Amina* readers about the multitude of careers available to them and describes exactly how to pursue them. The articles range in length from a small paragraph to two pages and often feature photographs of the woman at her workplace. It is clear that the main purpose of *Amina*'s editorial content was to promote women's educational and professional achievements. We can therefore presume that the purpose of these interviews was not simply celebratory, but was, rather, instructive.

The majority of the women viewed hair styling as a creative and artist career. Interestingly, this necessitated a defensive position because the postcolonial West African middle class viewed the beauty industry as superficial, not a legitimate career path. For many of these middle-class, urban women, their families wished them to study more practical subjects such as medicine or law. They usually completed secondary studies in their country of origin before coming to France, where they continued their educations. Many earned CAPs in hair styling, which required 3 years of classes and internships in salons. While they acknowledged that it was difficult to start a business in Paris as a Black woman, most of the women were married with

[112] Michel Yahi Naissemou, "Being a Businesswoman" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* January 1983, 25.
[113] Racial and gendered barriers were also a reason why Black women in the US choose hair as a profession: Adia M. Harvey. "Personal Satisfaction and Economic Improvement: Working-Class Black Women's Entrepreneurship in the Hair Industry." *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 6 (2008): 900-915.

children and claimed that they had achieved an excellent work/family life balance with the support of their husbands. These women also needed to justify their career choice because hair, makeup and beauty were not yet considered serious fields. These women are responsible for the rise of the Black beauty industry in France. Moreover, I argue that these pioneering women in the afro-Caribbean hair industry irreversibly transformed the urban space in Paris and were key actors promoting Pan-African cultural nationalism and redemption.

Returning to Kady, whose story opens this chapter, like many other hair stylists in the West African diaspora, she believes her work promotes the image of the West African woman in France and challenges racialized standards of beauty. Making Black women beautiful in a space where beauty is associated with whiteness elevates the status of hair styling to an art rather than just a job. Her assertions therefore challenge the West African middle class view that the beauty industry lacks societal or cultural value. Instead, she, and the other vanguard women working in the fashion industry in France, consistently promoted the value of their work in its capacity for elevating Pan-African culture.

In contrast to the Sahelian (from the Sahel region of West Africa) working-class women who have frequently been the focus of research, the women profiled in *Amina* were secondary or higher level educated, urban, French speaking, and working in diverse fields.[114] Their parents

[114] The existing body of research African immigrant women during this time period focuses on women from the Sahel region of West Africa, predominately the countries Mali, Senegal and Mauritania. These women represent a demographic very different from the women profiled in *Amina*. These Sahelian women were predominately from rural backgrounds without any significant formal education or training, speaking little to no French when they arrived. Most of these women came to join their husbands and if they worked, it was usually in cleaning services. Scholars and members of the diaspora alike have pointed to the fact that men who came as workers in the 1960s typically lived in *foyers.* The *foyers* were the center of their social life; men cooked, socialized, slept, and worshipped in them together. One observer termed these *foyers* the "village in miniature."[114] Their visibility in the city was limited as they kept to themselves in their residences and went home to their countries to see their families as often as they could, often in a type of circular migration. When their wives and children started to arrive after 1974, their presence, work and activities changed the face of France.

were diplomats, professors, teachers. Their hobbies were reading, going to the cinema, and spending time with friends. What this means is that *Amina* is a source of information about middle-class migration to France in the 1980s, a demographic that was neglected by sociologists interested in West African women's migration in the 1980s and 90s, a neglect which has led to the further alienation of this population. In fact, the articles in *Amina* magazine rarely mention working-class women. In the few instances when they are mentioned, they are portrayed as victims, underlining the difference in socioeconomic status. These articles can tell us how and why middle-class women migrated to France, what their education background is, what their current occupation is, the changes they faced, and their professional goals. The *Amina* profiles constitute a significant source on the urban and economic history of the feminization of the West African diaspora in France and the Black women's francophone press, whose origins lie in the global history of the Black press.

Building Economic Institutions and Urban Visibility

Women owned and operated businesses were integral for building urban visibility of Black France. Even though people of West African descent were present in France since the eighteenth century, the first visible diasporic culture arose in France in the interwar period. However, this "jazz age," epitomized by the image of Josephine Baker, dominated spaces marked by West African American performers and predominantly white audiences. The neighborhood called Montmartre was the principal site of the West African American diaspora in

Paris between the wars. After the wars, many African American writers congregated in the Montparnasse and St. Germain areas.[115]

The West African and Caribbean diasporas, however, concentrated on the Boulevard Saint Denis in the 10th district of Paris. It became known as the "Temple of Black Beauty" in the 1980s, attesting to the importance of women's roles in constructing this space in Paris. [116] The publication of "guides" to Black Paris echo how this neighborhood rose to prominence in the West African diaspora during the last decades of the twentieth century. The first of these guides was published in 1983 in a social anthropology magazine called *Autrement*. *Amina* published its own version, called *Almanacks*, in the 1990s. The *EuroBlack Business Guide*, published independently in Paris in 1990, was likewise filled with pages of women-owned businesses and businesses targeted to a female clientele.[117] These guidebooks describe the extent of Black Paris and Black France, which included associations, salons, restaurants, clubs, stores, music producers, and publishers.

Black women were at the helm of a variety of businesses in Paris. The addresses in these booklets include places such as Chez Aida, a Senegalese restaurant located at 48 rue Polonceau in the eighteenth district, and a staple for West African cuisine in Paris. Aida Ka opened the restaurant so her cosmopolitan clientele, including West Africans, Antilleans, and Europeans, could try her exotic dishes and a warm welcome.[118] Neuftex, a fabric retailer, run by Madame Barda in the 1980s, and still in existence, sold the people of the diaspora their fabrics. These

[115] Tyler Edward Stovall, *Paris Noir : African Americans in the City of Light*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
[116] "Boulevard de Strasbourg, Temple de la Beauté Noire" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* N. 156 Feb 1, 1985, 25.
[117] "Black," *Autrement*, 49, April 1983, Joseph Moumi de Bakondji, ed. *EuroBlack Business Guide*, Paris: 98 av. Parmentier, 75011, 1990.
[118] Moussa Traore, "Percer dans la Restauration" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* October 1983, 18. "La Cuisine Sénégalaise à Paris" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* July 1982, 31. "Aida Ka" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 165 June 15, 1985.

were the most visible business on the Strasbourg Boulevard and established this neighborhood as a West African space, a legacy that lives on today.

Figure 6. Beauté des Tropiques. July 1986. 90 rue Faubourg Saint-Denis in the Tenth Arrondissement.

Figure 7. “Miss Afro” Sept. 1986. 7 blvd. Rochechouart in the Ninth Arrondissement.

The DJY Center illustrates the epitome of success of Black salons and the beauty industry in Paris. Madame Else Ekindi, from Cameroon, the first West African woman to open a center in Paris, started her business in 1975 and continued to expand it into the 1980s. Ekindi arrived in Paris in 1968 and went to high school in Fontainebleu, a town near Paris. She passed her baccalaureate in 1969. Like many West African parents, hers encouraged her to study a science field, so she chose kinesthetics. She ended up earning her diploma in cosmetology. In a May 1982 interview, the DJY Center had grown to include 4 rooms: 2 rooms for retail sales and 2 for massage and beauty treatments. Her employees comprised mostly female hair stylists, braiders, and estheticians. She chose a location at 42 boulevard de Strasbourg in the 10th district of Paris because the "boulevard de Strasbourg is frequented by Blacks in Paris." The retail beauty products included primarily West African American products, some European, and her own DJY brand that she had created 2 years previously. She had also just opened a DJY center in Cameroon. Pan-African cultural nationalism was an important driving for force Ekindi, demonstrated in her statement: "I created DJY products so Black women can stay beautiful." [119]

The history of salons and the Black beauty industry in France opens a window into the construction of institutions and institutional differences between France, Africa, and even the overseas territories (départements d'outre-mer et territoires d'outre-mer/ DOMTOM). The reason why women from Africa went to France to study esthetics, hair, and cosmetology is because the required institution did not exist in Africa or the DOMTOM.[120] The first Black women students at the Parisian beauty schools were Antillean and West African. These schools taught techniques and styles applicable to white hair. These women thus had to learn about styling Black women's hair informally, but they needed the qualification to be viewed as legitimate. However, they

[119] Moussa Traore, "Centre DJY pour la beauté noire" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* May 1982, 68-69.
[120] Ben Saïd Dia, "Concilier maquillage et authenticité" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* October 1983, 73.

began to influence the curriculum of beauty schools in France. In 1990, Black and White Beauty Institute opened in Lyon, the first Institute in France to teach esthetic treatments for white, mixed, and Black skin.[121] Additionally, the Régine Ferrère International Beauty and Cosmetics Business School in Chartres began offering a specialization in Black and mixed-race skin.[122] Because of women's demand for this type of training, the Institute of Cut and Styling (*Institut de Coupe et de coiffure)* in Martinique began offering training in 1992 and the first modelling training center opened there the same year.[123] In 1996, a mother-daughter team opened Black Styl, a beauty institute for Black women in Villeurbanne, the first of its kind near Paris.[124] This is thus the moment when women in the diaspora forged new paths for themselves and developed new institutions, shaping both France, in the hexagon and the overseas departments, and West and Central Africa, contributing to *Amina*'s transnational goal to promote West African cultural nationalism.

The hair salon was a place where people from different diaspora origins met, worked, and discussed their lives, so it was an important space for building Pan-African connections. Black hair salons in Paris often employed a mix of women from West African, West African American, and Antillean origins. They not only worked together on a daily basis, but their clientele was a cosmopolitan as well, including West Africans, Antilleans, West African Americans, and

[121] Jean Claude Zelensky, "Anne Sylvie N'Gah Directrice de L'institut Stone, Black and White Beauty," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* March 1990, 24.
[122] " Régine Ferrère Reprend le Centre de Beauté du Faubourg St Honoré" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* August 1992, XXVI. It is still available to this day: https://www.regineferrere.com/regineferrere
[123] The first one I could find was in Fofo Forey-Fumey, "L'AFOM Acceuille Des Stagières de L'ICCM" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* April 1992, XXIV. Gilles Degrass, "Domi, En Mode Majeur, Nouveau Fait au Métier de Mannequin" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* February 1992, XVII.
[124] Frank Halimi, "Premier Salon de Vente de Produits Cosmétiques à Villeurbanne," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* N. 313 1996, LII.

Europeans. [125] A hair salon was prized for its warm welcome and attention to clients' needs and desires.[126] Sometimes the hair style was an original creation, formulated for a particular person and/or occasion.[127] In fact, women expressed the opportunities for exchange with different people and opportunities for personal growth that this allowed as reasons why they choose a career in beauty. Elisabeth Mbia, for example, expresses these desires when she states, "I like doing hair because of the contact with other people and building relationships."[128] These women interacted on a personal level with their clients as well as their coworkers. Cross-cultural exchanges did not just occur within in the confines of the salon and between groups of Antillean and West African women, they were also sites of exchange between Black women and Europeans. Numerous salon owners point out that their clients include Europeans. Some women specifically stated that European women enjoyed getting their hair braided to go the beach.[129] The salon also opened other avenues of cross-cultural exchange for these women.

As the Black beauty industry grew in the 1980s in France, Paris became the site of international exchanges on this topic and the nexus of the industry in Europe. This growth spurred professionals to establish several annual international conferences. These professional gatherings fostered opportunities for professionals in the Black beauty industry to meet and make contacts and share their work and products. One example of these new meetings was

[125] O.B.S., "Tresses 2000: un Salon d'Esthéticiennes," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 140, February 1984, 81, O.B.S. "Delphine Tchamga" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* December 1982, 28-29. And Moussa Traore, "Sitty Coiffure" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* December 1982, 34, O.B.S., "Comment Catherine Nguébé a ouvert un salon « Coiffure 14 »" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* May 1985, 75. Mamadou Traoré, "Leader Coiff.: Un Nouveau Look à Paris" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* July 1989, 79. Moussa Traoré, "Miss Bamy" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 174, November 15, 1985.
[126] A.B. Diallo, "Devenir Sa Propre Patronne" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 137, November, 1983, 83.
[127] "Tresses Sénégalaises en Plein Paris" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 230, June 1989, 34 and 37, Moussa Traoré, "Kady Coiffure" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 171, October 1, 1985, 29-30. Moussa Traoré, "Miss Afro" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 176, December 15, 1985, 48-49.
[128] O.B.S. "'Soleil' Coiffure Mixte" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 132, June, 1983, 82.
[129] A.B. Diallo, "Daigne Coiffure" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* April 1982, 26.

SABEMOD, founded by an African American named Francis Landi in 1983 in Paris, in order to unite "the Black community in Paris."[130] SABEMOD took place annually until at least 1994, running for over a decade.

Another example of an international annual event was the International Retail Trade Show (salon international du pret-à-porter). Gisele Gomez, a fashion designer from Benin, opened the first stand for "Black Africa" in 1985 along with another designer, Vicky Toudou, originally from Cameroon. Their exhibition promoted West African styles and fashion and they sought to make contacts with large retailers who could carry their designs in store. Gomez and Toudou also collaborated on a runway show. As Gomez stated, "I would love to see my designs on the streets of Tokyo...why not? But we are not a fashion we are becoming an institution."[131] Gomez was in fact able to make contacts at the show with Printemps Haussman, one of the most prestigious department stores in Paris. Mr. Plagnet from Printemps first saw her at the trade show and later went to see her in her boutique. In fact, he was so inspired by her "originality and quality" afterwards that a couple months later Printemps held its first ever West African Exhibition featuring artists with West African jewelry, music, artisanal products, and fashion.[132] These events were occasions for West African diasporic women to meet and make contacts internationally and with other French professionals in their field.

Schools were another site for international exchange devoted to the topic of Black beauty. West African women migrated from the continent, sometimes permanently and sometimes temporarily, because schools for hair styling, fashion, and modelling were not yet established in

[130] A.B. Diallo, "Le SABEMOD 88" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* May 1, 1988, 10.
[131] Claude Moineau "Gisèle Gomez et Vicky Toudou" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 156, February 1, 1985, 22.
[132] M.M., "Gisèle Gomez au Printemps-Haussmann" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 165, June 15, 1985, 16-17.

their home countries. The Black beauty industry was a growing field in both France and Wat Africa, and the most prestigious schools were in Paris. Women who studied hair styling, esthetics, or fashion usually went to an institute of beauty or a beauty school and completed coursework. Although a high school degree was not required to complete a CAP, most of the women who migrated from Africa to do a CAP in hair already had their high school diploma as well. The director of the fashion school Esmod-Guerre-Lavigne, for example, stated in 1982 that they had students from 50 different countries at that time, including 10 different West African countries.[133] These schools were therefore another forum of international exchange through the medium of beauty.

The beauty industry was a significant means of constructing the West African diaspora in France in the last decades of the twentieth century and furthering Pan-African cultural nationalism. Beauty, esthetics, and fashion schools brought together women from the West African diaspora, European women, and other international women. Salons, beauty shops, fashion shows, and international conferences provided spaces for contact and exchange based on a similar interest. These women worked together on a daily basis, along with their clients, in professions that promote conversation and very personal contact. They participated together at international professional development events, connecting with other people from the Black Atlantic diaspora, including West African Americans, Antilleans, and West and Central West Africans, as well as the diaspora in France.

[133] M Cathou, "1er Prix de Création 1982 Gisèle Gomez" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 118 September 1982, 34-35.

Black is Beautiful: French Afro-Caribbean Style

In 1978, Fashion Fair came to Paris**.** The African American magazine *Ebony* featured a column called Fashion Fair, which Eunice Johnson (wife of John H. Johnson, publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet*) wrote and transformed into a brand of cosmetics and a travelling fashion show geared towards Black women, the first of its kind. Significantly, it gave Black middle- and upper-class women access to the world of high fashion for the first time. To launch her vision, Eunice travelled to Paris and Milan to convince high end fashion designers to support Fashion Fair with their designs. The task proved difficult because these elite designers initially feared losing clients as a result of taking part in a show for African American women, which might lower the status of their brand.[11] In the end, she convinced them that their brands would benefit, and established contacts in Europe that continued for fifty years of Fashion Fair.

The "Black is Beautiful" movement, from which Fashion Fair grew out of, was a concept promoted in the United States beginning in the 1960s, during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Activists brought attention to the ways in which racial hierarchies affected definitions of what and who is beautiful. While second wave feminists in the 1970s had criticized the beauty industry, particularly on dieting and hair removal practices, this analysis lacked what we know today as intersectionality; it failed to take the nuances of the intersections of race, class, and gender.[134] Third wave feminists, who emphasize women's right to choose how their expressions of feminism manifest, have embraced the beauty industry for the choices and means of expression it offers women."[135] However, as Stephanie Camp asserts in her history of 'Black is Beautiful:' "ideas about beauty and ugliness were, and remain entangled with, the invention

[134] Jeffreys, Sheila. *Beauty and Misogyny : Harmful Cultural Practices in the West* London ;: Routledge, 2005.
[135] Although this author critiques choice as an invention of neoliberalism and sees the beauty industry as another form of subjugation for women: Dimulescu, V. "Contemporary Representations of the Female Body: Consumerism and the Normative Discourse of Beauty." *Symposion* 2, no. 4: 505–14.

and ongoing reinvention of race itself," and, furthermore, "to dismantle white supremacist racial beauty entails a transformation in how we think about both beauty and race."[136] Since ideas about Blackness formed in conjunction with ideas about beauty, Blackness was more often associated with ugliness. These ideas were internalized by Black people, as Camp points out further in her article.[137] Therefore, to promote Black beauty can serve as a form of resistance to white supremacy and beauty ideals based upon the superiority of whiteness. A major aspect of the "Black is Beautiful" movement was the promotion of natural hair styles for African Americans. They called attention to the practice of hair straightening as conforming to white standard of beauty. If Black people were equal in society, their physical features, hair type, and skin color should also be promoted and viewed as beautiful. Scholars of these movements agree that although these movements did not attain the political revolution they sought, their legacies are found in the cultural realm; they were hugely successful in changing actual beauty practices of African American, both men and women, and their representations in the media. However, the effects of the "Black is Beautiful" movement have not been explored on the other side of the pond, in France, where natural hair was not as widespread, and the women who opened salons came from differing background as women in the United States.[138]

African American women and women of West African origin in France frequently interacted on matters pertaining to the beauty and fashion industries. The journalists of *Amina* viewed the African American beauty industry as the precursor to the Black beauty industry in France. The fact that both the Fashion Fair brand and show established a branch of operations in

[136] Camp, Stephanie M. H.. "Black Is Beautiful: An American History." *Journal of Southern History* 81 (3): 2015, 690.
[137] Ibid
[138] Craig, Maxine Leeds. *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? : Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* Oxford ;: Oxford University Press, 2002, Ongiri, Amy Abugo. *Spectacular Blackness : the Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010.

France shows that African Americans viewed the French market as potential partners.[139] The Black beauty industry in both the United States and France forged the path for visibility for Black women in diasporic locales, challenging the hegemonic standard of beauty as racially white (with everything that entailed, such as hair texture). While the driving force may be economic, this does not reduce the social and political motivations and effects that they had. Not only did these pioneers proved that upwardly mobile Black people, women in particular, were a growing and viable market, they also paved the way to make the fashion and beauty industries in France more diverse and inclusive. Historically, mainly intellectual ties between African Americans and West African people existed in France. Only through studying the interests and activities of Black women in France can we discover the full extent of connections between the West African diaspora in the United States and in Europe during the second half of the twentieth century.

As *Amina's* articles show, women's associations also played roles in changing ideas about beauty; they promoted "Black is Beautiful" in France. When women began forming associations, they at first encountered difficulties funding their project. They were new immigrants and wanted to build community by bringing people with shared interests together, but did not yet have strategies to put their plans in motion. By the 1990s, this had changed. Many associations adopted a three-pronged approach to funding their activities: member dues, funding from local government, and income generating events. The fact that these associations were able to secure local government funding demonstrates that they learned to navigate the French bureaucracy through the years. One of the most popular (and thus most profitable) income generating event was a "Miss" Pageant**.** These types of events proliferated during the 1990s in

[139] "Fashion Fair s'Installe à Paris" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* December 1991, XVI.

France. Miss Blackbox, Miss Soleil, Miss Black Beauty, Miss Timis, Miss Origine, and Miss Africa are some of the numerous examples. The most popular of these contests was Miss Black France, which in 1997 held eighty local competitions throughout France. They were not all centered on young girls, however. "Miss Diogoma" appreciated plus-sized older women and mothers. "Miss" pageants brought the community together to celebrate Black beauty. They took place at Black night clubs, such as the Nelson club, the Timis, or the Black Diamond. Black businesses sponsored the events by donating prizes. Air Afrique, for example, would provide a flight to a destination in the Caribbean or Africa. The expansion of these types of contests underlines the interest of the Black community in France in the promotion of Black beauty.

BEAUTÉ-MODE

Miss Black Yvelines

Pour la première édition de Miss Black Yvelines sous le patronnage de l'agence de voyages El Djazair de Paris a eu lieu récemment. **Amina Bamba,** une jeune sénégalo-zaïroise de Mantes-la-Jolie, aux mensurations 1m81 pour 51kg et qui allie à la fois le charme et la finesse a été élue Miss Black Yvelines. Elle a des possibilités de se faire un nom dans le cercle privilégié des Top-models. Née à **Kinshasa,** il y a 20 ans cette sympathique lycéenne vit en France depuis plusieurs années. Elle consacre son temps libre à la danse, l'expression corporelle et à défilé occasionnellement pour certains créateurs et boutiques de prêt-à-porter notamment Benetton. Miss Black Yvelines 88 s'envolera prochainement à destination de Dakar via Alger. Félicitations à Madame **Aquila** et Monsieur **Saïdi** de l'agence El Djazair.

Figure 8. Miss Black Yvelines. May 1988.

The development of autonomous fundraising in the Black diaspora in France is a watershed moment, and women were integral to it. The 1920s were a previous moment of flourishing for the Black diaspora in France. Scholars regard the *Revue du monde noir* as the catalyst for the *Négritude* movement. However, as Denean-Sharpley points out, the *Revue* discontinued after the French colonial administration withdrew funding because it was "more political than cultural."[140] As long as the diaspora was dependent on French funding, their aspirations and objectives were stifled. When the number of people grew, bolstered by unprecedented numbers of women migrating in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, they were able to become more self-sufficient economically.

The idea that "Black is Beautiful" did not remain confined to the United States, but its manifestations in France were very different. Black people in France accessed many of these ideas in via the American mass media. Both *Amina* and my oral sources point to the influence of the American Black press in France through references to the African American publications *Ebony* and *Jet.* The Black press in France directly references the concept of "Black is Beautiful" (in English). In the 1980s, "Black is Beautiful" was in vogue, and it was due in large part to the work of Black women in the beauty industry, modelling, and the arts. "Black is Beautiful" is a huge part of the mission of *Amina* magazine, however it differed from the approach in the United States. The French manifestation did not focus on natural hair. Instead, it was focused on the idea of cultural *metissage,* in the sense of blending, between West African and European/French in the pages of *Amina.*

One woman who elaborates on the concept of Black French cultural *metissage* is Célianthe Médus, from French Guyana. Trained in Belleville with a CAP and a BEP, she opened

[140] Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. *Negritude Women* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

her own salon in 1980 in the Nineth district. Since then, she had become "the most well-known Black stylist in Paris."[141] Her services included not only hair but make-up, accessories, clothes and jewelry. Additionally, she was an Artistic Director at Luster's, travelling in this capacity throughout Europe, Africa, and America. She asserts, "I am appreciated for my technical skill and my "French style:" spicy and tropical. My creations testify to this cultural *metissage*, the primary source of my inspiration."[142] The idea of cultural *metissage* pervades most of the descriptions of women's work in *Amina* magazine. It was an important part asserting Pan-African cultural nationalism by highlighting that West African cultures could contribute to European ones to produce new cultural creations.

Colonial Legacies and Pan-African Cultural Nationalism

The Black francophone women's press, as exemplified by *Amina*, asserted that women's work was an essential element in Pan-African cultural nationalism and redemption in France and worldwide. To the authors and women featured in *Amina*, France was a key site of a Pan-African cultural uplift. This idea was influenced by the history of French colonial policies of integration and assimilation, ideologies that were transplanted onto the metropole during the subsequent post-colonial migration. Subjects featured in *Amina* directly referenced and challenged these colonial legacies.

Integration and assimilation, terms coined in the colonial context, continued to be used in relation to discussions of postcolonial immigration to France. In a January 1992 article titled, "Integration and Assimilation: Josephine Saboukoulou's points of view," Josephine Saboukoulou, a woman from Congo seeking naturalization, expresses her views on these two

[141] Célianthe: Parlez-Nous du 'Black Trophy'" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 294, June 1999, L.
[142] Ibid

politically wrought concepts. She considers herself integrated, but wishes integration and assimilation had the same definition. Assimilation to many meant a rejection of your culture of origin. Saboukoulou continues to assert that French officials define integration as equal chances but says that she "wishes this was reality. Despite these nice discourses, immigrants know only rejection in their work, housing, or training."[143] Calixthe Beyala, a successful writer from Cameroon echoes these critiques of official discourses not reflecting lived realities. Describing her Parisian neighborhood, known for its racial and cultural diversity, she observes, "in this neighborhood [Belleville] people want to keep their differences without opposing others culture. A version of integration radically different from that of public powers that still suffers from a big tendency towards assimilation"[144] There are multiple points she makes in this statement. First, that the "public powers" or French official discourse, still promote assimilation, in which French culture and practices become the norm and other cultural practices fall to the wayside. In a neighborhood like Belleville, you would find people of all origins, including Asian, West and North African, Antillean, and French. Beyala suggests here that these spaces encourage a different vision of integration and assimilation which allows people to continue their cultural practices and live harmoniously with people from other origins, a vision that differs from that of the French government. She implies that the French culture could learn from these people, questioning their supposed superiority. The Pan-African mission of cultural uplift in the pages of Amina thus challenge the French state's continued colonialist policy of assimilation in the metropole for its postcolonial migrants.

[143] Jacques Nsoumbi, "L'Intégration et L'Assimilation 4 Points de Vue de Joséphine Saboukoulou," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* January 1992, XXII.
[144] "Calixthe Beyala et Son Petit Prince de Belleville" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* August 1992, 10-13.

A strategy of Pan-African cultural nationalism addresses a legacy of the colonialism that people of the West African diaspora challenge: an inferiority complex, or the internalized belief in the superiority of Western and white culture and inferiority of the Black race. Several women featured in *Amina* allude to the complex by asserting that while they do not have it themselves, it does in fact exist. [145] Oral interviews conducted in 2019 confirm the widespread existence of this type of inferiority complex. When I spoke with two women from more modest backgrounds than the women in *Amina*, Saouia and N'deye, both confessed to me rather sheepishly that they had "complexes;" they explained that they believed that as West African they were inferior to Westerners. They also told me that the complex was much stronger for their parents' generation, who grew up and lived entirely during the colonial period. These women of modest backgrounds both connected this complex to the history of colonialism. Bilguissa and Thérèse, women from middle class background who I interviewed, further shed light upon this cultural myth by telling me how their fathers, who had French military careers, avoided it because of their success in this field, which allowed them to achieve high levels professionally and prove that they were as competent as French men. These discussions of an inferiority complex put these women's ideas in conversation with the theoretical work of Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks.* In a similar way, they underscore the psychological effects of colonialism on Black people, causing them to internalize beliefs that they are inferior to white people. These allusions to how inferiority complexes have continued to shape womens' psyches twenty and thirty years after

[145] A.B. Diallo, L'Idéal Féminin," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 131 May 1983, 30-31, Christian Lagauche, "Georgette Kala-Lobe Une Danseuse qui Brise Ses Chaines à la télé," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 225, January 1989, 14, Atoumata Ndibe, "Pleins Feux Sur Mathilde Ba" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* March 1992, VIII-IX. Zacharie Etoa Etoa, "Espaces Africains à Toulouse" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* March 1994, XXIV.

decolonization and my conversations with women decades later shed light on the "afterlives" of colonialism and on the transgenerational impact of colonial oppression.[146]

Framing their work in the context of Pan-African cultural nationalism allowed women to draw great fulfillment from their work because it directly challenged the colonial ideologies that continued to hold salience in their daily lives. Many women, whether hair stylist, fashion designer, or model, speak about their expertise as not only technical, but artistic and creative as well. They take pride in formulating original hair styles or fashions according to their clients' needs. Salon owners describe the challenges of training and managing a staff, for example. Many of the women express their desire to showcase West African culture, creativity, and arts in France and around the world. They are quick to point out that they have European clients who they enjoy exchanging conversation with.

Towards the last decade of the twentieth century, a second generation of the West African Diaspora was born in France and the strategy of Pan-African cultural nationalism needed to transform to meet new contexts. If the second generation does not have the same attachment to West African or Caribbean culture as their parents, then they may not be committed to Pan-African culture. *Amina* reflects this change in several articles that focus on the concern that the generation of the diaspora born in France have no knowledge of their West African roots. In interviews with women of West African descent who were born in France, journalists pose the question whether they have been to Africa or the Antilles, and whether they speak a West African language. Concern for the second generation is echoed in associational activities; many groups organized trips to Africa for children during the school holidays for them to discover the country of their origin and associations offered these trips as prizes in various contests. Through

[146] Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, Berkeley: Global, Area, and International Archive, University of California Press, 2012.

these strategies, the culture of the West African diaspora in France would be transmitted to future generations.

"We are not a fashion; we are becoming an institution"[147]

The Black female body has a troubled history in France because of its origins in the context of slavery, colonialism, scientific racism, and exoticism. Sarah Baartman's story symbolizes these tropes, while Josephine Baker's symbolizes the transformation of these ideas during the interwar years. In the later part of the twentieth century in France, the Black female body became stylish again. *Amina* tells the story of women's work in fashion during this time. It credits the designers Paco Rabane, Yves Saint Laurent, and Christian Dior as being the first haute couture designers to employ Black women in their shows, making Black women's bodies visible in a new context, high fashion, that contrasts with previous images.[148] It also implies that white patronage was necessary for Black women to break into the world of Paris fashion. During this time, exoticism did not disappear. A December 1991 article, "Black is Beautiful and Really Sell-able" conveys in an interview with Sylvie Joco, an actress, "the image in France today on mixed and Black women is completely stereotyped...beautiful, oiled, curvy."[149] However, the plethora of articles profiling women in the fashion industry during the 1980s and 90s reveals their experiences and demonstrates that they exerted agency in their career and life choices. During this time, these women also constructed the Black beauty industry into an institution.

Almen Gibirila's story illustrates her motivations in promoting the image of Black female beauty and the value and creativity of West African fashion worldwide from the 1970s through

[147] Gisèle Gomez quoted in Claude Moineau "Gisèle Gomez et Vicky Toudou" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 156, February 1, 1985, 22.
[148] Mathieu Abaga-MBarga, "Aita Kane" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* September 15, 1986, 28-29.
[149] PJW, "Sylvie Joco" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* December 1991, XIV.

the 21st century. Gibirila studied at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Bordeaux, a prestigious art school, but never took a design class. This did not stop her from opening a studio in Paris in 1979.[150] In 1981, she founded "Black Experience," an association for Black artists, models, dancers, artists, "to raise awareness on the richness of Black artistic world."[151] Later, she opened a boutique called "Taxibrousse." She built her business establishing contacts both in France and West Africa, participating in international fashion events such as International Beauty Trade Show (salon international de beauté et d'ailleurs/ SABEMOD) and organizing shows in Paris at spots like Nelson Club, and participating in international fashion shows. [152] At first she had an atelier where her contacts would come to place orders, and then she opened her own boutique. It is not surprising that Almen Gibirila and the "Black Experience" models appear in *Amina* several times because their mission fits perfectly with the cultural nationalism that the magazine promoted. Assiatou Bah Diallo, editor of *Amina*, describes her succinctly as a "woman with many facets," just as her career has many facets that all contribute to the promotion of West African culture in France and in the world.[153] It is important to note that Almen Gibirila, in a televised interview, critiques a men's movement for style which had emigrated from its original Congo to France, called Society of Ambiance-Makers and Elegant People (Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes /*la Sape*). *La Sape* and *les sapeurs* were well-dressed men who put on fashion shows in nightclubs. In an interview for a 1985 documentary, she stated that the *la Sape*, "makes me laugh and bothers me because it's saying to be well dressed you need to be dressed western. We are not in conflict of course, but I find it a shame."[154] She makes,

[150] A. Diallo, "Une Fille aux Multiples Facettes Almène Gibirila" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* N. 90, December 1979, 8-11.
[151] Assiatou B. Diallo, "Black Experience" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 129 February 1983, 44-45.
[152] Email correspondence with Almen Gibirila June 21 and 24, 2019.
[153] Assiatou Bah Diallo, "Djo Balard A Nu" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* 237, January, 1990, 36-38.
[154] Yvan Butler, "Noir sur blanc : le défi multiracial" *Temps Présent* documentary, 1985.

an important distinction here between the West African men and women's fashion and beauty movements, underlining the importance of gender in the manifestations of the West African diaspora.

Figure 9. A Sapeur, "Afrique: Capitale Paris,"aired May 15, 1986 on TF1.

Figure 10. Almen Gibirila on *Le Magazine de Mosaïque*, "Le Magazine de Mosaïque : émission du 5 février 1984," aired on February 5, 1984 on France 3.

Figure 11. Black Experience Models in *Le Magazine de Mosaïque*, "Le Magazine de Mosaïque : émission du 5 février 1984," aired on February 5, 1984 on France 3.

Modelling provided an increasing number of women with lucrative employment and increased Black women's presence in the fashion industry. Djeynaba Drabo, for example, was "discovered" in the metro at the age of 18. She leveraged her career enough to complete internships in Europe, Asia, and the United States. Like fashion designers such as Almen Gibirila who promoted West African fashion internationally, Drabo viewed her work through a similar lens, stating, "I am going to conquer the world by participating in multiple fashion shows in order to promote West African women's personality in fashion."[155] Christiane Dika Nsangue Akwa, a marketing consultant of Cameroon origin, details the history of Black models: "The Black model was only promoted in the niche of high fashion. This is a gross error that I want to correct in the area of cosmetics, and I think I am the only one doing this. The essential thing for me is to uplift Black women who, outside of high fashion, are used as vulgar products of consumption, which lowers their real value." She again speaks to the Pan-African nature of her work: "my interventions in Black beauty are the same for Antillean women and I also consider

[155] Assane Ndiaga Diop, "Djeynaba Drabo" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 207, August 1, 1987, 38-39.

them my Black sisters."[156] Her statements here suggest that even in the area of modelling and marketing, Black women envisioned their work as essential to uplifting West African culture in a both inside France and beyond its borders. With these new opportunities in media came visibility in the urban space, and often international, spaces as well.

[156] Razin Elyse, "Assistante Consultante en Marketing" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 200, January 1, 1987, 34-35.

CHAPTER 3: COLLABORATIONS, EXCHANGES AND TENSIONS: WEST AFRICAN WOMEN AND FRENCH FEMINISTS IN THE 1980s

> At MODEFEN, we were all born Black women. We are somebody. Our ages range between 28 and 54 years. We confirm the fact that we know not only what love is, but also what passionate love is. We've had children. We confirm the fact that we know and understand the pain of childbirth. So, it's clear that African women know what love and pain are. And these terms have the same MEANING for them as for others. It is only their way of expressing them that differs, expressions made only in the presence of other African women. To assert anything else would be racist.[157]

This excerpt from a letter published in the Bulletin of the French Association of Anthropologists, written in 1982 by the women of the Movement for the Defense of Black Women's Rights (Mouvement pour la défense des droits de la femme noire/MODEFEN), expresses the core of Black women's struggle for recognition, legitimacy, and equality in France and internationally in the post-independence era. MODEFEN, publishing this article, indicted two factions of French feminism, divided on the issue of excision, for racism. Somewhat surprisingly, their collective work responded to an article that had appeared in a previous volume of the same publication, titled, "On Excision in Africa" written by several of France's leading women anthropologists in an anthropology journal critiquing Benoîte Groult's article in *F Magazine,* a feminist publication, that argued excision was a patriarchal practice that should be outlawed, writ large.[158] In response,

[157] MODEFEN (Mouvement pour la défense des droits de la femme noire). "Sur l'Infibulation et l'Excision en Afrique" *Bulletin de l'Association Française des Anthropologues* No. 9, September 1982, 50-54.
[158] Marie-Dominique Arnaud, et al. "A Propos de L'Excision en Afrique" *Bulletin de l'Association Française des Anthropologues* Vol. 4 Issue 1 1981, 37-39.

MODEFEN argued that, "[the anthropologists] reproach Benoîte Groult's behavior as racist, but they are falling into the same trap."[159] To these Black women, in justifying excision in Africa as a cultural practice, the authors of the *Anthropology Bulletin* "fall into the same [racist] trap" by homogenizing the entire continent of Africa as traditional, stagnant, culturally backward, and in need of aid from the West, in other words: supporting the basis of colonialism. This chapter argues that, standing as it does at the nexus of race, gender, and postcolonial immigration, Black women's activism around the issue of excision in France in the 1980s thus provides us with an essential lens to understanding race, gender, and post-colonial immigration to France at that time.

Scholars have pointed to the need for a comprehensive history of Black women's activism in France.[160] This chapter contributes to efforts to write this history. It will detail the collaborations that took place between French feminists, French healthcare workers, activists from the United States and Europe, and West African women from the continent and in France. It delves particularly into West African women's organizations and activism and reconstructs ties between them, the French media, and French feminists in order to show what their transnational feminist practices tell us about French citizenship and the West African diaspora. The chapter also articulates the positions of West African francophone and French feminisms in France during the 1980s. Scholars such as Joan Scott and Bronwyn Winter assert the importance of the "headscarf debates" which surrounded the passing of the 2005 law on religious symbols in France as a moment which "crystalized" the divides between West African and French

[159] MODEFEN (Mouvement pour la défense des droits de la femme noire). "Sur l'Infibulation et l'Excision en Afrique" *Bulletin de l'Association Française des Anthropologues* No. 9, September 1982, 50-54.
[160] Most recently Silyane Larcher in "The End of Silence: On the Revival of Afrofeminism in Contemporary France." In *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016*, edited by Silyane Larcher and Felix Germaine, 69-88, 2018.

feminists.[161] I argue that these divisions were already in place two decades before that law was passed.

There have been many debates about the existence of race and racism in "colorblind" France, however, less attention has been paid to the significance of gender in forming race relations in this country. Drawing on a variety of media sources including print, television, radio, and oral interviews, this chapter sheds light on the importance of gender in the racial formation of Frenchness in the last decades of the twentieth century when migration patterns changed. This chapter examines the postcolonial tensions between Africa and the West, France, the former metropole, through the lens of the history of feminisms in France.

In the 1980s, French feminists and West African women's activists came into close contact through debates and activism on women's rights, particularly about the practice of excision. [162] My examination of these debates over excision is organized into two parts. The first introductory part is an associational history of Black women's activism in France, which began in the late 1970s. It describes the historical groups institutionalized who Black women's activism in the hexagon.[163] The second part, my examination of the debates and activism centered on excision in France in the 1980s and 90s, facilitates the parsing out of differing beliefs and strategies of both French feminists and West African women activists on transnational and transcultural feminist praxis. It includes the focused discussion of the French Government's interventions, a case study of a grassroots West African activist in France, and an examination of

[161] See Scott, Joan Wallach. *The Politics Of The Veil*. Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2007, Winter, Bronwyn. *Hijab & The Republic: Uncovering The French Headscarf Debate*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2008.

[162] I am going to use the term "excision" because it is more neutral than female genital mutilation (FGM) which was the most widespread term in English (*mutilations sexuelles* in French) and it is more commonly used in French. When I quote, I will translate the term that the quotee used. For a detailed discussion of terminology see Hope Lewis, "Between Irua and 'Female Genital Mutilation': Feminist Human Rights Discourse and the Cultural Divide." *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, vol. 8, 1995, pp. 1–55.

[163] The Union of Martinican Women (L'Union des Femmes de la Martinique) has been active since 1944.

a group of Senegalese women who travelled to and from West Africa, as well as, lastly, some more diverse representations.

This chapter intervenes in three main bodies of scholarship on the history of postcolonial feminism. The first centers on the Black feminist response to the colonial ideological legacies present in the metropole decades after the formal end of French colonialism in Africa. For example, the words of the women of MODEFEN which open this chapter contest French white intellectuals' belief that West African women experience pain and love differently from white women. These beliefs are rooted in France's history of colonialism in Africa which constructed Africa and West Africans as backward, savage, and barbaric. These ideas extended into the postcolonial era, manifesting in the belief that since West African women feel pain differently, they can sustain the pain of excision and its aftermath more easily. Such ideas supported efforts to explain the practice within the West African community in France. MODEFEN, comprised of Black women living in France, challenged these colonial ideas, terming them "racist" and asserting that West African women do in fact feel similarly to other women. They specify that the difference is in the way they may *express* these feelings. Women like those involved in MODEFEN fought against the practice of excision by challenging the monolithic view of West African culture in French (and Western) minds.[164]

Secondly, this chapter intervenes in the substantial body of literature on what has become known as Female Genital Mutilation. Recent surveys of the past 30 years of academic writing on excision, known more commonly as FGM in Anglophone scholarship and feminism, assert that

[164] Decades before *Cultural Anthropology* acknowledged in 1997, "In short, the current controversy surrounding female genital operations is inextricably linked to other contemporary debates that concern the nature of universal "human rights" and the ways such rights include, or exclude, women; the cultural rights of minorities as immigration increases in Euro-American countries; and, ultimately, the meaning and viability of "multicultural" societies," the women of MODEFEN were already making the same arguments, on their own behalf." Christine J. Walley. "Searching for 'Voices': Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations." *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 3 (1997): 406.

early studies expressed a belief in the cultural inferiority of West African societies compared with Western ones. According to this work, such beliefs only gradually transformed into perspectives grounded in cultural difference rather than hierarchies, at which point Western feminists' views and anti-FGM discourse were, according to scholars like Lisa Wade, overgeneralized as imperialistic.[165] I claim, in contrast, that some Western feminists recognized the need to work closely with West African women on these issues due to West African women's expertise and highly developed associational practices. However, not all scholars agree. Christine J. Walley, for example, still argues that: "Euro-Americans tend to "share an essentialist view of culture" and one common trope in much of the Euro-American-oriented literature opposing female genital operations has been the tendency to characterize West African women as thoroughly oppressed victims of patriarchy, ignorance, or both, not as social actors in their own right."[166]

Thirdly, this chapter participates in the recovery of the history of Black feminisms in France. The work of these women has not yet been documented to the same extent as Anglophone West African women's activism for linguistic reasons, and Western feminism's activism, for structural reasons.[167] Since Black French feminists often evoked the taboo concept of race in France, they suffered from marginalization in the archival process as well. Furthermore, with the exception of work by Awa Thiam, other studies which examine the French approach to excision (such as scholarship by Anouk Guiné and Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes), minimize the role of West African women's activism in France throughout the 1980s

[165] Lisa Wade. "Learning from 'Female Genital Mutilation': Lessons from 30 Years of Academic Discourse." *Ethnicities* 12, no. 1 (2012): 26.
[166] Christine J. Walley. "Searching for 'Voices': Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations." *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 3 (1997): 407 and 419.
[167] Wade. "Learning from 'Female Genital Mutilation': Lessons from 30 Years of Academic Discourse," 2012, 26.

and 90s; While they acknowledge the two main groups fighting against excision in France, the Commission for the Abolition of Sexual Mutilations (*la commission pour l'abolition des mutilations sexuelles*/CAMS) and the Group for the Abolition of Sexual Mutilations (*Group pour l'abolition des mutilations sexuelles*/GAMS), they only quote Isabelle Gillette-Faye (a white woman), the director of GAMS, and do not elaborate on the fact that West African women were essential to the activism carried out by both CAMS and GAMS. [168]

Early Black Women's Activism in France: Forming an Institution

Histories of Black feminisms in the United States are well-documented. This is less true for France. That said, scholars of French history, notably T. Denean Sharpley Whiting, have detailed Black Caribbean women's contributions to Negritude, a Black cultural pride movement in France and its colonies in the 1930s. And yet, the need for a comprehensive history of Black women's movements in France has not been fulfilled. This next section, focused on Black women's activism regarding the topic of excision in the 1980s, contributes to uncovering these neglected histories.

There were multiple Black women activists in France in the latter decades of the twentieth century and French and West African women interacted on many platforms, official and unofficial, during this time. While postcolonial and Black feminists in the United States critiqued mainstream Western feminism for its middle class, racially white vision of women's issues, white feminists in France were working at the grassroots level with women from the West

[168] Awa Thiam was a Senegalese woman who studied in France and became the first African woman activist against excision. Gertrude Mianda, "Reading Awa Thiam's *La Parole aux Negresses* Through the Lens of Feminisms and English Language Hegemony," *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 36:2, 2014: 8-19, Anouk Guiné and Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes. "Engendering Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the United Kingdom and France," *Politics & Society* 35 iii (January 1, 2007): 491.

African diaspora. These women were called upon by the French government to offer their experience and advice on government, legal, and social policies. This is a history that has not yet been included in postcolonial histories of feminism or twentieth century French history, and it is essential to understanding contemporary debates on multiculturalism in France, the worldwide West African Diaspora, and Francophone postcolonial and Black feminisms.

The second wave of Black women's activism in France was spearheaded by West African students in the 1970s. Like the Caribbean women who came to study before them in the interwar years (of which two women known as the Nardal sisters are the emblematic figures), these West African women experienced both temporary and permanent migration to France as students very differently than their male counterparts. Béatrice Elom, a young West African student, activist, and journalist from Cameroon who studied in France in the 1980s felt that for women like herself, this was an opportunity to create " a new personality, opens [oneself] up to life, new experiences, and acts which would be inconceivable in the society where [we] come from."[169] While male students sometimes experienced migration to France as an emasculating experience, a loss of status, autonomy, and authority, female students could experience it as liberating. Female students from West Africa came to complete advanced degrees in French cities such as Paris, Lyon, and Bordeaux. Since studies for a PhD took several years, even if the women did not have the intention of settling in France, they would live in that country for an extended time. For some, this migratory experience was temporary, as it was for Elom, who eventually returned to Cameroon. For others, such as Lydie Dooh-Bunya it was permanent. And yet, even if temporary, many of the young women who came to France to study became politically active during their time there. For example, three Black women's activism groups

[169] Béatrice Elom, "L'estampille universitaire." *Autrement* 49 (April 1983), 135.

were born from these students who came from Africa to study in France: The Black Women's Coordination (BWC), the Black Women's Movement (BWM), and MODEFEN. We need to understand the history of these groups if we are to understand the diversity of Black women's issues in France in the 1980s, the approaches taken to tackling them, and their relationships with French feminists.

The Black Women's Coordination (*la coordination des femmes noires*, BWC) was founded by West African women; it kicked off the second wave of Black women's activism in France in 1976. The group achieved notoriety through the media, via both television and print interviews. Béatrice Elom, a student and later journalist from Cameroon, and one of the Coordination's most active members, represented the group in a 1981 television appearance on *Mosaïque*.[170] Elom and another activist, Yolande Akauti, a Congolese hair stylist in France since 1970, also gave an interview to the editor of *Amina Magazine* in 1983. According to them, the group met informally at members' houses. Assiatou Bah Diallo observes that the group "had experienced several divisions" since its creation and noted that although "there are only 10 members…they are so active it seems like 40." The BWC raised funds performing as a theater troupe and through sales of their brochure, "Black Women's Coordination" first published in 1978.[171] The BWC sought to "help sisters in distress" to escape dangerous situations like forced marriage, abortion, violence, and rape. According to the pamphlet, their hope was to one day have a shelter for women fleeing domestic abuse.

The Black Women's Movement, (*le movement des femmes noires*, BWM), founded by Awa Thiam in 1978, is perhaps one of the fruits of the divisions that Diallo refers to above. Thiam came to France to study at the doctoral level in philosophy at the Sorbonne. She founded

[170] *Mosaïque*, "Les Femmes Immigrées," aired December 13, 1981 on France 3.
[171] A.B. Diallo, "Béatrice, Yolande et les Autres," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* January 1983, 34-35.

the BWM with women from different backgrounds in February 1978 to address Black women's problems. The same year, she published what is arguably one of the foundational texts of Black Francophone women's feminism, *La Parole Aux Négresses,* Awa Thiam states that while she planned on going back to Africa (and did indeed return), she did not want to "stand with her arms crossed" and do nothing in the meantime.[172] However, she acknowledged that the BWM's means were limited and so they were focusing on community building and reflection. The group's activities included a demonstration against events in Zaire, and participation in Anti-Sexual Mutilation Day and Black Women's Day in Paris in 1978.

MODEFEN is the third and most long-lasting group founded in the last decades of the twentieth century that was directed specifically at Black women's activism. Founded in November 1981 by Lydie Booh-Dunya, a student and journalist from Cameroon, it was funded both by private donation and by the Social Justice Funds for Immigrant Workers and their Families (*fonds d'action social pour travailleurs immigrés et leurs familles/* FAS). MODEFEN was active until 1994. The fact that MODEFEN endured the longest of these three organizations suggests that official, government funding allowed this group to flourish for a longer duration than previous groups. Even though the BWC and BWM may have been ephemeral, they laid the basis for MODEFEN's institutionalization of Black women's activism in France in the 1980s. MODEFEN aimed for "Black women's rights" by fighting against illiteracy, sexist and discriminatory education, and for freedom of choice, voluntary use of contraception, and "solidarity for all women around the world in justice, equality, liberty, peace and dignity." They also participated in a forum on excision, a subject "close to their hearts." In a November 1989 article in *Amina* magazine, Dooh-Bunya expresses optimism regarding the work that MODEFEN

[172] Thiam, Awa. *LaParole aux Négresses* Paris: Denoël-Gonthier, 1978, Assiatou Diallo, "Awa Thiam, Auteur de « La Parole Aux N*égresses* » *Amina Magazine* no. 79 January 1979, 46.

had accomplished. When asked whether she was satisfied with the work that they were doing, she stated "yes, because the work we started 10 years ago is coming to fruition." To prove her point, she sites that their work had facilitated many discussions about excision and notes that their membership had doubled and included followers in the United States and Africa.[173] Black women activists in France in the 1970s and 80s experienced marginalization by French feminists. This marginalization took different forms. The women of MODEFEN, for example, spoke about derogatory comments made by white feminists: "during demonstrations, we always heard comments like "let the little Negresses pass."[174] They believed they could collaborate with Western women, but were upset that white Western women " speak for [Black women] too much."[175] They needed to speak for themselves, not only as African women, but, as the chapter later describes, as a diverse group of women from different African backgrounds.

Since they were marginalized by the general women's liberation movement, Black women, from the Antilles and West Africa, needed to create their own organizations and their own spaces to gather. These organizations shaped Black women's activism in France. Uniting as Black women was productive in and of itself since this category brought women of different ethnicities, national origins, religions, and citizenship statuses together. Importantly, however, Black women in France could come together with French feminists despite their tensions, but they needed to employ certain strategies in order to do so. First, these collaborations required Black women to clearly state and explain their positionality as intersectional; they could not separate their race, culture, or national origin from their gender. Second, they employed affect in their discussions in order to humanize West African people, often depicted as one-dimensional

[173] A.B. Diallo, "MODEFEN : Toutes Contre le Sexism" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* December 1989, L.
[174] A.B. Diallo, "Béatrice, Yolande et les Autres" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* January 1983, 34-35.
[175] Brigitte Tallon, "Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi." *Autrement* 49 (April 1983) : 150.

beings blindly following tradition by the French media and feminists. Thirdly, they provided critiques of the West that challenged its supposed cultural and moral superiority.

Assiatou Bah Diallo, originally from Guinee and longtime editor-in-chief at *Amina* magazine, penned numerous articles for the magazine. Her articles provide a rich source of information about diasporic women's activism in France. In May 1982, she authored an editorial on the occasion of International Women's Day on March 8th that expresses the complexity of West African women's positions both worldwide and within feminism. She begins by asserting that "it is difficult being a Black woman in Europe," and proceeds to describe the fraught relationship between Western feminism and West African women. According to her, they are in an "unstable position in France" because while French feminists ask for their opinions and for their participation in demonstrations, they remain "ill at ease" because Western feminism is not necessarily concerned with the same issues that Black women's are, and, in their search to include Black women, still fall short of understanding the complexities of their experience. She points to several ways in which contextual differences in context between West African and Western women's perspectives result in different needs, even if they agreed on the importance of specific issues, such as birth control or abortion. She asserts, "all places have a local context and need local strategies." She adds, "Both West African men and women are suffering from under-development and need to concentrate their energies on this, and most of the oppression women suffer is from this too. Is this the solution to every problem? No, but we can't put women's liberation first when people are suffering. Some of our countries at this moment can't even pay their employees."[176] In these statements, she explains the intersectionality of West African

[176] Assiatou Bah Diallo, *"Les Africaines et le 8 Mars" Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* May 1982, 3.

women's lives. Their identities as West African drives them to feel solidarity with West African men in ways that sometimes conflicts with their gendered concerns.

In another article on MODEFEN, Assiatou Bah Diallo writes that West African feminists: "in being feminists…are not less West African," a statement that challenges a binary between feminism and West African-ness. Diallo continues her observations stating that MODEFEN has "always preferred the art of debate over extreme solutions. They try to establish dialogue with parents, spouses, or partners of the girls they try to help."[177] The "extreme solutions" referenced here are those practiced by Western feminism. The reasons why they are extreme from the point of view of West African women is that they require alienation or separation from men. For West African women, who also feel the effects of racism along with West African men, this alienation is problematic. Bah-Diallo asserts that this situation results for women in a "painful choice between defending her culture at any price (far from being the prototype of barbary) or turning her back on it and against it and fighting for feminism"[178] On the issue of excision in particular, she writes that it "forces West African women to either defend all practices or none and be a feminist" by choosing "between the health and life of our daughters and race solidarity."[179]

The fact of the matter is that Black women activists were not seen as participating in the development or theorizing of the French Women's Liberation Movement (*Mouvement pour la liberation des femmes*/ MLF). One scholar asserts that French feminist publications such as *F Magazine* and *Questions Féministes* portray West African women as passive victims, while *Des Femmes en Mouvements* emphasized West African women's agency. As the author states,

[177] A.B. Diallo, "Béatrice, Yolande et les Autres" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* January 1983, 34-35.
[178] Ibid
[179] Ibid

"sexuality was a key site of struggle for the MLF, which placed oppression of women's bodies at the center of its critique of sexism in French society. While MLF activists were aware of imperialism and Third World Liberation movements, 'race' was not a foundational concept to the MLF and was often neglected in the movement's analysis of women's oppression."[180] While this study is a critical examination of French feminism at the time, we also need to examine these interactions from the point of view of West African women to see how in fact Black women's activism in France contributed to transnational feminist theory and praxis.

Transnational Activism and Debates on Excision in the 1980s

In the 1970s, the World Health Organization began inquiries into the practice of excision on girls in multiple countries worldwide. When the topic sparked the concern of the United Nations and attracted the attention of a feminist activist from the United States, Fran Hosken, it began a chain of events that brought West African women's bodies into the spotlight in debates about the meaning and significance of excision through the 1990s.[181] In 1977, Edmond Kaiser founded the first NGO based on activism against excision in Geneva, *Terre des Hommes. Terre des Hommes* consulted with the United Nations on matters related to FGM. Six women from various West African and European countries lead the organization. Berhane Ras-Work, a woman from Ethiopia, was among these leaders. Ras-Work later founded an organization called the Inter-West African Committee (*Comité inter-africain /*CIAF) in 1984 following a summit in Dakar on excision. She continued her activism for the next twenty years.[182] Fran Hosken

[180] Jennifer S. Duncan, "Confronting 'Race': French Feminism's Struggle to Become Global" in *Women's Activism : Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*. Francisca de Haan, ed. London: Routledge, 2012, 183.
[181] Anne Sugier, ed. *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France*. Paris: Éd. Tierce, 1984.
[182] I. Hoskins, "Speaking out: An interview with Berhane Ras Work, president, the inter-African committee." *Ageing Int.* 24, (1998), 85–97.

returned to the United States and founded the Women's International Network in 1975, which concentrated on research in women's health. She also published a report on excision based on her research in Africa called *The Hosken Report* in 1979, a text which continues to be used as a reference for activists around the world, particularly because for its illustrations of different types of excision practices.[183]

In the early 1980s, two excision cases brought even more public attention to the practice of excision in France. In 1980, a baby girl named Bintou was hospitalized for two weeks as a result of complications following an excision procedure. Two years later, a baby girl named Bobo, unfortunately did not survive similar complications. These cases sparked a series of discussions in France about the topic, and produced a vast range of opinions, groups, and strategies in the French media. As a result, France became a key battleground for the issue of excision and a significant site for of interaction between Western feminists and West African women about this topic. In what follows, I focus on West African women's activism on excision in France in the 1980s in order to articulate how their work contributed to the development of postcolonial feminisms in the 1980s and how their interactions with French feminists pushed the latter to take the lived experience of Black women into account to articulate their feminist stances. At the same time, I demonstrate how colonial legacies continued to influence contemporary discussions of integration, marriage, family life, and sexuality in France.

At first, there was tremendous conflict over whether or not it was appropriate to intervene in the practice of excision when it was conducted inside the French national borders. While the French authorities and feminists did not believe it was their place to intervene in these practices *because of* their colonial history, some feminists believed this was the very reason that they

[183] Fran P Hosken, *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females* Lexington, Mass: Women's International Network News, 1979.

should intervene. Simone Iff, in her Forward to *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui en France* (1984), states that although colonialism was silent on the subject and took no action to encourage or discourage the practice in West Africa, "being silent about genital mutilation in France would be a form of racism. This would mean that we support and allow for others what we would not want for ourselves or our daughters. It is not racist to talk about it; it is racist to be silent about it because when there is a public scandal, there will be judgement, incomprehension, and rejection."[184] In these statements, Iff expresses the view that it would be racist to allow practices that are not acceptable for French women to continue for West African women in France. Maternalistically, she thinks that West African women must be protected from prejudice that would result from people misunderstanding these practices if they were not explained in a culturally sensitive way. Iff's position was shared with a plethora of French feminists (with the help of medical professionals) who engaged in a campaign of describing the practice of excision on West African female bodies in graphic detail, using pictures (from Fran Hosken's *The Hosken Report*), and cataloging the types of excisions, the reasons for them, and their consequences broadly in the French mainstream and feminist media. Thus, for example, an issue of *Cahiers du Féminisme* quoted a 1976 tract from the French Women's Liberation Movement which placed excision in the same category as tortures that women underwent in the Algerian War, Vietnam, Brazil and Chile. In response, however, some West African women replied that: "you are reacting as Westerners, by ethnocentrism. You don't respect other traditions, other cultures." According to the author, Natacha Brink, French feminists had been silent about it until the death of Bobo in 1982.[185]

[184] Simone Iff, "Forward" *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France*. Paris: Éd. Tierce, 1984, 7-9.
[185] Natacha Brink, "Excision" *Cahiers du Féminisme* Dec 82/Jan 83, 28-30.

The French Government Intervenes

In October 1982, three months after the death of Bobo, the French Ministry of Women's Rights decided to form a work group on excision in order to aid the government in preparing a national action plan to prevent the practice of excision in France. French and West African women participated in the working group which published *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France* in 1984.[186] French feminists Annie Sugier and Simone Iff, as well as activist groups MODEFEN, GAMS, the Women's Rights League, the French Movement for Family Planning, the League for Human Rights (Cimade), public health workers, and ethnologist Sylvie Fainzang all contributed to this work, which was eventually published by Éditions Tierce, a feminist publisher, in 1984. This text is a key site of collaboration between French feminists, healthcare workers, and West African women's groups and must be examined in detail in order to parse out the ways in which these groups worked together despite their differing backgrounds, while united by a single issue.

According to a 1983 article, Simone Iff, technical advisor to the newly created Ministry of Women's rights, brought the practice of excision to the attention of the authorities in 1974 or 75 because she had learned about it in her capacity as president of Family Planning. She was told at the time that: "Those problems are the business of the populations concerned— our colonial past forbids us from asking questions on this subject."[187] This was the position of the French government until French feminists and West African women came together in the early 1980s to push for more decisive action; their collaboration resulted in trials in the early 1980s and convictions and jail sentences for the practitioners and the parents of girls affected by the practice in the later part of the decade.

[186] Sugier, ed. *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France*, 1984.
[187] Tallon, "Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi." *Autrement* 49 (April 1983): 150.

Simone Iff states in her Forward to *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France*, that "outside of cultural differences, there is a similarity between women worldwide-their oppression." Such statements, while sympathetic, also express a lack of understanding of the concept of intersectionality and reflect instead the French conception of citizenship as an abstract universal attribute. In this understanding of women's connection, their differences do not matter; women are rather simply united by their shared experience of oppression as women. At the same time, some French feminists realized that they could not simply speak for West African women; problematically, however they developed the strategy of having one West African woman represent the entirety. As we will see, this strategy conflated the diversity that existed within the constructed category "West African women."

Contrary to both popular belief and to the legacy of the French feminist movement in France, Black women were involved in the Women's Liberation Movement in France from the outset. Thérèse Kuoh, a writer and lawyer from Cameroon, was invited to speak at the États Généraux de la Femme, the first national congress on women's issues in France, organized by the magazine *Elle* in November 1970. She attended as the president of the Union of West African and Malagasy Women and intervened to speak about mixed-race? couples, pensions for wives of deceased soldiers from the former French colonies, and the status of the Third World in France. She concluded by saying, "Act, ladies, so that the Third World does not become the Third State here [in France]." French feminists continued to use this representative model when collaborating with West African women activists going forward, which is to say that they would extend an invitation to an activist who would be expected to speak for the entire continent of Africa and its diaspora in France. A tall feat for anyone, given the diversity of both the continent and its diaspora in terms of ethnicity, language, culture, geography, and socioeconomic status.

This homogenizing tendency among white French feminists continued in feminist print media. One study of *F Magazine, Questions Féministes* and *Des femmes en Mouvements* during the years 1978-1982 concludes that "an analysis of reports on West African women in the major magazines *F Magazine* and *Questions Féministes* provides ample evidence of a problematic construction of West African women as passive victims of uncivilized and backward cultures. However *Des femmes en Mouvements* (Women in Movements) and *Des femmes en Mouvements Hebdo* (Women in Movements Weekly), a publication associated with the publishing house *éditions des femmes*, presents an alternative model that highlighted West African women's agency."[188] Looking at two additional feminist publications, *Cahiers du Féminisme,* and *Choisir*, we can see that these magazines did attempt to include West African women's voices, but they still fail to depict the diversity of West African women's experiences present in later reports.

In January 1983, *Cahiers* published an article titled "'The Geography of Excision is Not Limited to Africa'" which describes a second wave of concern about excision because of the revelation that it was being practiced within France following reports about the excisions practiced on the baby girls—Bintou and Bobo mentioned earlier —the latter of whom died.[189] This article, written by Natacha Brink, includes quotes and paraphrases of Noual el Saadaoui's *La Face Cachée d'Eve,* a collection of essays on women in the Arab world. El Saadaoui was an Egyptian doctor who analyzed the causes women's oppression in the Arab world. Brink clearly explains el Saadaoui's critiques of Western feminism, such as her belief that it is imperialist for Western feminists to intervene in the topic of excision when it does not

[188] Jennifer S. Duncan, "Confronting 'Race': French Feminism's Struggle to Become Global" in *Women's Activism : Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*. Francisca de Haan, ed. London: Routledge, 2012, 184.
[189] Natacha Brink, "Excision" *Cahiers du Féminisme* Dec 82/Jan 83, 28-30.

directly concern them. However, once again, we see here only one woman's voice being used to represent the plethora of opinions that West African women may have.

Coumba Traoré: Grassroots Activist

The first women's groups to engage in activism on excision in France were SOS-Femmes Alternatives and CAMS, which both included Black and White members.[190] In fact, Assiatou Bah Diallo's article "Female Gential Mutilations," published in October 1982 in *Amina* describes the Black Women's Movement splitting into two groups, GAMS and CAMS because the members of the two groups could not reconcile their approach to anti-excision activism in France. [191] CAMS members supported the criminalization of people found engaging in excision on French soil, including the parents and the person performing the excision. To carry out this vision, they served as the plaintiff in cases that were tried throughout the 1980s and 90s. The women in GAMS, on the other hand, believed education and integration of the families concerned was the more effective strategy to reduce and eventually eliminate the practice. Furthermore, they viewed criminalization of the practice as doing more harm than good to people who were already marginalized, particularly women. Since CAMS was involved in the highly publicized trials, they became better known, overshadowing the work of GAMS, and of one woman, Coumba Touré, in particular.[192]

Coumba Touré, from Mali, was the face of GAMS and an activist working at the grassroots level in the 1980s in France. Founded in 1982 by West African and French women, GAMS aimed to advocate for the end of traditional practices detrimental to the health of women

[190] Winter Bronwyn, "Women, the Law, and Cultural Relativism in France: The Case of Excision," *Signs* 19, no. 4 (1994): 939-972.
[191] Assiatou B. Diallo, "L'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles," *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* October, 1982, 24.
[192] Bronwyn. "Women, the Law, and Cultural Relativism in France: The Case of Excision," 939-972.

and children, including excision. GAMS was one of two groups composed of West African women that participated in the work group formed by the French Ministry of Women's Rights in 1983. Its members contributed chapters to a collective work on excision in 1984 titled *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France.*. In 1984, when Berhane Ras-Work founded the Inter-West African Committee in Geneva, GAMS became the French branch of this international organization.[193]

Touré was the figurehead for West African women in GAMS, as demonstrated by her multi-media presence in France from the late 1970s into to the 1990s. She made appearances on documentaries on TV and radio, and was also interviewed in print (including multiple times in *Amina*), demonstrating the breadth of both her activism and notoriety at the time. She was arguably the foremost advocate for West African women's rights and education in France in the latter decades of the 20th century. Her experience differed from earlier West African women activists in France because she did not come to France as a student, but through family reunification connecting her to populations earlier activists did not have access to. She also lived in a working-class area in Paris. This means that her socioeconomic status differed from that of earlier activists such as Awa Thiam, Béatrice Elom, or Lydie Dooh-Bunya. Touré came from working-class Paris. The women she encountered were non-French speaking women from more rural origins. This means that Touré was in a liminal position that allowed her access to working class West African immigrant women in France. This position was quite different from that of women like Awa Thiam, who had said in a 1979 interview for example, that making contact with

[193] Lydie Dooh-Bunya, Jean-Pierre Zirn, Cheick Oumar Sissoko, *Des Lames Et Des Femmes*. Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir distrib, 1990.

immigrant women is "hard because they don't speak French, they are mistrustful and when we try to talk to them their husbands are there and they don't like us so it's difficult."[194]

Unlike her predecessors like, Thiam, Elom and Dooh-Bunya, Coumba worked at the grassroots level. She came from a modest background in Mali and began her activism there before coming to France. Within her first year in the Paris area in 1981, she joined GAMS. By 1983, she had conducted an inquiry with ethnologist Sylvie Fainzang on the topic of excision. The French Ministry of Women's Rights requested this report, and Fainzang acknowledges that it would not have been possible without Coumba Touré, who worked as an interpreter. As a Malian woman with linguistic and ethnic Bambara roots, she could speak Bambara to other Malian, Mauritanian, or Senegalese women who were not able to speak French. In addition to Fainzang's acknowledgement of her work, Touré penned her own version of the interviews in a chapter titled, "West African Women Express Themselves" which appeared sequentially before Fainzang's chapter. Touré's language skills, as well as her background as a West African immigrant living among other West African immigrants, allowed her to enter spaces that French people could not access.

Another key factor that allowed her to be an effective conduit between the West African and French communities was that Touré herself had been excised when she was seven years old. The film *Blades and Women* (*Des Lames et Les Femmes*), produced by Lydie Dooh-Bunya and the Union of Malian Women in 1990, shows Touré teaching children of West African descent about sexuality using an anatomical model.[195] Her strategy to share her story openly, which she does both in writing and on television, worked effectively to open dialogue with immigrant

[194] Assiatou Diallo, "Awa Thiam, Auteur de « La Parole Aux N*égresses* » *Amina Magazine* no. 79 January 1979, 46-47.
[195] Dooh-Bunya, Zirn, Sissoko, *Des Lames Et Des Femmes*, 1990.

women and served to highlight her credibility to French people, since she knew about excision firsthand.

Coumba Touré went on to be the face if the anti-excision cause in France, appearing several times in the French media. Her ability to play the role of interpreter, both in the literal sense, but also in the broader understandings as well, between different groups of people, both French and West African, Black and white, was extraordinary. In the Figure below, (a screenshot from the film, Coumba speaks to a group of men in someone's home. Coumba used the strategy of home visits to reach out to community members (see Figure 12 below).

Figure 12. Coumba Touré in 1997 on ARTE.

Changing Representations?

Two occasions in the French media provided a glimpse into the diversity of opinions and beliefs that West African and French activists held regarding excision. The first was the conference "Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Day" (*Journée contre les mutilations sexuelles*) in 1984. MODEFEN produced a film recording of the day entitled *Neither Sexually Nor*

Otherwise.[196] The film shows the set up for the conference: four women seated in a panel at the front of the room preside over the proceedings; these women include, Lydie Dooh-Bunya from MODEFEN and Yvette Roudy, who was Minister of Women's Rights in France from 1981-1986. The film shows the audience is a diverse group of people which includes white and Black people, men and women. Lydie Dooh Bunya opens the conference by introducing herself and MODEFEN. Later, Coumba Touré speaks at the podium on behalf of GAMS.

Significantly, during the conference, the organizers give women in the audience opportunities to speak to the room with a microphone. During this time, the women convey diverse opinions about the issue at hand. A key discussion which emerges among the women is the use of the term "mutilation." One West African woman in the audience begins this debate by stating that "it is not mutilation for Malians." A white woman argues that this belief "negates their whole position," meaning that if West African women do not see it as mutilation, French feminists' activism is undermined. Another West African woman asserts that "it's an operation; it is not the same as mutilation." The debate continues like this, with women on the panel and in the audience intervening and expressing their views. When a comparison to male circumcision is made, a white woman points out that it is different because excision takes away pleasure from the woman. To this, a West African woman responds that "frigidity is in your minds. It has nothing to do with excision. I can tell you that I am not frigid," and laughter erupts from the audience. This is a rare opportunity for a reference to sexuality, notably absent from the activism of West African men and women, which framed the issue as a medical one, rather than an issue of being able to express sexuality as many Western feminists did. Coumba Touré speaks up and

[196] Lydie Dooh-Bunya, Perrine Rouillon, Yvette Roudy, *Ni Sexuellement, Ni Autrement*. Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir distrib, 1984.

says “I am Malian. I was excised and I am proud to be a Malian woman who sees the problem and fights for it to be changed.” In contrast to the articles in *Choisir* and *Cahiers du Féminisme*, therefore, during the conference “Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Day” and in the film produced by MODEFEN, *Neither Sexually Nor Otherwise*, a plethora of West African women’s voices make it clear that they have multiple viewpoints and experiences which cannot be represented by one or two token speakers from West Africa to represent all their diverse opinions and experiences.

A second instance, this time on a major French television broadcast, brought multiple West African women’s voices to the fore. On December 12 1989, *Ciel, Mon Mardi !*, hosted by Christophe Dechavanne on TF1, featured a debate on excision with Coumba Touré representing GAMS, Lydie Dooh-Bunya and Adhanet Andou from MODEFEN, Amina Mahaman from Niger, Félix M’Bapé, a male surgeon from West Africa, Annie Biquart, anthropologist from the French National Center for Research (CNRS), Catherine Zviloff, a lawyer, and Annie Sugier, member of SOS Femmes-Alternative. The host began the round table by referring to a case in October in which a mother was arrested for excising her 7 year old daughter and sentenced to 3 years in prison. Next, Biquart, the anthropologist speaks. Then the women Adhanet, Amina and Coumba share their experiences being excised. Finally, Lydie Dooh-Bunya speaks. She thanks the show for putting this together, because “we’ve already tried to do it and we filmed for an entire day, but they only used 3 minutes of it.” The host intervenes: “Yes, [but] we are here live” and she responds, “Yes, and that’s why I wanted to highlight that.”

The inclusion of four women and one man from West Africa allows for the audience to see the extent to which the viewpoints on excision vary even amongst the diasporic population. The short interviews of Black people on the street (both from West Africa and the Antilles) that

opened the show also amplify this effect. It becomes evident how diverse their viewpoints are when the women start to argue amongst themselves. Dooh-Bunya asserts "Let's not argue because Africa is so big, we can't generalize." One of the points the women disagree on is whether girls cry during the procedure. Some believe that the nature of the operation is such that crying is inevitable. Others, like Amina and Coumba, assert that they were excited and willing participants because of the festive nature of the ritual of becoming a woman. Amina says that she "didn't even have time to cry out." Adhanet interrupts her and says, "that's not true." And she replies "I am not asking your opinion because that's how it happened for me. In Guinea we only do the clitorectomy." Adhanet challenges her again, "I've seen this done and the girls cry like we saw in the film." Amina responds, "I'm just saying that its over so fast that you don't even realize, and you cry because you see the blood." Then Coumba chimes in "I have to agree. I was asking when it will happen before because of the festivities; I was excited. There's a party the night before and afterwards. You spend three months with your grandma for sexual education, and you don't cry because beforehand your mother tells you that this is for your family's honor."[197] This is the only broadcast to my knowledge on French television which demonstrated the range of experiences and beliefs of West African women on excision, who came from different cultures, ethnicities, and geographies in Africa.

Postscript: From Paris to Dakar: CAMS and Senegalese Women's Activism in the Early 1980s

Black women's activism in the France in the 1970s focused on Black solidarity, uniting women from diverse backgrounds in France as Black because they shared the experience of discrimination and Othering based on race. Black women faced discrimination at feminist events, and a lack of understanding about their intersectional identities as Black, West African women,

[197] Christian Vidalie dir. Host Christophe Dechavanne *Ciel Mon Mardi* "Bernard Pierre Donnadieu" aired December 12, 1989 on TF 1.

in addition to others such as religion, ethnicity, nationality, and immigration status. However, as this chapter demonstrates, West African women were at the forefront of activism on excision in France. This fact is embodied in the history of CAMS as well. CAMS' membership in October of 1982 included women of West African, American, Afro-Cuban, and European descent from countries including France, Belgium, Senegal, Mali, the UK, Austria, and Germany.[198] The organization was founded by Awa Thiam, a Senegalese sociologist who came to France to complete her studies and eventually went back to Senegal. Seventy percent of the CAMS' board of directors were comprised of European women. Besides, Thiam, one of the leading figures of CAMS was Juliette Fouda Ondoa, a woman from Cameroon.[199]

In 1983, the Senegalese women in the group called for the resignation of the entire board of directors, the dissolution of the group, and its re-establishment with a new structure. They did so because of the "non-recognition, by certain French women, of the necessity for women to adapt their specific activism to the respective realities of their countries."[200] As far as the structure, they demanded that women from each nation establish a separate entity with their own autonomous leadership. The different sections would continue to work together transnationally as a coalition on certain issues, but they could also pursue the issues related to their local realities as well.[201]

They called the new organization CAMS-Internationale and sections in different countries took on different names. The Senegalese section named themselves *Femmes et Sociétés*, the French section became CAMS-F, the Belgian section CAMS-Belgium, the section

[198] Diallo, "L'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles," 1982, 24.
[199] Julienne Gauzin, "Conférence-débat" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* No. 312 1996, L.**,** 1982.
[200] CAMS- Internationale, *Femmes et Sociétés*: *Revue de la Commission Internationale pour l'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles.* No. 0. Dakar: Senegal, August 1983.
[201] Ibid

in the UK was The Women' Action Group. and the groups *Terre des femmes* and Amnesty for Women were based in Berlin.[202] The Senegalese section named their publication *Femmes et Sociétés* and envisioned it as a quarterly publication. The first issue appeared in August 1983. The second issue was published in December of the same year.[203] The circulation included Francophone Africa (CFA zone), Mali, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the United States.[204] They established the publication first and foremost as a voice for women's issues because, according to them, there were many periodicals now available in Senegal, but none of them addressed women's problems directly.

While I was only able to find only two issues of the publication *Femmes et Sociétés* they still provide a rich window into the vision of feminism that the Senegalese women had in 1983. Their feminism was transnational from the beginning because the issue of excision, the basis of the group, was a transnational issue. Awa Thiam formed the group CAMS while she lived in France and worked with other West African and European women. The group was concerned with the issue of excision both in France, on the continent of Africa, and anywhere else in the world that it occurred. Their vision of feminism was a praxis which acknowledged local realities as well as common over-arching issues that could unite women internationally. The authors of *Femmes et Sociétés* carefully give a context to each issue that they are discussing and avoid essentializing any group. For example, they are careful to point out that only certain groups in the content practice excision, noting the *Toukouleur* in Senegal, the *Bambara* in Mali and the *Somalie* in Somalia. They connect this issue to the larger issue the cult of virginity, which makes

[202] Ibid and Pepe Roberts, "Femmes et Sociétés: Revue de la Commission Internationale pour l'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles (CAMS- Internationale). No. 0. Dakar: Senegal, 1983.
[203] These are the only two issues that I have been able to find and am unsure if any more were published.
[204] The price was 500 CFA, 12 francs in France and $2 in the U.S.

this an issue of women's sexuality in general, a concern that women around the world have, given the fact that it was a central issue of the Women's Liberation movement since the 1960s.

The fact that the Senegalese women fractured the group and successfully called for a restructuring of the coalition with European women demonstrated how white feminists, although acknowledging the need for West African women's involvement in activism on excision, tended to homogenize the diversity of viewpoints and backgrounds of people on the continent and in the diaspora. More importantly, it also underscores that West African woman were a part of the conversation about excision from the beginning, and when they pushed for different strategies, European women listened. These women called for more autonomy from the CAMS coalition, and their voices made a difference. Without examining the history of the feminization of West African diaspora in France, their contributions to a diasporic and postcolonial feminist activism would have been overlooked or minimized, as they have until now.

Conclusions

One of the most significant contributions that West African women make to histories of feminisms are their critiques of Western culture. Since they frequently hold different perspectives from Westerners on gender, women, the body, and sexuality, they are able to offer a view of Western culture "from the outside" which calls into question the superiority that is taken for granted by Westerners when they speak about Africa, especially in terms of gender and women. As previous scholarship shows, French feminists often took a maternalistic view of West African women about excision, portraying them as helpless victims.[205] This attitude silenced the critiques that West African women leveled against the West, while pointing out that

[205] Duncan, "Confronting 'Race': French Feminism's Struggle to Become Global" in *Women's Activism : Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*, 2012, 183-197.

Western women were perhaps not as "liberated" as they believed. For example, doctor Marienne Diakite, a Malian doctor working in France in 1983 points out, "For you, French people: easy cesarean section, tubal ligation, all this is normal because it is part of your culture…. Here in France, you never ask yourselves what might a Malian women think, coming from the countryside, of a cesarean section or tubal ligation? She could also think of these interventions as mutilation, barbaric. Why? Because it is not part of her culture!"[206] She continues, "Violence practiced by Western medicine on women's bodies is frequently compared to excision and denounced by West Africans as well as French women."[207] MODEFEN draws attention to Western atrocities perpetrated under Nazism and slavery, pointing out that "savagery and barbary have never been geographic, but are rather sexist and patriarchal."[208] In this statement MODEFEN challenges the colonialist association of Africanness with savagery while also underlining that, whether in Africa or France, they both share the oppressions of sexism and patriarchy.[209]

West African descended people in France perceived that French media's coverage of excision was "over the top." One author stated, "A lot of ink has been spilled on this subject recently.**"**[210] Aicha Sissoko, president of the West African Women of Cergy, (a suburb of Paris), said in a television segment, "this phenomenon was sensationalized."[211] According to Assiatou Bah Diallo, Béatrice Elom and Yolande from the Black Women's Coordination state that they "declare themselves indignant by any over the top publicity on excision."[212] Likewise, they

---

[206] Tallon, "Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi," *Autrement* 49 (April 1983) : 154.
[207] Ibid
[208] MODEFEN. "Sur l'Infibulation et l'Excision en Afrique" *Bulletin de l'Association Française des Anthropologues,* Sept 1982, 50-54.
[209] Tallon, "Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi," *Autrement* 49 (April 1983) : 154.
[210] Diallo, "L'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*, 1982, 24.
[211] Dir. Olivier Bressy, Host André Bercoff , *Français si vous parliez* "Banlieue des femmes s'entêtent" aired March 1st, 1993 on France 3.
[212] Diallo, "Béatrice, Yolande et les Autres" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* January 1983, 34-35.

assert that they are not concerned with the same issues that the French media publicizes, such as excision, polygamy, dowry, and forced marriage. As far as excision, to them WHO has the resources to fight this practice and "West African women need to mobilize for other causes where they can be more efficient."[213] Not only was the publicity national in France, but it was also international. As Walley observes, "this tendency toward sensationalism draws on a long history in which sub-Saharan and North African women's bodies have been simultaneously exoticized and eroticized" and she adds: "Henry Louis Gates asks, "Is it, after all, unreasonable to be suspicious of Westerners who are exercised over female circumcision, but whose eyes glaze over when the same women are merely facing starvation?"[214]

Activism on excision continued in France into the 21st century and the issue was reflected in the media. In 1994, CAMS produced a short 15-minute film called *Bintou's Bet* (*le Pari de Bintou*) for West African women living in France or wanting to migrate there. It was meant to be shown in maternity wards, Child and Family Protection Centers (*Protection maternelle et infantile/*PMI), welfare offices, immigrant housing, and in West African countries. On February 15, 1996, a "Day of Education on Sexual Mutilation" was held in Paris. Berhane Ras-Work attended as the founder of CIAF (1984) and its current president. According to Doctor Franjou, president of GAMS, 13,000 women in France were excised and 4,500 girls were susceptible to it. Khady Koita, a member of GAMS comments on the French law of 1993 against it as "very harsh," with sentences of up to 15 years for performing an excision on a child under 15, 20 years if it's a parent or grandparent of the child.[215] It is clear the issue had made its mark on the hexagone.

---

[213] Ibid
[214] Walley, "Searching for 'Voices': Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations," *Cultural Anthropology*, 1997,420.
[215] Gauzin, "Conférence-débat" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*,1996, L.

A radio broadcast in 2000, *Regards sur Afrique*, investigates the legal history of excision cases in France following a 1999 case. For the first time, a young girl brought her parents to court for excising herself and her sisters. The narrator opens the segment by describing the "periodic debate in France: should we favor multicultural: the acceptance of all cultures in their specificities, their differences, or whether we should consider certain values as universal for everyone at all times in the entire nation. The question of the veil in France, a horrific question, excision, it's important to go back to the question of how to live together, engaging democracy."[216] This opening statement succinctly summarizes what the practice of excision and the reactions to it represented in France in the latter part of the twentieth century; colonial legacies of silence around excision in the colonies transformed into silence about it in the hexagon following postcolonial migration. Feminists both in the United States and Europe latched on to this issue because of their stance on violence against women and the importance of sexuality to the Western Women's Liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s. They were immediately met with resistance by West African women in both Europe and on the continent, who charged them with Eurocentrism and privileging the identity of "woman" above other aspects like race, national or ethnic origin, religion, etc. The French government, medical infrastructure, and judicial system intervened for the reasons that the radio narrator suggests; when this practice occurred on in the former metropole, it came to symbolize all the ways in which France was changing. The fear that these newcomers would not assimilate caused the French to intervene on behalf of the young girls. Between the 1970s and the turn of the millennium, the issue only gained momentum because while immigrants were supposed to

[216] *Le vif du sujet*, "Regards sur Afrique," aired on April 4, 2000 om France Culture.

assimilate, growing discrimination made it virtually impossible to do so. These tensions culminated in the uprisings of 2005, which took place a few years after this radio broadcast.

Coumba Touré, Assiatou Bah Diallo, Juliette Fouda Ondoa, Lydie Dooh-Bunya, Béatrice Elom, Aicha Sissoko, Berhane Ras-Work. These are names not usually associated with feminism in France, since the activism of these women focused on Black women's issues in France and West African women's issues worldwide. Their praxis was transnational, spanning both the West African continent and its diaspora in Europe. However, their activities in France forged a place for Black women activists in the 1980s, a mantle that has been taken up by women calling themselves afrofeminists in more recent years. At the same time that theorists like Chandra Mohanty critiqued Western feminism for its maternalistic and racist treatment of women of color from the so-called "Third World," women in the West African Diaspora in France were working at all levels to make a place for themselves in women's activism, both in the diaspora and on the continent. Their strategies, beliefs, and praxis are an essential history that can inform and educate feminist practice today.

CHAPTER 4: PERFORMING AND PRODUCING GENDERED BLACKNESS AND THE DIASPORA ON THE SILVER SCREEN

To many, French film is the ultimate cultural symbol. During the 1980s and 90s, films on the West African Diaspora helped the French public to explore the possibilities of what the racial, cultural, and ethnic future of France could be. The first French feature films about the West African Diaspora which were produced in the 1980s by white French people, were comedies that attempted to conveyed a sense of hope for racial and cultural harmony in France.[217] Arguing once again for the significance of West African women's migration in shaping the French nation at the turn of the 21st century, this chapter focuses on images produced about and by West African diasporic women in the late twentieth and early 21st century. It investigates how the medium of film contributed to shaping images of West African women in the French cultural sphere. The uprisings in the *banlieue* of multiple French cities in 2005 ushered in a new era of films, also analyzed in this chapter, dominated by *banlieue* films and documentaries, which examine the social inequalities and segregation people living in these areas face. As this chapter will demonstrate, it was at this point that female characters became more complex.

Despite the fact that roles for Black women are few and far between, West African descended women in France emerged as leaders in the direction and production of 21st century films on the West African diasporic experience. Their work speaks out against and contradicts their continued social and cultural marginalization. These women continue to develop strategies and rhetoric that challenge stereotypical images of Blackness in France and subvert the symbolic violence that continues to affect Black people, whose bodies are invariably equated with the

[217] *Black Mic Mac* Directed by Thomas Gilou France, Tamasa Distribution, 1986, *Romuald et Juliette*, Directed by Colline Serreau, Tamasa Distribution, 1987.

space of the *banlieue*, crime and poverty. Cinematic representation both produces and reflects the ways in which the French social imaginary now includes West African-descended people in the definition of "Frenchness." Shaped by the context of French republicanism, diasporic women filmmakers sought to show that Black bodies do not always have to perform Blackness. Instead, their films illustrate how the Black body can be used to depict universal themes on the big screen.

This chapter first examines *Black Mic Mac* and *Romauld and Juliette*, two of the earliest French feature films to depict the existence of the West African Diaspora in France. I contrast these films against later films in order to illustrate the shift in the image of the diaspora as mainly masculine and urban to one that is set in the *banlieue* and which includes a more balanced population of men and women. In the early films the female protagonist's roles are primarily that of the love interest of male protagonists. When the *banlieue* became the subject of a series of films in the 1990s, women played minor roles in these films at first. Next, I turn to films made in the post 2005 moment when the conversation about the *banlieue* became more focused on structural inequalities. Many artists and activists—including both Black and white female and male filmmakers—sought to explore the causes of the riots through cultural productions at this time.

While films on the West African diaspora—whether by male or female filmmakers- proliferated in the late twentieth and early 21st centuries, roles for women, especially Black women, remain limited. In the second part of this chapter, I explore the image of women in the banlieue with an examination of the films *Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera* (2008) (made by a white man, François Dupeyron); *Bande de Filles* (2015) (made by a white woman, Cécile Sciamma), and *Les Misérables* (2018) (made by a Black man, Ladj Ly). These films from the early twenty-first

century, which are made by either male or white female filmmakers, begin to complicate the images of women that were visible in the earliest films of the West African diaspora. The last part of the chapter delves into the recent work of West African female filmmakers, namely Euzhan Palcy, Alice Diop, Yamina Benguigui, and Dyana Gueye, to explore how they navigate their identities as filmmakers such that they are inclusive of their multi-cultural origins while at the same time resisting identification as *Black* filmmakers. Finally, this chapter explores how these women ceaselessly strive to create new spaces where women's stories can be told.

Section 1: Fantasies of Racial Harmony in the late twentieth Century: From the City to the *Banlieue*

As the demographics of France, and Paris in particular changed, the diaspora began to shape the French film industry. The most notable Black actress first to take the stage was Josephine Baker, an African American woman from St. Louis, in the 1920s. As scholar Eileen Julien asserts, West African American performers such as Josephine Baker served as bridges between French and West African cultures.[218] Baker's dances also tapped into historical French images of the Black female body, namely, the Black Venus (which originated with the fascination for Sara Baartman, known as the Hottentot Venus in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century) that were promoted in the early twentieth century by the interest in France in "negrophilia" that emerged in the 1920s.[219] Theater had already begun to reflect demographic

[218] Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small. *Black Europe and the African Diaspora,* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.
[219] T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus : Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French,* Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1999, Brett A Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire: the Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France,* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.

transformations at work in the metropole in the 1950s, when students from the Caribbean and Africa formed the first Black theater troupe, *Compagnie Les Griots,* in 1956.[220]

Baker remained the largest icon of Black femininity in France until the 1980s. During this decade, movies became a major vector for the exploration of a new image of France as a multi-ethnic nation, with films about the West African Diaspora at the center. The comedy *Black Mic Mac*, released in 1986, was the first French feature film which centered on the Black West African Diaspora in Paris. It opened a space for conversations about racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in France, where such conversations were not (and are still not) widely accepted. Its cast was primarily comprised of Black actors and the crew included people of West African descent as well. Because "comedy creates an environment where race can be spoken about directly, and often times harshly," the genre of comedy provides a safe means to experiment with politically and socially taboo subjects like race and ethnicity. [221] In fact, multiple scholars have argued that comedy provides a means to subvert racial and ethnic stereotypes, even as it sometimes reproduces them.[222] The fictional space created by comedy allowed for more frank depictions of the French nation which included West African diasporic subjects and the urban infrastructure they shaped in the late twentieth century, however, roles for women remained limited to the love interest and the Mammy character. As we shall see, these roles are demonstrated in one of the most iconic films of the period, *Black Mic Mac.*

---

[220] The *Compagnie Les Griots* was the first theatre company to consist of all Black actors of African origin, including a Haitian actress and musician named Toto Bissanthe. Griot included actors from the Caribbean and West Africa whose trajectories illustrate the transnational character of the African Diaspora in France, beginning with the name, which refers to the griot tradition of oral storytelling in African societies. The Griots notoriety rose to prominence in 1959 when they performed Jean Genet's *Les Nègres*, a play which portrays racial discrimination and stereotypes and was a success, even playing off broadway in New York.

[221] Aaryn L Green and Annulla Linders, "The Impact of Comedy on Racial and Ethnic Discourse," *Sociological Inquiry* 86, no. 2 (May 2016): 241–69.

[222] Katja Antoine, "'Pushing the Edge' of Race and Gender Hegemonies through Stand-up Comedy: Performing Slavery as Anti-racist Critique," Etnofoor 28, no. 1 (2016): 35-54, John Mundy and Glyn White, *Laughing Matters : Understanding Film, Television and Radio Comedy*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Black Mic Mac, directed by Thomas Gilou (a white Frenchman), and released in 1986, was, as one commentator put it, "one of those rare surprises of the season," with an audience of 400,000 in Paris and more than 800,000 in France. It was also released in Switzerland, Belgium, and Canada.[223] The film depicts the story of a white Public Sanitation Inspector who gets duped in more ways than one by slick con artists of West African descent who are experts at *mic mac* (translated as shenanigans, wheeling and dealing, or hustling). The film employed over 1000 Black actors as extras and featured 70 in speaking roles; the crew was also comprised of West African descended people. [224] It was a surprise hit because up until that point, producers thought films featuring Black protagonists would not attract French, mostly white, viewers. Television programmers had passed on broadcasting the film because one scene in Bambara required subtitles. However, one review noted that there was major change from the original script: it was decided that at least one of the main protagonists had to be white, so that the white audience would have someone to identify with. The role of the Public Sanitation Inspector served this purpose.[225]

The first French feature film to depict the existence of a Black West African Diaspora in France was significant because it presented a Black community to mostly white French spectators who, because they lived outside major cities, often had little contact with it. To my knowledge, both Francophone and Anglophone scholars have overlooked *Black Mic Mac,* although North African and Beur films have received much scholarly attention.[226] As filmmakers

[223] O.S., "Rencontre avec le réalisateur de « Black Micmac »" *Le Monde* June 26, 1986, Florence Raillard "Le premier film coté en brousse," *Le Matin du Cinéma,* April 23, 1986.
[224] Michel Cressole, "Mic Mac chez les Blacks," *Libération,* February 14, 1986
[225] Raillard, "Le premier film coté en brousse," 1986.
[226] Orlando, Valérie. "From Rap to Raï in the Mixing Bowl: Beur Hip-Hop Culture and Banlieue Cinema in Urban France." *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 3 (January 2003): 395–415, Higbee, Will. *Post-Beur Cinema : North African Émigré and Maghrebi-French Filmmaking in France Since 2000* . Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, Caillé, Patricia. "A Tunisian Film Festival in Paris: Issues in Reception at the Intersection of French and

increasingly took an interest in the West African Diaspora as a subject, the infrastructure for this niche topic in the film industry developed. Gérard Noyer and Christine Chiquenet were hired to cast *Black Mic Mac*.[227] Noyer soon became known as the specialist for casting Black people in the 1980s in France. A 1988 segment of *Assiette Anglais,* a French culture show on Antenne 2 (now France 2) from 1987-9, shows his casting methods.[228] Speaking multiple West African languages, he is shown on camera combing the streets of Paris' West African neighborhoods soliciting amateur actors to play extras in films as needed.[229] Since the segment aired in 1988, it seems likely that many of the techniques Noyer demonstrates on TV were developed during the casting of *Black Mic Mac* only a few years prior. At that time, he held an open casting call for Black people because there were not enough professional Black actors in France to fill all of the roles in the film's majority Black cast.

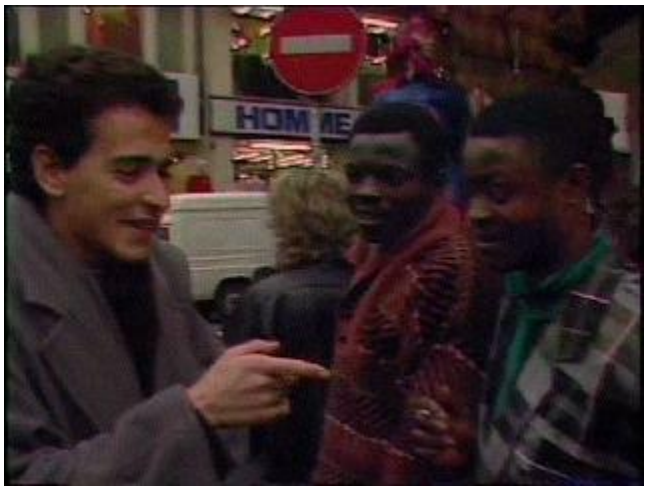


Figure 13. Gérard Noyer on *Assiette Anglais.*

Anglo-American Approaches to Cultural Analysis of the Diasporas." French Cultural Studies 21, no. 2 (May 2010): 85–96. McKinney, Mark. French Cinema and Postcolonial Minorities: Post-Colonial Cultures in France," London ; New York :: Routledge,, 2013.

[227] Alain Riou, "Noir Mic Mac," *Nouvel Observateur,* April 15 1988.

[228] The show also featured one of the first journalists who was Black woman named, Rahmatou Keïta who was born in Niger.

[229] *Assiette Anglais,* "Casting de Blacks," aired on January 30, 1988 on Antenne 2.

Black Mic Mac depicts the newly formed spaces of the West African Diaspora in Paris for French viewers, primarily around the areas known as *Goutte d'or, Gare de Lyon,* and *Barbes-Rochechouard*. These spaces are delineated first and foremost because they are spaces where a majority of residents have West African origins. The settings of the film include a *foyer*, where male workers from Africa lived together and recreated their village practices in the urban space of Paris. Black night clubs also figure predominately, as multiple scenes take place in these spaces where West African style music plays and young people gather in the evening to dance or the Congolese *Sapeurs* put on a fashion show. Many night clubs like these existed in Paris and its environs, as well as in other major cities in France at this time.[230] These spaces correspond with the real Black Paris which was in the midst of being constructed, as my previous chapter elaborated.

Significantly, the spaces within the West African Diaspora are gendered and women's roles are limited in *Black Mic-Mac*. Whereas men's numbers dominate in the night clubs and the *foyers*, other spaces are dominated by West African women. For example, the character of Aida, played by Lydie Ewande, holds a supporting role in the film; Aida is the owner of a restaurant serving Senegalese food. As demonstrated by the fact that the character Lemi (one of the main protagonists in the film) goes to see her as soon as he lands in France, Aida is the head of the family in France. Aida's restaurant is another gathering spot in the film. The restaurant is most

[230] For details in print see: Monde à Paris and Catherine Bastard, "Guide Paris-Black," Brigitte Tallon and Maurice lemoine, eds. *Autrement*, 49, April 1983, 255-297, Joseph Moumi de Bakondji, ed. *EuroBlack Business Guide*, Paris: 98 av. Parmentier, 75011, 1990, V. Mathias, "Les Nuits 'Black' de Paris," *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*, Paris : December 1983, 49, on TV: *Infovision*, "Afrique : Capitale Paris," aired on May 15, 1986 on TF1.

likely based on an actual restaurant in Paris called Chez Aida, a Senegalese restaurant located at 48 rue Polonceau, in the eighteenth district of Paris run by Aida Ka.[231]

Finally, the beauty salon is the one space in the film reserved for women; in this space they discuss their lives and develop plans to reach their goals. Lemi, Aida's cousin, comes in to ask her to help him coax the health inspector into being lenient. It is significant that he comes to a space where women hold power as entrepreneurs, owners, and creators. That he is asking his cousin for a favor in this space further underlies that women hold the power there. She volunteers that her friend Anisette, played by Felicité Wouassi, can help him. Wouassi wows the inspector so much that he falls in love with her as well. The inspector later helps her to escape a police raid of a squat. A major plotline is hatched in the salon, underscoring the importance of women's roles as entrepreneurs within the salon environment that was previously discussed in Chapter Two.

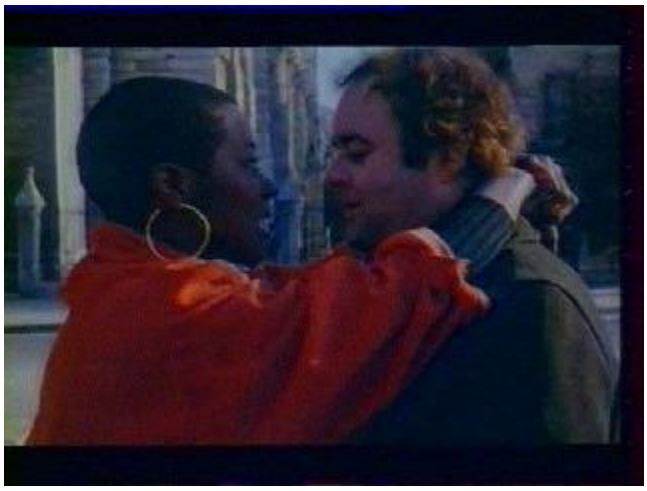


Figure 14. Clip from *Black Mic Mac* on "Afrique: Capitale Paris," aired May 15, 1986 on TF1.

[231] Moussa Traore, "La Cuisine Sénégalaise à Paris," *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*, Paris: July 1982, 31. "Percer dans Restauration" *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*, Paris: October 1983, 18, "Aida Ka," *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*, Paris: June 15, 1985, 21.

For all that it features Black performers and Black spaces, *Black Mic Mac* is far from flattering; it portrays the West African community in Paris as both hustling con artists and as unsanitary, since the main thrust of the plot is Villeret's attempt to condemn the West African's *foyer* as a public health threat. A secondary story line features the previously mentioned Lemi, who steals the identity of a *marabout* (an Islamic spiritual leader) sitting next to him on the plane from Senegal to France in order to con the men in the *foyer* out of their money (the men had sent for this *marabout* in hopes that his spiritual guidance would assist them in evading their impending eviction for sanitation reasons, since they had no place to go and did not want to lose their community). The figure of the *marabout* was fixated on by French colonial administrators and ethnologists as the equivalent of a witch doctor.[232] The police raid at the end of the movie seems warranted given the antics of the characters, and viewers are rewarded with a performance of West African conviviality and ignorance when Lemi is interrogated by police.

At the beginning of the film, the white French characters view the West Africans as foreign and inassimilable. The commentaries and interactions between Black West Africans and French health inspectors when they enter the *foyer* strikingly demonstrate the degree of incomprehension between them. One inspector enters the room, where it is obvious that several men are sleeping, and says, "Normally this room is meant for two" and one of the two men who happen to be in the room responds by counting them, "one, two." In another shot, the inspector opens a door to a small closet filled with garbage and comments, "I see the garbage but no bin." Before leaving, one of the inspectors says, "You know what I found in the soap dish? An egg." It is evident from these examples that the film is using comedy to mock the conditions that West

[232] George R. Trumbull IV, "French Colonial Knowledge of Maraboutism" *Islam and the European Empires*.ed. David Motadel, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Africans are living in. This derogatory depiction of the *foyers* serves to differentiate West African descended people from the French, but, not unpredictably, the structural causes for these conditions are not interrogated. Interestingly, the film also uses satire to portray the French as comical. The extent to which they are ignorant of West African or Black people is extensive, and surprising so, given France's colonial past. The inspectors uncritically enforce the health standards, stating that they are demolishing the *foyer* because it is a public health risk, so it is for the residents' own good, showing a complete lack of awareness that in doing so, they are rendering the residents homeless. The lack of empathy shown by the French characters in these opening scenes is striking.

Black Mic Mac also depicts a generational difference between older and younger West African immigrants living in Paris, which conveys—at least to those viewers paying attention—the cultural adaption and hybridity of the second generation of West African migrants. The younger generation masters the French language, wears Western clothes, and overall moves through Paris with ease. The older generation, in contrast, are more "traditional"; for example, they believe in the powers of the *marabout* to stop their home from being destroyed through the use of what whites view as "silly" rituals.

The narrative arc followed by Le Gorgues, the health inspector, metaphorically represents the idea that the French can, in time, learn to understand, live with, and even find enjoyment in the presence of West African people in this lighthearted comedy. Over the course of the film Le Gorgues moves from total ignorance to becoming an ally of the West African community. At the beginning of the film when he inspects the *foyer*, he shows no remorse in telling the men that it will be closed for their own good. Another early scene makes it clear that he views the West African population of Paris as a political pawn rather than as human beings; when speaking to a

politician on the phone who says that closing the *foyer* would not be good politically, he counters by telling his interlocuter that it will garner him votes because it will benefit public health. However, Le Gorgues gradually forges cultural connections through interpersonal contact. Lemi, in an effort to put a hex on Le Gorgues with the help of a marabout, pretends to befriend Le Gorgues and takes him out to a Black nightclub. It is there that Le Gorgues meets Anisette, who charms him.

Delving into the press media for reviews of *Black Mic* Mac offers a rare chance to read how French people discussed race and racism in the late 1980s and to analyze what and how they wrote about it. The French popular cinematic media argued that *Black Mic Mac* served a pedagogic role that, in representing the West African Diaspora in France for French viewers for the first time could help reshape the social imaginary to include a more diverse France. Advertised as the first film about the West African Bush ("*premier film coté brousse*"), many film journalists characterized the film as sociological or ethnographic in nature. As a review in *Le Point* states "Subject: describe the habits and customs of the West African community in Paris." The review then goes on to call it an "ethnic touristic walk."[233] Reviewers acknowledge the film's role in introducing a different culture to white viewers within the French nation. As previous chapters mention, these spaces were recent additions to the French urban landscape, and the film reviews imply the viewers were not yet familiar with these spaces.

Despite its stereotypical, often demeaning portrayals of West African characters, film reviewers also consistently characterized the film as antiracist. Gérard Lefort, in a review in *Liberation* asserts that the film is "intelligently sympathetic," explaining how viewers "discover here what we already knew was right down the street from our white doormats but was rarely

[233] J-M.F., "Black Mic Mac de Thomas Gilou," *Le Point,* April 28, 1986.

filmed with such affection: West Africans, their particularities, their agreements, their rivalries, their way of cobbling together life in France."[234] Lefort hits the nail on the head with these statements. His term, "intelligent sympathy" translates to "antiracism" in the other reviews.[235] It is telling, however, that these film critics view a sympathetic portrayal, a humanization, of West Africans as antiracist. Indeed, such simplistic definitions of antiracism (and racism, for that matter), no longer hold water, if they ever did.

The film's producer, Monique Arnaud, nonetheless reportedly intended the movie to be antiracist. Arnaud, a white woman, had spent twenty years living in Senegal and Cameroon as an agent of French cooperation in post-Independence West Africa. Discussing the film's sequel, *Black Mic Mac 2* in *Nouvel Observateur,* she states, "The original *Black Mic Mac* was a comedy-parody, pleasantly antiracist" whereas *Black Mic Mac 2* (1988) "goes even farther in presenting a series of situations that show that at their core, Blacks and Whites are exactly the same."[236] The film's director, Thomas Gilou, ethnologically studied and observed the West African community for two months before making the film, demonstrating that he wanted to learn about the community before filming it.[237] Despite their good intentions (and the prevalence of the term "antiracist" in film reviews) the film itself fails to interrogate the ways in which French colonial history and contemporary immigration policies were largely responsible for the squalor in which the characters live, and for the incomprehension of West African descended people by people of European decent despite a long history of connections between them.

Notwithstanding professions of antiracism, reviews of *Black Mic Mac* consistently map Blackness onto the urban space of the ghetto, a theme explored in the previous chapter. Thomas

[234] Gérard Lefort "Un Sacré Mic-Mac," *Libération,* April 26-27, 1986, 24.
[235] Ibid
[236] Raillard, "Le premier film coté en brousse," 1986.
[237] Alain Riou, "Noir Mic-Mac," *Nouvel Observateur,* April 15-21, 1988, III.

Gilou, the film's director, references the stereotype of "ghetto Black" in the *Nouvel Observateur*.[238] An article in *Le Canard Enchainé* points out that while the film's setting is "the rue Mâcon [a street in the 12th district of Paris near Gare de Lyon]" it makes "no allusion to Chalon" an area known for drug activity.[239] Journalist Florence Raillard reports that Monique Arnaud, the film's producer, echoed the desire to break stereotypes that associate Blackness with poverty and criminality: "With *Black Mic Mac*, she states that she wanted to make a "true West African film, funny, without the ghetto."[240] These quotes suggest that they envisioned themselves as transgressing the caricature of the ghetto, showing that they attempted to break stereotypes.

Reviewers place the film *Black Mic Mac* in the new genre of Black cinema in France. "After Beur [a Verlan term for 2nd generation people of North African descent] cinema, now we have Black cinema" observes one film critic in the highly regarded *Cahiers du Cinéma*.[241] Another observes, "It has become clear, after the success of *Rue, Cases Nègres* and *Dieux sont tombés sur la tête* [films set in Martinique and South Africa, respectively], that the French public has become infatuated with the Black population. At least on screen." Black people had lived in France since before the French Revolution, and in larger numbers since the 1920s. It took another 60 years for French filmmakers to believe that they would make a marketable subject for film. It is worth nothing that just three years after the National Front made major victories in elections, *Black Mic-Mac* comes along, showing cultural and harmony at the end of the film.

Black people's experiences in French film and theater contradict media professions of antiracism. Black actors and actresses in France frequently attest to the difficulties that their race

[238] Ibid
[239] P.V., "Black Mic Mac," *Le Canard Enchainé*, April 23, 1986.
[240] Florence Raillard "Le premier film coté en brousse," 1986.
[241] A.d.B. "Black Mic-Mac" *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 385, June 1986, 66.

poses in finding work in France because of typecasting. Lydie Ewande, considered one of the first West African actresses to gain notoriety in both French theater and film during the 1980s and 90s, worked with *Compagnie Les Griots* theatre troupe and played Aida, the aunt of the main protagonists and a restaurant owner in *Black Mic Mac*. In fact, Ewande was so popular at that time that in a 1985 interview *Amina* magazine noted, "a big theater representation or film shoot with Blacks rarely occurs without the artistic participation of Lydie Ewande." In this print interview, Lydie Ewande makes several observations about being a Black actor in France. She states:

> There is a typically French quandary. The French colonized us and they maintain the same image of Africa from that time so well that even in their theaters, there is almost always a role for a Black and not for an actor, actress**.** This role for a Black person, they write it with every cliché of colonial times. So almost all the offers are riddled with this state of affairs. We, immigrants in France, tend to only identify with people of the same nationality as us, Ivoiriens prefer performing with Ivorians, Cameroonians with their countrymen.[242]

Just a few years later, in 1989 Colline Serreau (the daughter of Jean-Marie Serreau who worked with *Compagnie Les Griots*) wrote and directed *Romauld et Juliette*, a romantic comedy which explores an interracial and intercultural relationship between a white middle class man and a Black working-class woman. If this film is an example of a Black woman in a lead role when very few existed, it also marks a shift in depictions of the geography of the diaspora from that of

[242] Solange Agnimel, "Lydia Ewande: une Comédienne Accomplie," *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*, Paris: July 15, 1986, 12-13.

a predominately male urban space to that of a suburban space with a more balanced proportion of the sexes.

The synopsis goes as follows: Romauld works as an executive in a yogurt company, and Juliette cleans his office in the evenings. Juliette lives in the banlieue with her five children in public housing (hebergement à loyer modèré, known as HLMs). She has five ex-husbands, and vows to remain single for the rest of her life because she is "done with men." Romauld has a successful upper middle-class life which includes a housewife and two children, a boy and a girl. At work Romauld is framed by his co-workers for product tampering. He nearly loses his job, but for Juliette. While cleaning the offices, she finds evidence of the plot and informs Romauld, who has never noticed her before, even though she has cleaned his office for years. When he needs to go into hiding, she opens her home and family to him. Juliette ultimately helps Romauld get his job back. Later, when her son is arrested on drug charges, she goes to Romauld for help to pay for a lawyer. However, Romauld is travelling for work and his secretary does not take Juliette seriously, so the secretary does not pass the message on to him. Despite the interference of the blatantly racist secretary, the film nevertheless concludes with Romauld (whose wife was cheating on him) wooing and marrying Juliette, and, of course, saving her from a life of toil on the outskirts of Paris.

The opening scenes of *Romauld et Juliette* depict the title characters as living in completely different worlds, representing the cavern that racially separates different socioeconomic classes and spaces in France. This sequence cuts back and forth between their daily lives and emphasizes the differences between the life of the upper middle class, codified in the film as white, and the working class, represented as Black. Romauld's wife prepares their children, a boy and a girl, for school and then goes back to bed. Juliette gets her five kids off to

school and runs errands and cooks during the day, and in the evening goes to work cleaning the office. She takes a bus and the subway from the banlieue to the center of Paris. While her family lives in an HLM with an elevator that has been broken for months and she is behind on the rent, Romauld's kids ask him for spending money, which he easily gives. The two characters embody opposites not just racially but in their body types; many of the film reviews are quick to point out Juliette's "curvy," "voluptuous" form contrasts against Romuald's thin frame. One reviewer, Gerard Lefort, explicitly states that "[Juliette] doesn't exactly coincide with advertising's canonic view that slender is beautiful."[243] Another review in *La Croix* cheekily referred to her as the "Mata Hari of wastepaper bins."[244] Clearly, the full-figured Juliette makes quite a stir on screen and off.

The media position this film as a utopic modern day fairy tale which reflects the issues of the day. A film critic in *L'express* observes that the film "challenges received ideas" about business, racism, and mixed-race couples.[245] Thus the ending of the film where Romauld and Juliette and their children live happily ever after in a nice house that Romauld bought for them is a fantasy, as is the racial tolerance and compatibility that it suggests. Of course, these events echo colonial ideas about the *mission civilisatrice* in which the white race save West Africans from their backward and traditional ways. The fact that their families seamlessly and easily merge, as depicted in the scene when Romauld takes his kids to meet Juliette's and they are only aghast for a few moments until Juliette breaks the ice by saying, "Yes we are Black. Welcome!" is clearly a fairytale. Outside this utopic cinematic realm, their lives would be vastly different, and the joining of the families would be difficult to say the least.

[243] Gérard Lefort, "Romuald et Juliette," *Libération*, March 22, 1989.
[244] Violaine Gelly, "Romuald et Juliette" *La Croix* March 23, 1989.
[245] Sophie Grassin, "Romuald et Juliette," *L'Express*, March 17, 1989, 120.

Black Mic Mac and *Romauld and Juliette* employ comedy, antics, and fairy tale in order to paint a harmonious picture of French and West African culture in the hexagon, underscoring the message that if Black people assimilate and become "French" culturally, good things will follow. At the same time that the racism resurged in France with the rise of the National Front, concerns about temporary migration turned permanent began to mount. The comedy genre allowed filmmakers to depict a hopeful future in which the difficulties of cross-cultural communication and connection are glossed over. The meanings of race and racism, and their intersection with gender, are never fully interrogated, and therefore never fully challenged. Furthermore, roles for women remain limited both in frequency and in complexity. In *Black Mic-Mac*, the roles of Anisette, the love interest, and the role of Aida, the restaurateur, are significant only in relation to the men in their lives. In *Romauld and Juliette*, the female protagonist is once again the love interest for Romauld. The primary difference is that the geography of the West African Diaspora shifts from an urban setting to the *banlieue*, a theme explored even further in the next section.

Section 2: Complication Stereotypes: The West African Woman in the Banlieue

With a Little Help from Myself (*Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera*) is a 2008 film which centers on the experience of an West African descended woman trying to keep her family above water. The film opens in a hair salon, again underlying the importance of the space in diasporic women's lives (a theme developed in chapter 2). Sonia played by Felicité Wouassi (who previously played the female lead Anisette in *Black Mic Mac*), is having her hair done the day of her daughter's wedding. She celebrates excitedly with the salon owner and other clients in the salon. In this role, she portrays a wife and mother of unnamed West African descent, with three kids in an

HLM in the banlieue. This lighthearted, happy first scene is misleading, as the film is more of a dramedy with a darker tone than earlier films like *Black Mic Mac* and *Romauld and Juliette*. When Sonia returns from the salon, her husband informs her that he has already spent the money put aside for the wedding. Later, Sonia finds he has passed away in bed. Not wanting to ruin her daughter's day and in need of his pension checks, she hides his body in her elderly neighbor's home where she works as a home aide. Throughout the film, Sonia struggles to keep her family together. Her younger teenage daughter reveals she is seven months pregnant, and her son is arrested for involvement in drugs. She ends up burying her husband's body in the basement of the building with the help of her neighbor, who later coerces her into sexual acts before dying as well. While the tone has shifted, it is evident from these events that Sonia's character resembles that of the leading lady in *Romauld and Juliette* from nearly 20 years prior. In the 1980s, the Black female body was imprinted in the geography of the banlieue and public housing, often showing women as single mothers who supported multiple children. However, the roles for women become more widespread and more complex by the 2000s.

To more fully comprehend what the *banlieue* has come to represent in the French social imaginary, we must delve into the historical and filmic context of the urban environment in France. On October 27, 2005, a group of young men were walking home after playing soccer in Clichy-sous-Bois, a suburb of Paris. As they walked past a construction site, a neighbor called the police to report an attempted robbery. When the police arrived, the young men acted by instinct, and fled. Three ran into an electricity station to hide; they were all electrocuted. Two, Zyed Benna, seventeen and of North African descent, and Bouna Traoré, fifteen and of sub-Saharan West African descent, died as a result. Their deaths sparked three weeks of riots in the

banlieue of all major cities in France, culminating in the declaration of a state of emergency on November 7th.[246]

Foreshadowing these historical events, 1995's *La Haine*, set in Marseilles and directed by Matthew Kassovitz, was a watershed film in its depiction of a day in the life of three young men of Jewish, North and Sub-Saharan West African descent from a housing project in the Parisian banlieue. The film conveys the complexity of their experience struggling to find a way out of the housing projects as well as their varied interactions with the police both in the banlieue and in Paris proper. Kassovitz made his movie in the context of increasing concern over police violence against youth from immigrant origins sparked by the death of Makomé M'bowole, a seventeen-year-old, who was shot in the head at point blank range while in police custody during the course of an interrogation in 1993. [247] By 2005, young men had learned to fear police brutality, which is why Benna and Traoré fled when they saw the police. *La Haine* also foreshadowed a change in tone from the earlier comedic portrayals of the West African Diaspora in France. Gone are the days of happy endings. The post-2005 moment ushered in new examinations of the socioeconomic inequity that plagued French society and caused the riots in October and November of that year.

In *With a Little Help from Myself*, as the title suggests (in both French and English), the film exclusively follows the trajectory of the main protagonist, Sonia, who is left to her own devices Since her husband dies at the beginning of the film, she is not partnered in the film until the end, when she meets someone knew (and it is implied, better; someone who will not gamble away the money for their daughter's wedding). At the start of the film, she finds herself in a

[246] Thomas Crampton, "Behind the Furor, the Last Moments of Two Youths." *The New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2005.
[247] Steven Jacks, "*La Haine* or Culture Wars in Paris and the *Banlieues*" in *African Images: Recent Studies and Text in Cinema*, eds. 1st Africa World Press, Inc., ed. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000.

predicament, and she proceeds to take unusual actions for the survival of her and her children under difficult circumstances. Living in the *banlieue* is not easy, but somehow, she begins to thrive at the end of the film. The character Sonia is a complex one. She is extremely quick thinking and concerned for her children's happiness, hiding her husband's body instead of interrupting the wedding, which would undoubtedly be cancelled if his death was made public.

The 2015 film, *Girlhood* (*Bande de Filles)* from white French filmmaker Celine Sciamma is one of the first French feature films to explore the subject of Black female adolescence. The film takes place in the setting of the banlieue and follows the story of a young girl's entry into a clique with three other girls like herself who form a close emotional bond while engaging in theft, fights, and gang activity. The film garnered positive reviews, in both the Franco and Anglophone worlds, but has been criticized by other camps. On one hand, the film focuses on the experiences of Black female adolescents for the first time on the silver screen. It echoes some of the themes from earlier *banlieue* films. The characters are from the banlieue, and a trip to the city center of Paris is a novelty in their lives, bringing attention to the geographic disparities in the population as well as the inequities of access to the public transportation system. Sciamma, the filmmaker elaborates on her inspiration for the film; her desire to depict the experience of adolescent girls in France. She states:

> There is no safe space for girls. The neighborhood outside and even at home, the men make the rules and there is an authority the girls have to live by. But when they go to a public space like the city, it's kind of a stage where they get to perform and be better versions of themselves. For the intimate spaces, they have to rent a hotel room so they can be who they truly they are.[248]

[248] ReBecca Theodore-Vachon, "Interview: Black Women's Lives Matter in "Girlhood"," *Roger Ebert.com*, February 07, 2015.

When the girls go into Paris, a scene shows them carefully surveilled in the store because of the association with Blackness and crime. Another scene shows Vic, the main character who is Black, being "guided" into a technical track for high school rather than the regular track which is more likely to lead to post-secondary education. In an interview, Karidja Touré, an amateur actress from the Paris banlieue who plays the lead character confirms that these experiences are commonplace: "The same thing happened to me…Although the white students with the same grades were allowed to pursue regular studies, I found myself in a class full of Arab and Black students, like we weren't clever or dedicated enough for a real career."[249]

Girlhood also delves into Black female subjectivity more broadly. One of the most notable scenes from the film is when the girls dance together to the Rihanna song "Diamonds." In this moment of female solidarity, the girls connect with the music of a wider global diaspora (Rihanna is from Barbados and now lives in the United States). The film also explores Marieme's experience with domestic violence at the hands of her older brother, the authority figure in the house since her mom works long hours. She tries to avoid her sexualization when she goes to live with Abou, a drug dealer, by binding her breasts and wearing baggy clothing. Her efforts are unsuccessful however, and she finally flees his house when he comes on to her. Importantly, scholars and activists have questioned the film's contributions to the representation of the West African Diaspora in France.[250] Mame-Fatou Niang, for example, cites the fetishization and animalization of the Black female body in *Girlhood*. Sciamma acknowledges this to a certain degree when she observes, "If I had the urge to look at them, then others do

[249] Alice Pfeiffer, "Girlhood: the Film that Busts the Myth of Conventional French Femininity," *The Guardian.com*, May 4, 2015, HeyUGuys, "Karidja Touré Exclusive Interview – Girlhood," YouTube Video, 8:42, May 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e40wx8DxORw.

[250] See for example anacademic's take and an online blogger's: Mame-Fatou Niang. *Identités Françaises: Banlieues, Féminités Et Universalisme*. Boston : Brill, 2020, Tewolde-Berhan, Awra. "Girlhood - A Review: Fatally Flawed Examination of a Young Black French Girl's Life." Whats On Africa, December 23, 2015. https://whatsonafrica.org/girlhood-sciamma-2014-review/.

too."[251] The film's portrayal of violence and theft as empowering for the girls has also been questioned. It is important to note that the direct translation of the French title, *Bande de Filles,* or Girl Gang (the word *bande* meaning gang) seems to equate the female solidarity that the girls find in the film with criminality and delinquency, the stereotypes of people of color and the banlieue in France. The film ends when Marieme returns to her building in the *cité* and rings the bell. She hesitates, however, about going back into the building, suggesting to the viewer that she does not desire to return to her old life; she has grown up, learned, and wants another path. Her delinquent period provides much needed homosocial contact and reinforcement, but she is ready to stand on her own now. What her future holds is as unknown for the viewer and the character' as for the director and writer, Céline Sciamma, who admits, "This isn't a film about being Black in France; that's not my role. I like to show depth in people who are invisible, or usually used as background, stereotypical roles."[252] Her wording here is interesting. It's "not her role" to make a film about being Black but she can make a film about Black people; she refuses to acknowledge the significance of race to Black people in France

Sciamma, known for her explorations of female adolescence and gender and sexual fluidity in her first two films, insists her specialization is the female experience, not the experience of being Black in France. Yet the salience of race in *Girlhood* or any *banlieue* film cannot be denied. In some ways, the film draws on the stereotypes of the *banlieue*. However, criminality seems to be just a phase in Marieme's life, a growth experience, and at the end she is stronger and more independent. After all, she is on her own in these last scenes, eschewing all external influences in her life. In her hesitation to return home, she shows her desire for change,

[251] HeyUGuys, "Director Céline Sciamma Exclusive Interview – Girlhood," YouTube Video, 9:05, May 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_hcQy3-G8Y.
[252] Quoted in Alice Pfeiffer, "Girlhood: the Film that Busts the Myth of Conventional French Femininity," *The Guardian.com*.

for something different. Marieme did fall into, or choose the road of delinquency for a time, but it makes her stronger and does not define her future. Female bonding is another theme of the film, a source of the protagonist's strength and growth. Sciamma states, "Life is ahead of her. I didn't want the ending to be dark or positive because I feel like she's going to make it, you know. And it belongs to her." Sciamma demonstrates the agency of Marieme's character in these statements. She also expresses her desire for Marieme's future possibilities to change over time: "The spectator is also in charge of the destiny of the girl. The ending might change as the world changes. In 10 years, the ending may be different because the world may be different."[253] The message is that the world may be less harsh to girls like Marieme, who clearly experiences both a gendered and racialized existence in France.

Sciamma places *Girlhood*, her third film, as the last of a trilogy on female adolescents. "I had the feeling they were never looked at- especially groups of Black girls." Sciamma, who grew up in the banlieue west of Paris, in Pontoise, observed that "the story is farthest from me [out of the three in the trilogy] but also the closest. Who is the French young girl? I think it's her. I grew up in the banlieue. I was a middle-class white girl in the banlieue. But I know the feeling of being so close to the center but still at the periphery." Acknowledging her positionality in comparison to her protagonists she places, however, Marieme's character within the scheme of French girlhood. She renders Black female girlhood visible, and an integral part of the French social imaginary, and yet invisible at the same time because she refuses to name or acknowledge it. Perhaps this representation of Black girlhood will invite further, more complex depictions of both girls' present realities and the possibilities (emphasizing their plurality) for their futures. In

[253] HeyUGuys, "Director Céline Sciamma Exclusive Interview – Girlhood," YouTube Video, 9:05, May 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_hcQy3-G8Y.

any case it reflects the ways in which a lack of language and acknowledgment serves to render their lives invisible or illegible.

Section 3: Diasporic Filmmaking Women: From Euzhan Palcy to Yamina Benguigui, Alice Diop, and Dyana Gaye

While the previous sections focused on the image of women in films about the West African Diaspora in France, this next section centers on women filmmakers. It opens with a discussion of Euzhan Palcy to analyze her experience with structural racism in the film industry as a French filmmaker from Martinique and a Black woman which has led to the marginalization of her accomplishments in the both the francophone and anglophone film industries. This section argues that her work broke down barriers for a new generation of diasporic filmmakers born in France to immigrants from North and West Africa. These women offer the perspectives of a second generation in France with different points of view on their positions in the film industry and the African diaspora globally.

Euzhan Palcy, from Martinique, director of *Sugar Cane Alley* (*Rue Cases Nègres*, 1983), accomplished many firsts for women in film and the Francophone diaspora. Since she was born in an overseas territory, Palcy was a French citizen from birth. In "The Defiant One: Euzhan Palcy" Trica Danielle Keaton makes a compelling argument that Palcy should be well known for both English and French speaking audiences, however, she is not, due to systemic racism and sexism in both the US and French film industries.[254] Palcy went to Paris to study film at the Sorbonne and Louis Lumière College in the late 1970s. I contend that given that her background and career, Euzhan Palcy's view of the film industries in France and the United States are

[254] Trica Danielle Keaton, "The Defiant One: Euzhan Palcy," *The Feminist Wire.com*, May 9, 2011, https://thefeministwire.com/2011/05/the-defiant-one-euzhan-palcy/.

credible and important sources on the marginalization of Black women in the film industry, they offer us the point of view of a Black woman born in overseas France who worked in the hexagon and in the US. In a 2010 interview, she states, "you know, I'm just someone who is trying to make a difference, and over the years, I've been trying to rectify something that had been very badly done, that perhaps had not been done: to bear witness to an injustice."[255] Euzhan Palcy has devoted her career to making films about the global West African diaspora and the injustice that racism poses in France, in the larger sense of the hexagon and the overseas territories.

Palcy's trajectory gives her a platform to speak, convincingly, about the difficulty that Black artists face in the film industry in France, revealing that they face additional structural obstacles beyond those besetting white French citizens. She identifies the problem in both the United States and France as being pigeonholed into being a director of "Black films," just as actors are typecast into racialized roles. In a 2012 interview with Trica Danielle Keaton, Euzhan Palcy's quotations clearly express her views about being both Black and a director in France, and sheds light on structural racism in the film industry.[256] She reveals that in France, distribution is a huge barrier for Black filmmakers because they believe, according to her, that French people do not want to see French Black people on screen. They will, however, watch American produced films on West African Americans, which are successful with French audiences. Furthermore, they do not hire Black actors to play roles that are not specifically "Black" roles, and, moreover, that there are no Black screen writers to write for Black actors. Palcy refutes this by pointing out that white people can write stories for Black actors; they do not have to be specifically Black stories (an argument similar to Sciamma's). Black actors can play any role because they will

[255] Trica Danielle Keaton, "Euzhan Palcy: Creative Dissent, Artistic Reckoning," *Palimpsest: A Journal of Women, Gender, and the Black International* 1, no. 1 (2012): 116–34.
[256] Keaton, "Euzhan Palcy: Creative Dissent, Artistic Reckoning," 2012.

assume that character; it does not matter what their race is. It did not matter that all the actors were Black. Additionally, she remarks that Black people are presumed to be able to identify with mainstream movies, but they are not called "white films."

According to Palcy, in contrast to the United States, where African Americans have carved out a space for expression on the silver screen, in France into the 21st century this continues to be a problem. She articulates the crux of the issue in these statements: "it's very difficult for French leaders to understand that we are French, yes, but we are also Caribbean. We have a rich culture. France is at the heart of it, but they cannot embrace all that we are, which could be of great benefit to France."[257] Palcy argues here that they just want to be accepted in France with all aspects of their identity. At the same time, in contrast to films from the United States, films made by women like Palcy, and other diasporic women do not necessarily express a discourse of Black women's film or Black film. They simply want to be recognized as filmmakers expressing their work.

Diasporic filmmakers also shed led on structural barriers to producing their films when they lament the lack of infrastructure in Africa**,** especially with distribution, which makes France a necessary partner in any cultural production. Palcy, for example, expresses dissatisfaction with the Ministry of Culture in Cameroon; she had proposed a theater project, but never got a response, so her other option was funding in France. In some ways France was a gatekeeper for the arts on the continent in the post-independence era because the lack of cinematic support and infrastructure meant that filmmakers were dependent on French distribution channels and funding. For example, *Black Mic Mac* was not able to be released in Africa because of problems with the rules governing returning the revenue from the movie to France.[258] Other notable

[257] Ibid
[258] O.S., "Rencontre avec le réalisateur de « Black Micmac »," 1986.

directors, such as the Guadeloupian Christian Lara and Franco-Guadeloupean Sarah Maldorer, have also spoken out about the ways in which France's economic stronghold on funding for the arts constricted their artistic autonomy.[259]

Yet despite the difficulties that Palcy describes, her work has in fact paved a path for a new generation of diasporic women filmmakers in France today who are forging new territory, thinking through challenging questions about race in French contemporary society, and developing their own filmmaking techniques in order to showcase how the West African Diaspora in France forms an integral part of the French nation and exposes the cracks in French "colorblindness." These female filmmakers include women like Yaminia Benguigui and Alice Diop. Both of these women have shed light on structural racism in housing and education in France through the medium of documentaries.

Yamina Benguigui, a filmmaker active since 1990 and born in Lille to Algerian parents, is known more for her first feature film *Inch'allah Dimanche* (2001), a poignant film that portrays the complexities of Algerian women's experience immigrating to France during Family Reunification. Centering on an Algerian family immigrating to Saint-Quentin in Picardy, it is notabley told from the point of view of Zouina, an Algerian woman. Benguigui became well known for her second documentary, *Mémoires d'immigrés, l'héritage maghrébin* (1997) for which she conducted over 300 interviews. Less well-known, but I wouldargue equally important is a later documentary called *9/3 Mémoire d'un territoire* (2008) which brings issues of housing segregation and stereotypes associated with the 9-3 area code in Paris. Benguigui's career has been dedicated to filming both fiction and documentaries about immigration to France. Benguigui's film 9/3 depicts the history of the *département* called Seine Saint-Denis which

[259] Brigitte Tallon,"L'an II du cinéma antillais," *Autrement,* 49, April 1983, 239-245.

includes the *banlieue* to the North and East of Paris. This area is known in France as "the 9-3" because the first two digits of the zip code.[260] Seine Saint-Denis spans the north and east banlieue of Paris, an area defined in the French social imaginary as "the ghetto": it includes public housing projects, immigrants, and crime. In *9/3 Mémoire d'un territoire,* Benguigui takes a historical approach to the space, detailing how this area was first conceived as an industrial wasteland and continued to function as a place for the collection of Paris' refuse, both chemical and human. The area, just to the north of Paris, began largely as an industrial area, since the amount of pollution and waste produced by the factories made it undesirable. After de-industrialization began, these polluted sites were repurposed for the construction of public housing towers. As more and more newly arrived immigrants moved in, the white working-class moved out, citing cultural differences and rising crime. According to Benguigui, the image of "the 9-3" in the French social imaginary embodies "all the unease of a society coming to grips with the place of its colonial heritage in French national history."[261]

In an interview with *Jeune Afrique,* Benguigui states that she made the film posing the question, "what happened in the space of Seine Seine-Saint-Denis that brought us here [to the urban unrest of 2005]?"[262] She concludes that:

> There is a generation of youth that came to the employment market 10 years ago [around the year 2000], these youth, Master's degree holders (bac +5) after sending out, I don't know, we're not talking about 10 CVs here, more like 1, 400 CVs, didn't get any

[260] Paris addresses begin with 75 and are followed by the *arrondissement*, so French zip codes render the person's origin very visible. Montfermeil, the setting of Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables* has the same zipcode beginning 93, and not 75.
[261] Jeune Afrique, "Yamina Benguigui : Le 9.3 dit tout le malaise de la société française" Daily Motion Video, 4:18, July 5, 2010, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x19o3kr.
[262] Ibid

> interviews for the positions they were qualified for. They became the impetus for the younger youth who were protesting, burning, in what I show in the 9/3.[263]

The ghettoization of the "9-3," a "territory that has been segregated from its birth," gave rise to a generation of youth with very limited opportunities—in part because of the address on their CV; even when educated, these individuals are unable to get their foot in the door.[264] In 2005, Alice Diop, a young woman born to Senegalese parents in Aulnay-sous-bois's *Cité des 3000* housing project, made two documentaries about the banlieue. The first was *La Tour du Monde* (2006) which follows several families living in a housing project in the banlieue. *Clichy pour L'exemple*, (Clichy, For Example, 2006) the second, explores the causes of the 2005 riots through the eyes of those who live in the banlieue where the riots began in Clichy and Montfermeil, north of Paris. The film begins with young men speaking candidly to the camera. "We wanted dialogue, but that didn't work. We wanted to speak but certain politicians wouldn't listen. It's been 20 years. We are still not a part of the citizenry." The film then describes the sources of this inequitable citizenship, manifesting itself in poor housing, a broken educational system, difficult access to transportation, little employment, and social prejudice. Diop delves particularly deep into the French education system which depicts a system that perpetuates inequality, leading to an elevated rate of unemployment for youth from immigrant origins between the ages of 18-25, the same generation that Yamina Banguigui highlighted in her interview.[265]

---

[263] Ibid
[264] Ibid
[265] The French education system's role in perpetuating social inequality is an issue raised by François Bégaudeau's 2006 book and subsequent 2008 film titled *The Class* (in French *Entre les Murs*). These works are highly biographical, based on his experience teaching a diverse group of students in the 20th district of Paris. They tell

In *Clichy pour l'exemple,* Alice Diop interviews young men about their employment prospects. They testify how their addresses from the banlieue work against them. One of the interviewees shares that his brother found a satisfactory position only after he used a different address on his CV, a 94-zip code associated with the upper-class suburb of Vincennes. Her film details the role of the *Mission Locale* in the projects which help youth find employment. She shows young men going there every week to use the telephone in order to follow up with potential employers, who probably will not even consider their resumes because of where they are from. These are stories that are very rarely seen by French viewers, who are only exposed to the criminality of young men from the banlieue. At the film's end, the mayor of Clichy explains that the people who live there experience "feelings of exclusion, non-recognition and even humiliation…It is clear that the next step is anger again."

And yet, both films, *Clichy pour L'exemple* and *9/3 Mémoire d'un territoire* come to the same conclusion; there is a high social stigma against people of color in France, particularly people whose families come from both North and West Africa and structures in place in France perpetuate this stigma. The 9-3-zip code has become a burden for the youth growing up there and trying to leave. The uprisings in 2005 were not the end, but the beginning of further conflict.

Alice Diop has devoted her career to filming at the margins of French society; she argues that "it is up to us to work on our own complexes," recalling the complexes mentioned in Chapter Two, and asserting that the West African community must fight against the mindset that West African people are inferior to white Westerners, as generations before them had been

---

Bégaudeau's story from the perspective of a white teacher with good intentions who is unable to perform his job effectively because of all the additional difficulties these children bring to the table: below grade level skills, including French language, behavioral problems, attitude problems, students who question the relevance of his class' content, and parents who are absent, do not have papers, are working, or do not speak French. The book and movie portray a very nihilistic view of the French education system. The students' lived experiences are very different from those of the teachers, who are mostly middle-class white people.

told.[266] Her genre of choice is the documentary, and, as discussed above, she is known for her focus on the Seine Saint-Denis, or the "9-3," where she was born. Her work aims to "interrogate reality," and for her, that means making films about real lives, singular stories, instead of stereotypes.[267] Diop theorizes that her approach pushes the viewer to experience her subjects as "individuals, not as statistics." In 2017, she won a César for best short film for *Vers la Tendresse,* which conveys the views on romance and intimacy of four young men from the banlieue; this has been called "a discourse of impossible love" because these young men face "enormous stigmatization and stereotyping."[268] Diop "wanted to show [this] complexity." She argues that *Vers la Tendresse* is not a film about love in the banlieue because "we love there like we love in other places. I don't make films about the banlieue; I make films about people. The voices of men on love are invisible." Diop explores the intersection of masculinity and romance in this film.

Despite herself being a woman seeking to portray a masculine view, Diop denies that her films have a Black women's perspective. Instead, she insists that she cannot speak for all people in the banlieue or all Black women. She finds this type of thinking "condescending and reductive. I can only speak to my own view." She believes that her role as an artist and filmmaker is to show the complexity of people's experience and to demonstrate that human experiences are universal, not particular to race or location. In this, Diop both echoes Euzhan Palcy's assertions, and takes them farther. She observes:

---

[266] Olivier Barlet, "Alice Diop: 'It is Up to Us to Work on Our Own Complexes,'" *Africultures.com,* December 25, 2011, http://africultures.com/alice-diop-it-is-up-to-us-to-work-on-our-own-complexes-10553/, 4.
[267] Another Gaze Journal, "In Conversation With Alice Diop (Interview)" YouTube Video, 6:03, November 7, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnmVK_YRRvU.
[268] Ibid

> I remember an older woman who came to me after a screening [of *Danton's Death*/ *La Mort de Danton,* 2011] and she said with tears in her eyes, "Steve is me." I was extremely touched. She was white, she was from Picardy and she recognized in [this character] her own insecurity about being a child who is illegitimate. I am very happy that this film can speak to everyone. That so many people could relate to Steve's character was very important to me. I think this film can extend beyond the subject of discrimination against Black actors in France and prejudices that affect young people from housing projects…As I said earlier, I think this film deals with more than questions about the place given to Black actors in France. For me the reality is actually indicative of something much larger. The subject of my film is rather about how to escape from the confinement of the gaze of the Other, how to invent one's own life and become the person of one's choice, despite what others project on us, despite the place and role they assign to us. Of course, with someone like Steve, who is a kind of walking caricature of all the clichés that people can have about "youth of housing projects," this question takes on a specific social and political dimension.[269]

In this interview, Alice Diop expresses that she seeks to go farther than merely filming inequalities about "youth in the housing projects"; she also tries to provide ways to overcome them. In *Danton's Death*, she films Steve's "emergence of consciousness" and how he "confronts his oppressor" in a process of self-actualization.

[269] Barlet, "Alice Diop: 'It is Up to Us to Work on Our Own Complexes," 2011, 1-2.

A third woman filmmaker originating from the francophone West African diaspora is French-Senegalese Dyana Gaye, whose films offer viewers stories of the global diaspora through stories in multiple cities. Gaye's first feature length film, *Under the Starry Sky* (*Des Etoiles,* 2013), premiered in January 2013. *Under the Starry Sky* depicts the complexity of the West African diaspora in three cities: Turin, New York, and Dakar. Sophie travels to Turin to find her husband but discovers that he has taken up with another woman and left to find work elsewhere. She decides to stay in Turin and make it on her own. Her husband is Abdoulaye, another protagonist, who has gone to work first in Paris and then in New York, where the film follows him as he struggles to make it in the Big Apple. Theirno, the film's third protagonist, lives in Senegal. On the day of his father's funeral Theirno finds out that his father had a second wife and that he has half-siblings. The film follow's his experience getting to know his newfound siblings. In an interview, Gaye expressed her desire to tell the story of three people, and their struggles, "We experience their point of view, their solitude, their silence, in their pain their joy, we are very close to them." These lines express her objective for the audience to identify with and experience the lives of these three characters. She wants these people to be defined by their experiences, not by their race. Their challenges as humans are universal, not just limited to Black people, echoing the words of Alice Diop as well.

Gaye further stretches the meaning of being both Black and French in another interview in Dubai for the Dubai International Film Festival in 2004. When the interviewer asked Gaye what role her position as a Black woman plays in her career, she responds,

> I would not say I am pure Senegalese. I am French-Senegalese. I was raised in France and therefore I cannot say that I have or that I was challenged with the

> same difficulties as any other female director would have met in Africa or in Senegal with all the particularities of this continent and this country. However, I must admit that I don't like the question often raised stating that you are a Black, you are a woman, therefore you have difficulties entering the film industry. I don't really have this issue. And my advice is anybody that would like to enter the film industry has to believe in it, must believe in his or her skills and has to do everything in order to improve such skills and go ahead.[270]

Her remarks here contrast with Euzhan Palcy's, made around the same time**,** who fully acknowledges that she faced professional difficulties because she is a Black woman. Their differing views show the complexity of beliefs around race, gender and belonging in France, as their films reflect this diversity as well. However, they are both seeking to make their characters and films universally relevant.

Saint Louis Blues (Transport en Commmun, 2009) is another film produced by Gaye which reflects the dynamics of the francophone West African diaspora in the 21st century. It is a musical comedy about the lives of people who cross paths during a journey from Dakar to Saint Louis. A Dakar, Senegal setting is an unconventional place for a musical comedy. The film also depicts the complexity of the West African continent and its diaspora by following the voyage of multiple people from Dakar to Saint Louis. Gaye states, "I started going to Senegal at the age of five with my parents. I have always travelled in bush taxis. It is the accumulation of these different memories that is the basis for the story. It is also a reflection on the possible encounters

[270] Dubai International Film Festival, "DIFF09 - Dyana Gaye Interview - African Cinema," YouTube Video, 2:15, December 11, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYuOObuWvNA.

while using public transportation**,** not only in Senegal. I have a journal of my trips by metro and bus in Paris."[271] In these lines, Dyana Gaye is able to marry the experiences of life in France and life in Senegal, a connection which is lost in the more common belief that life in France and life in Senegal are irreconcilable; the line between them is blurred. Through her art, she demonstrates that the lives of people come together for a moment on public transportation, whether in Senegal or Paris.

Conclusion

It took more than thirty years after *Black Mic-Mac* was made for Black actresses to come together and write about their experiences. In 2018, a group of sixteen Black French Actresses published a collection of essays entitled, *Black is Not My Profession* (*Noire n'est pas mon métier*).[1] Firmine Richard, Juliette in *Romauld and Juliette,* contributed one essay in which she reflects on the significance of her role in the film (her first) as well as on her more recent experiences.[2] She draws attention to the fact that besides *Black Mic Mac* in 1986, this was one of the first films with Black French characters. She writes:

> I think that in hindsight, we needed those images. That Blacks needed them. Kids could have seen themselves in Juliette's kids. It was good for people to be able to identify with these characters, both ordinary and positive. The film filled a void, in a way, quenching a thirst. At this time, when France was beginning to be on edge about immigration, you couldn't see us on screen.[3]

[271] Beti Ellerson, trans., Fatou K. Sene, "Interview with Dyana Gaye" *African Women in Cinema Blog.com,* February 24, 2011, http://africanwomenincinema.blogspot.com/2011/02/dyana-gaye-un-transport-en-communst.html.

She also discusses the lack of roles available for Black French women who look up to primarily West African American actresses and notes that she was lucky because "Coline Serreaus don't just walk in off the street," referencing the director of *Romauld and Juliette*.[4] She ends her essay discussing her career in the present day. She is honored to be a part of a strong cast in Eight Women *(Huit Femmes,* 2002) and states that the director François Ozon "considers me a French actress. It's a symbolic act, a very important step."[5] In this observation, she alludes to the fact that the director does not consider her a "Black" actress, and that he did not cast her in a role meant specifically for a Black woman. However, this hopeful note is tempered by her discussion of salaries. In a recent film, a Caucasian actress who worked a comparable number of days was paid five times more, despite Richard's thirty years' experience.[6] There is a racial disparity in these numbers, and they support the structural racism that films, the directors, and the actresses describe.

West African women are leading the way for new approaches to the Francophone West African Diaspora on the big screen, and they are also competing with the so-called Beur productions which have attracted far more scholarly attention.[272] While Josephine Baker's performances in the 1920s may have solidified the Black female body as the symbol of cultural and racial incompatibility between French and West Africans, as some contend, today's generation continue to advocate for more diverse representations of Black people in France. Women such as Dyana Gaye, Yamina Benguigui, and Alice Diop were preceded by directors

[272] See for example: Valérie Orlando,. "From Rap to Raï in the Mixing Bowl: Beur Hip-Hop Culture and Banlieue Cinema in Urban France," *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 3 (January 2003): 395–415, Will Higbee, *Post-Beur Cinema : North African Émigré and Maghrebi-French Filmmaking in France Since 2000* . Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, Mireille Rosello, ''Third Cinema or Third Degree: The 'Rachid System,' in Serge Meynard's L'Oeil au beurre noir,'' Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism. (Ed. Dina Sherzer). Austin: Texas UP, 1996, Patricia Caillé,"A Tunisian Film Festival in Paris: Issues in Reception at the Intersection of French and Anglo-American Approaches to Cultural Analysis of the Diasporas," *French Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (May 2010): 85–96, Sylvie Durmelat, "Tasting Displacement: Couscous and Culinary Citizenship in Maghrebi-French Diasporic Cinema," *Food and Foodways*, 23:1-2, (2015) 104-126.

like Euzhan Palcy and actresses Firmine Richard and Felicité Wouassi in the late twentieth century. [273] These women formed a cadre of path breakers in the film industry, setting up the infrastructure of Black French cinema to make space for even more Black men and women to contribute to the French film industry. This new generation of women express the desire for Black bodies to be recognized as human bodies which experience the same life challenges and tribulations as everyone else. The experience of the Black body is not marked eternally by its Blackness or its gender; it is marked by its humanity, and any audience member can and should be able to see themselves in these performances. What I find interesting, is that at the same moment that these women are denying the importance of race to in their films, these works, which focus on the effects of structural racism, actually reify the impact of the Francophone diaspora on their artistic work and professional identities. Moreover, in emphasizing their desire to be sign as "human" and not "Black" do they reinforce the tenets of universal abstract individualism that has also worked against them?

[273] Hine, Keaton, Small, eds, *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, 2010.

EPILOGUE

Nearly 25 years after *La Haine*, Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables* (2019) takes up the same subject as the earlier film, this time telling the story of a police crime unit on the day shift in Montfermeil's housing projects after the 2018 world cup win for France. Li was born in Mali but grew up in Montfermeil, in the Parisian *banlieue*. Taking place, like *La Haine*, which preceeded it, over the source of a single day, in Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables* the police scramble to find a stolen lion cub that could potentially ignite violence between two groups in the projects, the Roma and West Africans. The actions of the police lead a group of young men to attack them; the film ends on a tense note with a young boy holding a Malakoff cocktail ready to throw it at the police who are cornered while one of the officers points his gun at the boy. Finally, it closes with a quote from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (which depicted the experience of poverty in nineteenth century France and which the viewer learns is partly set in Montfermeil): "Remember this, my friends: there are no such things as bad plants or bad men. There are only bad cultivators." The message of these lines, coupled with the reference to Hugo's *Les Misérables*, places the socioeconomic problems of the banlieue, now marked racially as well, in a longer history of the French nation which has always been plagued by racial inequities. This film contributes to the belief that the 2005 urban uprisings did not change realities for those living in the banlieue and portrays the ways in which racial tensions have been exacerbated even more in the ensuing years.

While the roles for women in *Les Misérables* remain limited, they are more complex than previously; although they are still characterized as matriarchs, women are no longer limited to playing the love interest. A group of girls at the beginning of the film, for example, tell the

young malecharacter Issa that they are counting on him to film their basketball game. Issa's mother has the most significant role in the film. When the three officers come to their home looking for Issa (the young boy who stole the lion cub), his mother refuses to let them in, asserting in French, "I know my rights." The character of Gwada, a member of the crime unit who also happens to be Black, begins to speak to her in Bambara. After a discussion, she agrees to let him in to look for Issa. Inside, we see a group of women in one room, and Issa's mother explains that it is a *tontine*. Walking out, Gwada explains what a *tontine* is to the other officers. Despite the brevity of this scene, it portrays West African women, represented by Issa's mother, in a different light than the images depicted on television in the 1980s, where West African women are silent—because they do not speak French, do not know the values of France, and have nothing to contribute. The women pictured in this scene speak the language, know their rights, stand up to the police, and continue West African women's practices of economic independence in 21st century France.

The scene with Issa's mother, in her home, is also significant because it blurs the lines between police and immigrants. This is the first moment that the audience learns Gwada has connections to immigration himself (later the audience discovers he grew up in Montfermeil and is "second generation"). He uses these connections to appeal to Issa's mother in Bambara and gain entry to her home without a warrant (but the other officers are required to wait outside) His character therefore overlaps the binary of police versus (criminalized) immigrants, pushing the viewer to question their opposition. This interrogation continues later when the film reveals that Gwada grew up in Montfermeil. When he returns home to his own mother, who is dressed in West African fabrics, he further reveals his immigrant origins. His mother only says a few words, but her role is again key in this scene because as soon as Gwada sees her, he bursts into

tears. The confrontation with his mother forces him to reckon with the fact that he has joined the [colonial] forces of order: earlier that day Gwada shot Issa in the face with a BB gun. Whereas in contrast to earlier French films of the diaspora, in *Les Misérables* the female characters say few words and have less screen time, they nonetheless play pivotal, and more powerful roles. And while not many French films feature Black female protagonists, more recent films do explore both motherhood and girlhood. However, the film also shows that the banlieue has become what is known in English as the *ghetto* or the *inner-city* (although it is on the outskirts in the French context). The fact that the 2005 uprisings spoke to people in over 200 cities in France suggests that people have similar experiences of segregation and discrimination in most French towns.

Significantly, while the roles for women in *Les Miserables* may be expanded for women, they do not encompass the myriad of pursuits that the women had in as described in the chapters of this dissertation. From squatters and resistors to models and activists, West African women have performed in many aspects of life in France: economic, social, political, and artistic. This above all breaks with stereotype of a passive West African woman in need of help by Westerners because she is oppressed. They build businesses and create works of beauty in many forms, protest and rebel, and collaborate strategically. Perhaps someday the call of Calixthe Beyala in 2000 on behalf of the Collectif Egalité for equal representation for people of color in France and twenty years later, Rohkaya Diallo poses the question in her 2020 documentary, *Où sont les noirs?*[274] (Where are Black people?) We can equally ask: where are the Black women? A film about the salons at the *Goutte D'Or*? A TV series about a black francophone family?

[274] Rokhaya Diallo, dir. "Où sont les noirs?" aired on RMC Story, March 18 and 31, 2020.

Rather than minimize differences based on race, ethnicity, religion, and language, French republican universalism, in practice, serves to highlight and exacerbate differences because public discussions of race are not accepted, and yet, people in urban spaces in France and in French media and film, a sophisticated systems of codes, verbal and spatial, exist to uphold segregation and discrimination based on race and gender in France. Comparisons with the United States loomed large in the above pages. This is the result of several factors. The first is that the particular wave of immigration I focus on is only now transitioning from the purview of anthropologists and sociologists to historians. Secondly, the reluctance, hesitance, or refusal to discuss race in France has been it difficult to establish areas of studies in diaspora or Black studies. The reality is that the structural supports are not yet in place in the French academy to support these types of critical studies. The effort for these institutions are coming from the ground up by the people that organized the conference in March of 2020 that I attended. They are scattered throughout France and the world. But the conceptual frameworks simply do not exist in Francophone scholarship, so many times I found myself looking at secondary sources from the African American diaspora. I also think it is important as a methodology to do so because the comparison is often made by French politicians and scholars alike as to how and why the French model is different, and superior. *Feminizing the Diaspora* put this superiority into question. From the perspective of the 1980s up until the present for West African men and women, the French system is not superior in results. In fact, the results are largely the same: systemic discrimination based on race and gender, also intersecting with Islam, nationality, ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status, on every level of society.

Both the French and West African diasporic media agreed that West African women's presence in France was significant, but for different reasons. French television focused on the

disfunction of the West African family in France which practiced squatting, polygamy, and excision leading to precarious situations for women and children. Old ideas and tropes about the superiority of French civilization came into play, highlighting the long lasting effects of colonial ideology on West African people.

REFERENCES

Secondary Sources

Aguilera, T. “Configurations of squats in Paris and the Ile-de-France region.” In Squatting Europe Kollective (ed.) *Squatting in Europe. Radical spaces, Urban struggles*. New York: Autonomedia, 2013, 209–23.

Anderson Edwards, Jerrika M. “The Beauty Standard Trade-Off: How Ebony, Essence, and Jet Magazine Represent African American/Black Female Beauty in Advertising in 1968, 1988, and 2008.” April 1, 2013.

Antoine, Katja. "'Pushing the Edge' of Race and Gender Hegemonies through Stand-up Comedy: Performing Slavery as Anti-racist Critique." *Etnofoor* 28, no. 1, 2016, 35-54.

Ballantyne, Tony and Antoinette M. Burton. *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005.

Bazenguissa-Ganga, Rémy.“Paint it "Black" : how Africans and Afro-Caribbeans became "Black" in France” in *Black France/France Noire: The History And Politics Of Blackness*. Keaton, Trica Danielle Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. Stovall, Tyler Edward, eds. Durham : Duke University Press, 2012, 145-172.

Béland, Daniel. "Identity Politics and French Republicanism." *Society* 40, no. 5, July 2003, 66-71.

Berliner, Brett A. *Ambivalent Desire: the Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.

Bertossi, Christophe. "The performativity of colour blindness: race politics and immigrant integration in France, 1980–2012." *Patterns Of Prejudice* 46, no. 5 (December 2012): 427-444.

Boittin, Jennifer Anne. *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

Bouillon, Florence. “Why Migrants Squats are a Political Issue: a Few Thoughts about the Situation in France.” *Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy.* Pierpaolo Mudu and Sutapa Chattopadhyay, eds. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.

Bronwyn, Winter. “Women, the Law, and Cultural Relativism in France: The Case of Excision.” *Signs* 19, no. 4, 1994, 939-972.

Caillé, Patricia. “A Tunisian Film Festival in Paris: Issues in Reception at the Intersection of French and Anglo-American Approaches to Cultural Analysis of the Diasporas.” *French Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2, May 2010, 85–96.

Camp, Stephanie M. H. “Black Is Beautiful: An American History.” *Journal of Southern History* 81, no. 3. 2015, 675-690.

Chafer, Tony. *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France’s Successful Decolonization?.* Oxford: Berg, 2002.

Chaplin, Tamara. *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Constant, Fred. "Black France" and the National Identity Debate: How Best to be Black and French?.” in *Black France/France Noire: The History And Politics Of Blackness*. Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Tyler Edward Stovall, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012, 123-144.

Cowans, Jon. “Black and White on the Silver Screen. Views of Interracial Romance in French Films and Reviews since the 1980s.” *French Politics, Culture, & Society* 28, no. 3, 2010, 46–63.

Craig, Maxine Leeds. *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Davies, Carole Boyce. "Sisters Outside: Tracing the Caribbean/Black Radical Intellectual Tradition." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal Of Criticism* 13, no. 1, March 2009, 217-229.

Dimulescu, V. “Contemporary Representations of the Female Body: Consumerism and the Normative Discourse of Beauty.” *Symposion* 2, no. 4, 2005, 505–14.

Duncan Jennifer S. “Confronting ‘Race’: French Feminism’s Struggle to Become Global.” in *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*. Francisca de Haan, ed. London: Routledge, 2012, 183- 197.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003.

—"The Shadow of Shadows." *positions: east asia cultures critique* 11, no. 1, 2003, 11-49.

Fall, Mar. *Des Africains Noirs En France: Des Tirailleurs Sénégalais Aux ... Blacks*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986.

Fila-Bakabadio, Sarah. “Media and the Politics of "Re-Presentation" of the Black Female Body.” *Black French Women And The Struggle For Equality, 1848-2016*. Félix F., Germain, Silyane Larcher, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018, 169-184.

Foreman, P. Gabrielle. "The Books You've Waited for" : Ebony magazine, the Johnson Book Division, and Black History in Print.” *Against a Sharp White Background : Infrastructures of African American Print.* Fielder, Brigitte, and Jonathan Senchyne, eds. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2020.

Germain, Félix F., Silyane Larcher, and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, eds. *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

Green, Aaryn L. and Annulla Linders, "The Impact of Comedy on Racial and Ethnic Discourse." *Sociological Inquiry* 86, no. 2, May 2016, 241–69.

Guiné, Anouk, and Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes. "Engendering Redistribution, Recognition, and Representation: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the United Kingdom and France." *Politics & Society* 35 iii, January 1, 2007, 477-519.

Harvey, Adia M.. "Personal Satisfaction and Economic Improvement: Working-Class Black Women's Entrepreneurship in the Hair Industry." *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 6, 2008, 900-915.

Haywood, D'Weston. *Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth-century Black Press And A Manly Vision For Racial Advancement*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 2018.

Higbee, Will. *Post-Beur Cinema : North African Émigré and Maghrebi-French Filmmaking in France Since 2000*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Hine, Darlene Clark, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, eds. *Black Europe and the African Diaspora.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Hitchcott, Nicki. "Calixthe Beyala: Black Face(s) on French TV." *Modern & Contemporary France* 12, no. 4. November 2004, 473–82.

Hutton, Frankie. *The Early Black Press In America, 1827 To 1860*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Iromuanya, Julie. 2017. "Are We All Feminists?: The Global Black Hair Industry and Marketplace in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 16 (1), 163–83.

Jeffreys, Sheila. *Beauty and Misogyny : Harmful Cultural Practices in the West* London. Routledge, 2005.

Keaton, Trica Danielle, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall, eds. *Black France: France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness.* Durham: Duke, 2012.

Keaton, Trica Danielle. "Euzhan Palcy: Creative Dissent, Artistic Reckoning." *Palimpsest: A Journal of Women, Gender, and the Black International* 1, no. 1 (2012): 116–34.

Killian, Caitlin. *North African Women in France: Gender, Culture, and Identity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Kleinman, Julie O'Brien. "Dangerous Encounters: Riots, Railways, and the Politics of Difference in French Public Space (1860-2012)." Dissertation, Harvard, 2013.

Larcher, Silyane. "The End of Silence: On the Revival of Afrofeminism in Contemporary France." In *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016*, Silyane Larcher and Felix Germaine, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2018, 69-88.

Laudereau, C. “Les Mères Soninké et La Santé de Leurs Enfants à Paris.” *Revue Européenne Des Migrations Internationales (REMI)* 10 iii. January 1, 1994, 175–88.

Lewis, Edward, Audrey Edwards, and Camille O. Cosby. *The Man From Essence: Creating A Magazine For Black Women.* New York: Atria, 2014.

Lewis, Hope. “Between Irua and ‘Female Genital Mutilation’: Feminist Human Rights Discourse and the Cultural Divide.” *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, vol. 8, 1995, pp. 1–55.

Lionnet, Françoise. "Feminisms and Universalisms: "Universal Rights" and the Legal Debate Around the Practice of Female Excision in France.” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Reina Lewis, and Sara Mills, eds. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.

Lister, Ruth. “What is Citizenship?” in *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. NYC: New York University Press, 2003, 13-41.

Marker, Emily. “Obscuring Race: Franco-African Conversations about Colonial Reform and Racism after World War II and the Making of Colorblind France, 1945–1950.” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33, no.3, 2015, 1–23.

Martin, Thomas. "SOS Racisme and the Legacies of Colonialism 2005–2009: An Ambivalent Relationship." *Modern & Contemporary France* 23, no. 1. February 2015, 65-80.

Mattelart, T., and A.G. Hargreaves.“‘Diversity’ Policies, Integration and Internal Security: The Case of France.” *Global Media and Communication* 10 (3). 2020, 275–87.

McKinney, Mark. *French Cinema and Postcolonial Minorities: Post-Colonial Cultures in France*. London: New York: Routledge, 2013.

Mianda, Gertrude. “Reading Awa Thiam’s La Parole Aux Négresses through the Lens of Feminisms and English Language Hegemony.” *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice/Études Critiques Sur Le Genre, La Culture, et La Justice* 36 no. 2., 2014, 8–19.

Moukourika, Chloé. “Les Mobilisations Afroféministes Mwasi.” Master Thesis, University of Paris II Panthéon-Assas, 2018.

Mundy, John and Glyn White, *Laughing Matters: Understanding Film, Television and Radio Comedy.* Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013.

Nasali, Minayo. “Citizens, Squatters, and Asocials: The Right to Housing and the Politics of Difference in Post-Liberation France.” The American Historical Review 119 no. 2., 2014, 434–59.

Ndiaye, Pap. *La Condition Noire: Essai Sur Une Minorité Française*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008.

Niang, Mame-Fatou. *Identités Françaises: Banlieues, Féminités Et Universalisme*. Boston: Brill, 2020.

Nicollet, Albert. *Femmes d'Afrique noire en France : la vie partagée.* Paris: C.I.E.M.I., 1992.

Noiriel, Gérard. *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Ongiri, Amy Abugo. *Spectacular Blackness : the Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010.

Orlando, Valérie. "From Rap to Raï in the Mixing Bowl: Beur Hip-Hop Culture and Banlieue Cinema in Urban France." *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 3, January 2003, 395–415.

Patterson, Tiffany Ruby, and Robin D. G. Kelley. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1, 2000, 11-45.

Peabody, Sue. *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Quiminal, C. "La Famille Soninké En France." *Hommes & Migrations* 1185, January 1, 1995, 26–31.

Quiminal, Catherine and Timera, Mahamet. "1974-2002, les Mutations de l'immigration Ouest-Africaine." *Hommes et Migrations*, n°1239, Septembre-Octobre 2002, 19-32.

Rassiguier, Catherine. "Ces mères qui dérangent : immigrées africaines en France." *Les cahiers du CEDREF* online, December 2004.

Rosello, Mireille. "Representing Illegal Immigrants in France: From Clandestins to L'affaire Des Sans-Papiers de Saint-Bernard." *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 1–2., March 1998, 137–51.

Sassoon, Virginie. "La représentation du couple dans le magazine féminin *Amina* : une vision androcentrique." *Le Temps des médias*, 19 no. 2., 2012, 145-158.

— *Femmes Noires Sur Papier Glacé*. Médias Essais. Bry-sur-Marne: INA, 2015.

Schain, Martin. *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States: A Comparative Study*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Scott, Joan Wallach. "French Feminists and the Rights of 'Man': Olympe De Gouges's Declarations." *History Workshop*, no. 28, 1989, 1-21.

— *The Politics Of The Veil*. Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2007.

Semley, Lorelle. “Beyond the Dark Side of the Port of the Moon: Rethinking the Role of Bordeaux’s Slave Trade Past.” *Histoire Sociale- Social History* 53, no. 107. 2020, 43–68.

Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

— *Negritude Women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Silverman, Maxim. *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism and Citizenship in Modern France*. London: Routledge, *1992.*

Stovall, Tyler Edward. *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
— "Race and the Making of the Nation: Blacks in Modern France" in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader.* Michael Gomez, ed. New York: New York University Press, 2006, 200-218.

Thomas, Dominic and Richard, David, eds. *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Thomas, Dominic, ed. *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Tiberj, Vincent, and Laure Michon. "Two-tier Pluralism in ‘Colour-blind’ France." *West European Politics* 36, no. 3., May 2013, 580-596.

Timera, Mahamet, and Julie Garnier. “Les Africains En France: Vieillissement et Transformation d’une Migration.” *Hommes & Migrations* 1286–1287, January 1, 2010, 24–35.

Timera, Mahamet. “La Famille Soninke En France: Mode de Reproduction et Ruptures.” *Islam et Sociétés Au Sud Du Sahara* 5, January 1, 1991, 57–65.

Trumbull IV, George R. “French Colonial Knowledge of Maraboutism.” *Islam and the European Empires*. David Motadel, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Wade, Lisa. “Learning from ‘Female Genital Mutilation’: Lessons from 30 Years of Academic Discourse.” *Ethnicities* 12, no. 1, 2012, 26.

Wakim, Nabil. “Pourquoi les chiffres sur la polygamie sont inexacts.” *Le Monde*, June 10, 2010 : https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2010/06/10/pourquoi-les-chiffres-sur-la-polygamie-sont-inexacts_1370633_823448.html.

Walley, Christine J. “Searching for ‘Voices’: Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations.” *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 3., 1997, 406.

Winter, Bronwyn. *Hijab & The Republic: Uncovering The French Headscarf Debate*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2008.

Wolseley, Roland Edgar. *The Black Press, U.S.A.*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990.

Primary Sources

"Aida Ka." *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: June 15, 1985, 21.

"Boulevard de Strasbourg, Temple de la Beauté Noire." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris : Feb 1, 1985, 25.

"Calixthe Beyala et Son Petit Prince de Belleville." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris*:* Aug. 1992, 10-13.

"Célianthe: Parlez-Nous du 'Black Trophy.'" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: June 1999, L.

"Fashion Fair s'Installe à Paris." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: December 1991, XVI.

"L'AFOM Acceuille Des Stagières de L'ICCM." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: April 1992, XXIV.

"La Cuisine Sénégalaise à Paris." *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: July 1982, 31.

"Miss Afro." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris : Sept. 1, 1986, 29-30.

"Régine Ferrère Reprend le Centre de Beauté du Faubourg St Honoré." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: August 1992, XXVI.

"Romuald et Juliette: su-per-be." *Journal du Dimanche.* Mar. 26, 1989.

"Tresses Sénégalaises en Plein Paris." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: June 1989, 34 and 37.

9/3 Mémoire d'un territoire. Directed by Yamina Benguigui. France: Elemiah, INA - Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, Canal+, 2008.

*19 20 Edition nationale. "*Emission du 09 mars 2002- Polygamy." aired March 9, 2002 on France 3.

20 Heures le Journal. "Emission du 16 Novembre 2005 : Le regroupment familial en debat à L'Assemblé Nationale : La polygamie : un vecteur invoqué pour expliquer les violences dans les banlieues." aired on November 16, 2005 on France 2.

A2 Le Journal 20H, "A2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 16 mars 1990 » aired March 16, 1990 on Antenne 2.

A2 Le Journal de 13H "Emission du 8 Octobre 1989- Les Squats" aired October 8, 1989 on Antenne 2.

A2 Le Journal de 13H, "Chirac et l'immigration : "Le bruit et l'odeur" aired on *Télévision Française 1* June 20, 1991.
Antenne 2 Le Journal de 20H. "Squat." aired May 13, 1983 on Antenne 2.

Abaga-MBarga, Mathieu."Aita Kane" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* September 15, 1986, 28-29.

Agnimel, Solange "Lydia Ewande: une Comédienne Accomplie," *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*, Paris: July 15, 1986, 12-13.

Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera, Directed by François Dupeyron, ARP Sélection, 2008.

Another Gaze Journal, "In Conversation With Alice Diop (Interview)" YouTube Video, 6:03, November 7, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnmVK_YRRvU.

Antenne 2 Midi : Emission du 7 juillet 1983 "Opération policière d'expulsion d'un squat du 19ème arrondissement" aired on July 7, 1983.

Arnaud, Marie-Dominique et al. "A Propos de L'Excision en Afrique" *Bulletin de l'Association Française des Anthropologues* Vol. 4 Issue 1 1981, 37-39.

Assiette Anglais, "Casting de Blacks," aired on January 30, 1988 on Antenne 2.

B, A.d. ".Black Mic-Mac" *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 385, June 1986, 66.

Bande de Filles, Directed by Céline Sciamma. Pyramide Films, 2014.

Barlet, Olivier. "Alice Diop: 'It is Up to Us to Work on Our Own Complexes.'" *Africultures.com*, December 25, 2011, http://africultures.com/alice-diop-it-is-up-to-us-to-work-on-our-own-complexes-10553/.

Barry, Aminata, in discussion with the author, March 2019.

Bégaudeau, François. *The Class* (*Entre les Murs).* France : Haut et court, 2007.

Black Mic Mac. Directed by Thomas Gilou. France: Tamasa Distribution, 1986.

Bressy, Olivier, dir. Host André Bercoff , *Français si vous parliez* "Banlieue des femmes s'entêtent" aired March 1st, 1993 on France 3.

Brink, Natacha. "Excision" *Cahiers du Féminisme.* Dec 82/Jan 83, 28-30.

BUMIDOM, des Français venus d'outre mer. Directed by Jackie Bastide. Temps noir Productions, 2010.

Butler, Yvan. "Noir sur blanc: le défi multiracial." *Temps Présent*, 1985.

CAMS- Internationale. *Femmes et Sociétés*: *Revue de la Commission Internationale pour l'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles.* No. 0. Dakar: Senegal, August 1983.

Cathou, M. “1er Prix de Création 1982 Gisèle Gomez.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: September 1982, 34-35.

Ciel Mon Mardi. “Bernard Pierre Donnadieu.” aired December 12, 1989 on TF 1.

Coulibaly, Souleymane, in discussion with author, June 16, 2017.

Crampton, Thomas. "Behind the Furor, the Last Moments of Two Youths." *The New York Times*. Nov. 7, 2005.

Cressole, Michel. “Mic Mac chez les Blacks,” *Libération.* February 14, 1986.

Dakeyo, Paul, in discussion with the author, January 2019.

Des Lames Et Des Femmes. Directed by Jean-Pierre Zirn,. Paris : Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir distrib, 1990.

de Gaspari, Anne. “Romuald et Juliette.” *Le Quotidienne de Paris*. March 22, 1989.

Degrass Gilles. “Domi, En Mode Majeur, Nouveau Fait au Métier de Mannequin.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: February 1992, XVII.

Dia, Ben Saïd. “Concilier maquillage et authenticité.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: October 1983, 73.

Diallo, Assiatou Bah “Une Fille aux Multiples Facettes Almène Gibirila.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: December 1979, 8-11.

—“Béatrice, Yolande et les Autres.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: January 1983, 34-35.
—“Daigne Coiffure” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: April 1982, 26.
—“Devenir Sa Propre Patronne” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: November, 1983, 83.
—“Le SABEMOD 88” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: May 1, 1988, 10.
—“MODEFEN : Toutes Contre le Sexism” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: December 1989, L.
—"L’Idéal Féminin,” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: May 1983, 30-31.
—“Awa Thiam, Auteur de « La Parole Aux N*égresses* » *Amina Magazine*. Paris: January 1979, 46.
—“Black Experience” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: February 1983, 44-45.
—“L’Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: October, 1982, 24.
—*“Les Africaines et le 8 Mars” Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: May 1982, 3.

Diallo, Bilguissa, in discussion with the author, February 8, 2019.

Diallo, Rokhaya dir. "Où sont les noirs?." aired on RMC Story, March 18 and 31, 2020.

Diop, Alice. *Clichy pour L'exemple*. France: Pont du Jour, 2006.

Diop, N'Deye, in discussion with the author, March 15, 2019.

Dooh-Bunya, Lydie, Perrine Rouillon, Yvette Roudy, *Ni Sexuellement, Ni Autrement*. Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir distrib, 1984.

Dubai International Film Festival. "DIFF09 - Dyana Gaye Interview - African Cinema." YouTube Video, 2:15, December 11, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYuOObuWvNA.

Ellerson, Beti trans., Fatou K. Sene. "Interview with Dyana Gaye." *African Women in Cinema Blog.com*, February 24, 2011, http://africanwomenincinema.blogspot.com/2011/02/dyana-gaye-un-transport-en-communst.html.

Elom, Béatrice. "L'estampille universitaire." *Autrement* 49, April 1983.

Emessiene, Jacqueline, in discussion with the author, April 2, 2019.

Endamne, Alice, in discussion with the author, January 2019.

Etoa Etoa, Zacharie. "Espaces Africains à Toulouse" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: March 1994, XXIV.

F2 Le Journal 20H." F2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 31 octobre 1992." aired on October 31, 1992 on France 2.

F2 Le Journal 20H. "F2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 2 juin 1993: Immigration Polygamy." aired June 2, 1993 on France 2.

F2 Le Journal 20H. "F2 Le Journal 20H : émission du 2 juin 1993." aired June 2, 1993 on France 2.

Fabre, Maurice. "Romuald et Juliette : Ils sont charmants." *France Soir*, March 23, 1989.

Gauzin, Julienne. "Conférence-débat" *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: 1996, L**,** 1982

Gelly, Violaine. "Romuald et Juliette" *La Croix*, March 23, 1989.

Gibirila, Almen, email message to author, June 21 and 24, 2019.

Grassin, Sophie. "Romuald et Juliette." *L'Express*, March 17, 1989, 120.

Halimi, Frank. "Premier Salon de Vente de Produits Cosmétiques à Villeurbanne." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: 1996, LII.

HeyUGuys, "Director Céline Sciamma Exclusive Interview – Girlhood." YouTube Video. 9:05. May 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_hcQy3-G8Y.

—"Karidja Touré Exclusive Interview – Girlhood." YouTube Video. 8:42. May 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e40wx8DxORw.

Hosken, Fran P. *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females.* Lexington, Mass: Women's International Network News, 1979.

Hoskins, I. "Speaking out: An interview with Berhane Ras Work, president, the inter-African committee." *Ageing Int.* 24, 1998, 85–97.

Inch'allah Dimanche. Directed by Yamina Benguigui. France: ARP Sélection, 2000.

Iff, Simone. "Forward." *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France*. Paris: Éd. Tierce, 1984, 7-9.

Infovision, "Afrique: Capitale Paris." aired on May 15, 1986 on TF1.

J.S., "Romuald et Juliette," *Le Monde*, March 23, 1989.

Jacks, Steven. "*La Haine* or Culture Wars in Paris and the *Banlieues.*" in *African Images: Recent Studies and Text in Cinema*, eds. 1st Africa World Press, Inc., ed. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000.

Jeune Afrique, "Yamina Benguigui : Le 9.3 dit tout le malaise de la société française." Daily Motion Video. 4:18. July 5, 2010, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x19o3kr.

J-M.F. "Black Mic Mac de Thomas Gilou." *Le Point,* April 28, 1986.

Josselin, Jean-François. "Romuald et Juliette." *Le Nouvel Observateur*, March 22, 1989.

Kande, Sylvie, in discussion with the author, July 10, 2017.

La Tour du Monde. Directed by Alice Diop. France: Pont du Jour, Voyage, 2006.

Lagauche, Christian. " Georgette Kala-Lobe Une Danseuse qui Brise Ses Chaines à la télé." *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: January 1989, 14.

Le Magazine de Mosaïque. "Le Magazine de Mosaïque : émission du 5 février 1984." aired on February 5, 1984 on France 3.

Le Magazine de Mosaïque. "Les Femmes Immigrées." aired December 13, 1981 on France 3.

Le vif du sujet. "Regards sur Afrique." aired on April 4, 2000 on France Culture.

Lefort Gérard. "Romuald et Juliette." *Libération,* March 22, 1989.

Les Misérables. Directed by Ladj Ly. Paris: Le Pacte, 2018.

M.-N.T. “Coline Serreau : La Marchande d’Utopie.” *Figaro,* March 21, 1989.

Macia, Jean-Luc. “Black Mic-Mac.” *La Croix*, April 24, 1986.

Mathias, V. “Les Nuits ‘Black’ de Paris.” *Amina le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: December 1983, 49.
Mémoires d'immigrés, l'héritage maghrébin. Directed by Yamina Benguigui. France: Cara M, 1997.

Mingalon, Jean-Louis. “Le Conte de Fées de Firmine.” *Le Monde RTV*, January 12, 1992.

Moineau, Claude. “Gisèle Gomez et Vicky Toudou.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: February 1, 1985, 22.

Monde à Paris and Catherine Bastard. “Guide Paris-Black.” Brigitte Tallon and Maurice lemoine, eds. *Autrement,* 49, April 1983, 255-297.

Moumi de Bakondji, Joseph ed. *EuroBlack Business Guide*. Paris: 98 av. Parmentier, 75011, 1990.

Mouvement pour la défense des droits de la femme noire (MODEFEN). “Sur l’Infibulation et l’Excision en Afrique.” *Bulletin de l’Association Française des Anthropologues* No. 9, September 1982, 50-54.

Ndiaga Diop, Assane. *“Djeynaba Drabo.” Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: August 1, 1987, 38-39.

Ndibe, Atoumata. “Pleins Feux Sur Mathilde Ba.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: March 1992, VIII-IX.

Nsoumbi, Jacques.“L’Intégration et L’Assimilation 4 Points de Vue de Joséphine Saboukoulou.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: January 1992, XXII.

Nuits Magnétiques., “Paris: Place de la Réunion” aired on July 26, 1990 on France Culture.

O.B.S. “Comment Catherine Nguébé a ouvert un salon « Coiffure 14 ».” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* May 1985, 75.
— “Delphine Tchamga.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* December 1982, 28-29.
—“’Soleil’ Coiffure Mixte.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: June, 1983, 82.
—“Tresses 2000: un Salon d’Esthéticiennes,” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: February 1984, 81.

O.S., “Rencontre avec le réalisateur de « Black Micmac »” Le Monde June 26, 1986.

P.V. “Black Mic Mac.” *Le Canard Enchainé,* April 23, 1986.

Pfeiffer, Alice. “Girlhood: the Film that Busts the Myth of Conventional French Femininity.” *The Guardian.com*, May 4, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/may/04/girlhood-film-busts-myth-of-french-femininity.

PJW. “Sylvie Joco.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: December 1991, XIV.
Raillard, Florence. “Le premier film coté en brousse.” *Le Matin du Cinéma*, April 23, 1986.

Razin, Elyse. *“Assistante Consultante en Marketing.” Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: January 1, 1987, 34-35.

Reportages. “Polygames à Paris.” aired October 5, 1991 on Télévision Française 1.

Riou, Alain. “Noir Mic Mac.” *Nouvel Observateur*, April 15 1988.

Roberts, Pepe. "Femmes et Sociétés: Revue de la Commission Internationale pour l'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles (CAMS- Internationale). No. 0. Dakar: Senegal, 1983.” *Review of African Political Economy* 10:27-28, 1983, 185.

Romuald et Juliette. Directed by Colline Serreau. Paris: Tamasa Distribution, 1987.

*Saga Cités “*Emission du 4 novembre 1998 : Dix-neuf rue Petit ” aired on November 4, 1998 on France 3.

Sans Aucune Doute. “Emission du 8 décembre 1995 : Racisme dans l’immobilier.” aired on December 8, 1995 on TF1.

Saouia (pseudonym), in discussion with the author, March 25, 2019.

Sugier, Anne ed. *Les Mutilations Du Sexe Des Femmes Aujourd'hui En France*. Paris: Éd. Tierce, 1984.

Tallon, Brigitte.“L’an II du cinéma antillais.” *Autrement,* 49, April 1983, 239-245.

—“Nul n’est censé ignorer la loi.” *Autrement* 49, April 1983, 150.

Tenor, Janine. “Verna McKennzie Parle de « Voice » l’Hebdomadaire Black de Grande Bretagne.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme.* Paris: August 1992, XVI.

Tewolde-Berhan, Awra. “Girlhood - A Review: Fatally Flawed Examination of a Young Black French Girl's Life.” Whats On Africa, December 23, 2015. https://whatsonafrica.org/girlhood-sciamma-2014-review/.

TF1 13 heures. “Emission du 15 juin 1993 : Immigration Zéro. ” aired June 15, 1993 on TF1.

TF1 13 Heures. “Expulsion squatters.” aired May 4, 1990 on TF1.

TF1 13 heures. “Polygamy.” aired June 18, 1993 on TF1.

TF1 13 heures. “Squatt Paris.” aired December 14, 1989 on Télévision Française 1.

TF1 20 heures. “Emission du 17 Novembre 2005- Polygamy : difficultés de femmes africaines.” aired November 17, 2005 on TF1.

TF1 20 Heures le Journal. “Les Squatters” aired May 13, 1983 on Télévision Française 1.

TF1 Nuit. “Emission du 19 mai 1990: Manif Mal Logés.” aired on May 19, 1990 on TF1.

Theodore-Vachon, ReBecca. “Interview: Black Women's Lives Matter in "Girlhood"." *Roger Ebert.com*, February 07, 2015, https://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/interview-black-womens-lives-matter-in-girlhood.

Kouh-Moukoury, Thérèse in discussion with the author, February 6, 2019.

Thiam, Awa. *La Parole aux Négresses.* Paris: Denoël-Gonthier, 1978.

Traore, Moussa. “Chez Kady: Mme Kady Diallo coiffeuse malienne crée son style à Paris et ouvre un salon.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: September 1982.
—“Percer dans la Restauration.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* October 1983, 18. “La Cuisine Sénégalaise à Paris” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* July 1982, 31.
—“Kady Coiffure.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: October 1, 1985, 29-30.
—“Miss Afro.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: December 15, 1985, 48-49.
—“Miss Bamy” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: November 15, 1985.
—“Sitty Coiffure.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: December 1982, 34.

Traoré, Mamadou. “Leader Coiff.: Un Nouveau Look à Paris.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: July 1989, 79.

Vers la Tendresse. Directed by Alice Diop. France : Les Films du Worso, 2016.

Yahi Naissemou, Michel. “Being a Businesswoman.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme* January 1983, 25.

Zelensky, Jean Claude. “Anne Sylvie N’Gah Directrice de L’institut Stone, Black and White Beauty.” *Amina Le Magazine de la Femme*. Paris: March 1990, 24.