MIGRATION AND ACTIVISM IN EUROPE SINCE 1945

Edited by Wendy Pojmann
Migration and Activism in Europe since 1945
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Wendy Pojmann
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More than two decades ago American and European scholars “discovered” immigrants as political actors, as opposed to simply “powerless and voiceless” objects of politics. These newly established minorities had only limited rights as political actors and fewer rights still as participants in the electoral systems in European countries. Nevertheless, scholars argued that they had considerable protection in an emerging system of “post-nationalist” membership,¹ that numerous forms of political participation were open to ethnic minorities, and that in many countries (France, Britain, and Sweden, e.g.) relatively simple naturalization requirements meant that immigrants and their children would soon be voting citizens.²

This somewhat optimistic view did not go unchallenged. Post-national rights possess only a limited institutional status, protected mostly by judicial institutions, and can be easily swept away by tides of tribalism and nationalism it was argued.³ It is also clear that rights and protections may rest on a weak political foundation if there is a failure to build political support for either immigrant rights or new bases for citizenship. Moreover, the assumption that emerging ethnic minorities “would have a growing and dramatic impact on the politics of Western European nations” remains to be demonstrated.⁴

Now, this important new collection of essays, written mostly by a new generation of scholars from the United States and Europe, reexamines the issue of immigrants as political actors once again. The authors find that patterns of immigrant activism analyzed by scholars a generation ago have continued and have been reinforced. Activism has continued to be constrained and defined by the nation-state, its institutions, and its values. Protections for post-national rights remain highly fragile, and the reassertion of nationalist politics remains evident.

The chapters in this book tell a more complex story than most of what was written before. On one hand, immigrant groups have not gone away politically. They continue to be present, to be organized, and to assert their interests. On the other hand, there is little indication that they have become more effective, or more important than they were a generation ago. The chapters on Sweden, France, Germany, and Belgium, all indicate political weakness, perhaps
growing weakness, in the representation of immigrant interests, and indeed in
the representation of immigrants.

This is a rich collection of essays. It offers us the opportunity to examine
once again the role of immigrant/ethnic minority groups as political actors in
a Europe whose governments have become more hostile to the multicultural
frameworks that informed public policy twenty years ago. In this context, it is
not surprising that the special interests of these groups are more difficult to
assert. Indeed, it is now more important that we understand how these groups
participate in the political process.

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Notes

1. See Yasemin Nuhglu Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational
2. Alec Hargreaves and Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *New Community*, Volume 20,
   Number 1, October 1993, Special issue: “The Political Participation of Ethnic
   Minorities in Europe.”
   Press, 1998), see articles by Schuck, Feldblum, and Guiraudon.
4. Mark Miller, *Foreign Workers in Western Europe: An Emerging Political Force* (New
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Introduction

Wendy Pojmann

In the United States and Europe immigration is a hotly contested terrain that has generated intense debates at every level of society. The media, policy makers, and politicians, among others, have entered into a discourse that examines immigration from seemingly every possible angle. Within the academic world, numerous single-authored works and collections focusing on immigration and its consequences in postwar Western Europe have appeared in the past several years, especially on issues such as the economic and social impact of migration, its cultural dimensions, the integration of immigrants, national security, and the new role of Islam. An emphasis in much of this literature is the impact of immigration on the host society, and there is a continued tendency in the academy to see migrants, as Castles and Kosack did in their pivotal 1973 text, as powerless and voiceless. Yet, migrants are political actors, as Mark J. Miller recognized in Foreign Workers in Western Europe (1981), whose permanent and growing presence in Western Europe was sure to have a dramatic impact on the politics of Western European nations. As Miller wrote more than two decades ago: “Foreign workers have become political actors in their own right through a number of distinctive channels or avenues of influence that, although often unorthodox or obscure, have made them a characteristic component of advanced industrial political systems.” Miller documented numerous instances of foreign worker involvement in trade unions, political parties, and civil rights organizations and remarked on the ramifications of strikes and other protests in which large numbers of foreign workers participated.

Despite the exciting direction Miller took, there are still relatively few studies that attempt to sort out the question of non-European migrant activism in the Western European context since the end of World War II. Studies on the migrations of Europeans within Europe and their integration and political activism are perhaps better known, especially in the earlier part of the twentieth century. For example, numerous scholars have examined the political activism of the
Italians and Spanish in France before World War II and have commented on the smoother integration of European migrants than those of non-European origins. Other recent studies have focused on the politics of migration and immigration from the perspective of official legislation, policy, public opinion, and the shifting priorities of the European Union. In these studies politics generally refers to the native context and immigrant actors mainly appear as a disruptive force to be reconciled by European governments. This is especially the case in scholarship that examines political developments since 1990 in part because of an emphasis on the development of “Fortress Europe” as internal European borders have come down while external borders have tightened. Scholars have largely avoided the contentious area of migrant activism, perhaps because of the many questions it raises about traditional ways of defining who is a migrant, what national loyalty means, and even what political participation entails.

This volume aims to correct this oversight and generate debate by continuing in the direction set by Miller. It highlights exciting new research by a number of established and emerging scholars who examine non-European migrant activism in Western Europe since 1945 in a framework that seeks to challenge comfortable disciplinary and definitional categories. The authors analyze the significance of migration and immigration to political and social activism in contemporary Europe and ask how immigrants and native Europeans have confronted difficulties in working together in the post–World War II era. Migrants in this volume emerge as political actors and activists whose forms of organizing reflect both the influence of politics in their home countries and in the Western European countries where they reside. Postwar migrants have entered into a complex global system of men and women on the move seeking educational or employment opportunities, fleeing persecution, reuniting with families, or otherwise responding to the pushes and pulls of migration. Regardless of whether they have permanently settled in Europe and sought citizenship there, migrants must interact with native Europeans as they live their daily lives. As a result, migrants participate in the European political process albeit not always through recognized channels. Each of the chapters in this volume seeks to understand the nature and degree of that political participation in relation to the specific characteristics of migrant communities and the individual European nation-states.

To better come to terms with the immigration debates of the twenty-first century, the contributions to this book grapple with the complexities of contemporary European history. As a result, even when focusing on very recent developments, the contributors are aware of the dramatic changes in immigration to Western Europe that have occurred during the postwar decades. Key historical events and contemporary trends inform their studies: the consequences of decolonization; the war in Algeria; the student movements of 1968; the oil crisis of 1973; European integration; and September 11, 2001 have all had an impact on European politics and immigration. Because of its emphasis on critical historical and political moments, this collection advances the work undertaken by social scientists and adds a compelling longitudinal dimension to the study of migrant activism.
Despite working from different disciplines, the authors share an emphasis on using some of the richest methodologies from the humanities and social sciences. Their chapters blend archival research, empirical data, media analysis, and interviews, and apply such theoretical frameworks as political opportunity structure, social movement theory, and gender analysis to the study of immigration. The authors, moreover, include narrative accounts and case studies to help bring the actors in their stories to life. It is this element of story telling that helps to enliven the authors’ research and allows greater access to the experiences of the women and men who have lived through this period. Moreover, the authors bring some of the most valuable aspects of their specialties to their research, such as long-term fieldwork and participant observation, the collection and interpretation of empirical data, and extensive archival work. As a result, they help to advance immigration studies by showing what historians can learn from political scientists, sociologists from anthropologists, and so on, as well as what specialists in subfields such as Diaspora studies, African studies, international relations, American studies, public policy, and gender studies can contribute to the field of contemporary European studies.

Three methodological and theoretical elements that are utilized in several of the chapters require brief explanation. First, a number of the authors (Schandevyl, Dahlstedt, Torres Colón, Boucher, Ezekiel, Pojmann) in the collection have turned to oral history as one means of gathering data. An advantage to working on questions concerning contemporary Europe is precisely having access to men and women who can recount their experiences. In no case, however, have the authors relied solely on interviews. Instead, they use them as a complement to archival and statistical materials, which provides a valuable interpretative element to their studies. One of the early goals of oral history was to help give a voice to those individuals who were traditionally excluded from the written record and therefore marginalized, which is especially applicable to the case of immigrant activists in contemporary Europe whose stories have not received adequate attention in the mainstream literature. Second, the influence of political opportunity structure (POS) is evident in several of the chapters (Eccarius-Kelly, Dahlstedt, Boucher, Karan). As a theory that allows scholars to combine the study of social movements with the particularities of immigration, POS is a useful tool in explaining the political participation of actors who may or may not have access to citizenship and who remain largely at the margins of traditional (i.e., Western) political institutions. Influenced by the work of Tarrow, Koopmans, Kriesi, and others, the authors here attempt to understand the ways in which political institutions, social discourses, and culture affect European political opportunities, especially migrants’ access to political participation. Finally, the impact of women’s and gender theory in the study of immigration is evident in the chapters by Freedman, Ezekiel, and Pojmann. As a rich literature in this area has made clear, women have been migrating to Western Europe throughout the postwar period, and not solely through family reunifications. The “typical” migrant is not necessarily a young, single male nor do women and men experience migration in the same ways. Debates over the wearing of the Muslim headscarf in
public places, for example, have put women’s bodies at the center of discussions of migration and integration. Freedman, Ezekiel, and Pojmann therefore recognize the gender-specific interests of women minority activists.

As well as sharing methodological frameworks, the chapters in this volume explore several contested areas in combination with that of migrant activism to include nationalism, transnationalism, and citizenship—all of which call into question very limited definitions used in referring to migrants and their struggles. First, as recent scholarship has shown, despite the increased Europeanization of the immigration question and despite European Union policies that have led to the creation of “Fortress Europe,” the nation-state remains relatively autonomous while important differences among the EU member states continue to inform their approaches and responses to migrant political participation. Koopmans and Statham, in fact, have argued that immigration may actually serve to reinvigorate the nation-state. Migrant activism has certainly contributed to developments in national politics. To better comprehend how this has occurred, historical factors help explain why migrants in France appear to be more politically active in organized social protests (Freedman) and why migrants who attempt to organize in Sweden seem to disappear behind a complex system of government funding (Karan). More than simply defining the general characteristics of postwar migrations that are by now well known, however, the authors in this collection grapple with the complex results of national migration policies that have developed since World War II. In other words, in this volume, to state that Germany has long defined itself as not a country of immigration is less significant than coming to terms with the impact of that self-definition on the political activities of its migrant population (Boucher).

Second, while the nation-state retains its importance, the transnational dimension of migration is not to be underestimated. Migrants remain connected to their countries or origins whether through language and cultural tradition or through physically traveling back and forth between countries, which can have important political consequences. Migrant activists employ strategies that fit local, national, and international contexts. However, contrary to many studies that see transnational migrant activists as primarily loyal to struggles in the home country, several authors in this collection (especially Slobodian, Eccarius-Kelly, and Germain) recognize the complexity of social activism in a transnational context. Slobodian, for example, challenges the common perception that African and Asian student activists in Germany simply followed the lead of the German nationals, and instead argues that the foreign students themselves acted as models for international student protest. Even notions of what constitutes the state and defines its borders is challenged in this collection by authors such as Torres Colón who demonstrates that in the Spanish exclave of Ceuta transnational politics are complicated by history and place. Similarly, the Algerians in France discussed by Izambert found themselves facing mixed loyalties as French citizens working in French industry with a stake in the independence of Algeria. Finally, Eccarius-Kelly’s work underscores the importance of nationhood in the Kurdish struggle and offers a challenge to scholars who suggest that the success of the Europeanization of
immigrant activism is limited. These cases are examples of what Castles and Davidson may have had in mind when they stated, “there are increasing numbers of citizens who do not belong” in reference to neat traditional categorizations of national citizens.10

Third, the notion of citizenship as a derivative of political rights is problematic in Western Europe. Countries such as Sweden have long granted limited voting rights to noncitizens, but that does not necessarily mean that foreigners have a stronger political voice. In fact, the question of political participation is often defined by access to the rights of citizenship as distinguished in a variety of national contexts at different historical moments. In many cases, immigrant activists faced and continue to face deportation and legal action for their political participation. Citizenship becomes an important marker since, as Germain notes, Antillean leaders in the 1960s had French citizenship and so did not face the threat of deportation for their activism, whereas the threat of deportation is precisely the source of contention for the sans-papiers (undocumented migrants) discussed by Freedman. The sans-papiers were not the first migrants to organize in protest against French immigration policies, but they succeeded in capturing the public’s attention and in bringing questions of legality and political cooperation back to the center of immigration debates. In a very different context, Torres Colón’s research highlights how changes in the status of citizenship for the musulmanes of Ceuta have altered notions of multicultural politics. The acquisition of Spanish citizenship and the 1985 Immigration Law became the main focus of musulmanes activism in the late 1980s until most of Ceuta’s residents had obtained it by the early 1990s. Torres Colón notes that it was Spain’s desire to join the European Community that changed the country’s approach to the question of Ceuta and citizenship for its “immigrants.” The contributors to this volume have thus taken multiple meanings of citizenship, nationalism, and transnational belonging into their accounts of migrant activism.

The volume is divided into three parts, with four chapters in each part that address similar themes in different contexts. Part one offers a long-term look at migrant activism in France and Germany, with special emphasis on periods of heightened activity in the 1960s and 1990s. Part two considers migrant activism in relation to European trade unions and political parties in France, Spain, Sweden, and Belgium. Part three examines issue-specific migrant organizing in France, Sweden, Germany, and Italy. A more detailed description of each section follows.

Part I: Migrant Activists in National and Transnational Social Movements

The chapters in part one help to explain the historical development of migrant organizing in the postwar period. They confirm that migrant activism is not a new phenomenon. Although some of the main issues of migrant activism may have changed, many more have not, and very few of the problems migrants have brought to the forefront in various contexts have been resolved.
The contributions in this section show moreover how migrant actors participate in social protest from multiple vantage points: organizing to remedy their unjust treatment in the host country; participating in national social movements in the host country; responding to injustice in international politics; and representing the political interests of the home country. In each case, migrants have shaped political situations and have not simply reacted to extant circumstances. Slobodian argues, for example, that in the 1960s foreign students in Germany took the lead in transnational activism and globalized the German students’ awareness and concerns. In the more recent context, Eccarius-Kelly explains how Kurdish organizing at the European Union level may serve in the development of successful transnational political movements. And, as Freedman’s and Germain’s contributions demonstrate, in France migrant leaders have transcended limited notions of identity politics to become relevant in broader political debates. Germain, in particular, explains that migrants in France have long been involved in multiple forms of protest, some of which are related to home concerns, some of which are related to treatment in host country, and many of which overlap with the forms of protest used by the French. As a result, the contributors demonstrate that even when mainly focused on a singular cause in a specific location, migrant activists frequently operate according to multiple forms of identity and multiple understandings of place.

A transnational element exists even in struggles not directly related to events in the home countries. This may be because the migrants perceive themselves as connected to broader or even global struggles, as Slobodian’s chapter shows, or it may be because the European host population continues to view migrants as temporary and waiting to “go home” (Freedman) or to have a “home” created (Eccarius-Kelly).

These four chapters especially focus on developments in France and Germany. Both nations have been major countries of immigration since 1945 but have taken very different approaches to it. Broadly speaking, the French have supported limited immigration while downplaying racial and ethnic differences. The Germans, on the other hand, have asserted that Germany is not a country of immigration and have tended to approach migrants as temporary guest workers that should maintain their traditions for an eventual return to their home country. However, migrant activists have employed similar political tactics in both countries. Since at least the 1960s, migrant workers in France and Germany have used protests and strikes to bring attention to a series of issues pertaining to labor, housing, immigration law, and racism. Participation in the student and workers’ movement of 1968, the SONACOTRA rent strike that began in 1975, the national Convergence antiracist marches in 1983–84, the sans-papiers protests in the mid-1990s, and most recently, the Ni Putes Ni Soumises march in 2003, all point to the long-term organizing of migrants in France. Striking and taking to the streets, of course, are not new forms of political protest in France and certainly fit within French history and tradition. In Germany also migrants have been involved in strikes and protests but mostly through the trade unions. Miller described labor strikes as early as 1963 in Baden-Württemberg and housing occupations in Frankfurt in the early 1970s.11
Nevertheless, Koopmans and others have commented on the different development of migrant political activity in France and Germany. Whereas France can be characterized as having a higher level of national political activity and a closed political opportunity structure, Germany has more open institutional structures but less access to formal political citizenship. The consequences of these differences emerge in the chapters in part one.

**Part II: Migrant Activists in Trade Unions and Party Politics**

The chapters in part two examine the ways in which migrants have developed relationships with European political parties and trade unions in the postwar period. As key players in the political systems of the European nation-state, the political parties and trade unions have helped to shape policies on immigration, especially those that define inclusion or exclusion in political life and posit questions of social and cultural integration. During the decades of recovery and economic boom that followed World War II, the political parties and trade unions supported the recruitment of foreign workers to help temporarily meet the need for an increased labor supply. By the 1960s, northern and Western European nations such as Germany, France, and Belgium were relying increasingly on labor from non-European nations. By the time of the first oil crisis in 1973, however, it was clear that the new migrant workforce was permanent, and despite a closing of doors to foreign labor, the immigrant populations continued to grow throughout the 1970s, largely because of family reunifications.

With an immigrant workforce reaching into the millions by the 1980s, it was clear that the political parties and trade unions would have to take a stance on immigration. While both the parties and unions could potentially benefit from increasing their memberships, they also had to use caution in attempting not to alienate their native constituents. At the same time, migrants were faced with the question of how much benefit the political parties and trade unions could be to them. Access to some forms of the political rights of citizenship played a role in migrant activism but also having the opportunity to bring issues related to immigrant status into the discussions of the political parties and trade unions informed migrant participation or the lack thereof in these traditional political structures. The chapters in this section offer new insights into the response of migrants to the political discourse in their European countries of residence and therefore go beyond just an examination of the political parties’ and trade unions’ approaches to immigration. Moreover, while the rise of the extreme Right in Europe with its militant anti-immigrant stance has attracted the interest of many scholars in recent years, these chapters relate the positions of mainstream political bodies and question the supposed affinity between political parties and trade unions on the political Left and immigrants while demonstrating an awareness of the Right’s influence on recent political discourse.

Dahlstedt and Schandevelly examine the question of migrant activism and exclusion from the contexts of national politics in Sweden and Belgium. Sweden
Wendy Pojmann is generally known for a multicultural approach to immigration and integration. The Swedes recognized the permanent features of migration by the 1960s and so approached migrant workers, in particular, as immigrants and not as temporary guest workers. Foreigners achieved resident status and naturalization more easily than in many other European countries. Following the recession of 1972, however, the Swedes shut their doors to labor migrants and looked at how to deal with migrants already in Sweden as well as with their families arriving from abroad who were still entitled to reunite with them. From this point on, the Swedish government took to expanding its egalitarian and social welfare policies to its foreign-born population. Housing and labor legislation, for example, were to be equal for migrants and natives alike, and the Swedes granted noncitizen immigrants voting rights in local elections. However, as Dahlstedt points out, the promise of political equality and the reality of migrant political participation have not always matched. According to him, and despite discourse to the contrary, Swedish political parties practice exclusion because migrants do not have equal access to the networks, language, and tools available to native-born Swedes. The emergence of immigrant political candidates in the late 1990s who stress their ethnic identities has begun to upset previous models of political integration. These political actors have challenged a multiculturalism that aims to downplay difference.

Like other northern and Western European nations, Belgium developed as an immigration country beginning with migrations of southern Europeans to work in its mines and factories in the immediate postwar period. The recruitment of northern Africans and Turks in the 1960s and the halting of immigration in 1974 followed. In the subsequent period of family reunification, Schandevyl shows that the immigration question turned from being associated mainly with labor issues to being a “problem of national identity and cohesion.” She explains how the role of the Arab section in the Christian trade union, the CSC, changed from representing mainly immigration issues to sharing the other emphases of the Belgian trade unions. However, the regions of Walloon and Flanders have taken different approaches to immigration politics in Belgium, with Walloon following a French-influenced stance of assimilation and Flanders resembling the multiculturalism of the Netherlands. This has had an impact on the activism of migrants and their roles within the trade unions. Taken together then, Dahlstedt and Schandevyl offer a complex look at the history and role of migrants in the traditional political structures of northwestern Europe.

The chapters by Torres Colón and Izambert add a compelling transnational component to discussions of party politics and immigration. Torres Colón examines the historical development of Muslim political parties in Ceuta where traditional means of organizing have been complicated by the exclave’s position as a tiny piece of Spain in northern Africa and by the ambiguous political status of its Muslim residents. Izambert looks at the relationship between the French Communist Party and Algerians in France as it evolved during the Algerian crisis. Both of these chapters demonstrate how European political parties failed to successfully appeal to migrants of Muslim origin and to
consider their multiple interests. In the case of Ceuta, until the mid-1980s, migrant activists were especially caught up in questions of immigration and citizenship for musulmanes residents, which meant that they had little in common with the objectives of the political parties. When they formed their own party, however, Torres Colón points out that musulmanes activists had to enter into coalitions with other political parties. Interestingly, it was not always parties on the Left that became allies of the new Democratic and Social Party of Ceuta. For the Algerians in France, however, who did have French citizenship, the question of Algerian independence overshadowed their identity as members of the working class. The Parti Communiste Français (PCF; French Communist Party) found itself in a bind; it was not able to delineate a clear stance against imperialism and therefore found itself at odds with a sizeable immigrant population that otherwise would likely have supported and voted for the Communists. Izambert’s analysis of the PCF’s newspaper specifically targeted to Algerian immigrants provides many examples of the Communists’ inability to connect with Algerian workers, including a lack of Algerian columnists and Arabic language articles. In each of the four chapters, the authors question to what degree migrant activism has been possible inside political institutions that have a long history of exclusionary practices and mixed loyalties.

**Part III: Migrant Activists and Organizations in Outsider Politics**

The contributions to part three of the volume examine immigrant activism in issue-based politics. In particular, they consider forms of immigrant organizing outside national political parties and trade unions while at the same time reflecting on how national discourses on immigration shape migrant mobilization. As earlier chapters will make clear, traditional political bodies may have only limited appeal to migrants, who in many cases have formed their own organizations to confront matters of importance to them. However, the decision to self-organize is seldom an uncomplicated one since migrant leaders must nonetheless find a way to act within the existing political context. The individual historical settings and experiences of immigration in Sweden, Italy, Germany, and France are therefore relevant in understanding immigrant self-organizing. French difficulties at making foreigners French, and German stubbornness to only partially integrate migrants have led to many of the conflicts discussed by Ezekiel and Boucher. Yet, as Karan details, perhaps in an unintentional way, the Swedes’ relative openness to immigrants has not necessarily allowed migrant leaders to operate on their own terms either. In Italy, on the other hand, Pojmann notes a late response to immigration and government dependency on nongovernmental bodies to assist immigrants. In each case discussed in these chapters, the postwar history of immigration has shaped recent debates. The authors emphasize this in their analyses.

The chapters by Karan and Pojmann consider conflicts between existent political structures and migrants. Karan argues that by controlling the purse
strings, the Swedish government has limited migrant autonomy even within migrant-led organizations. Immigrant voices are marginalized within a corporatist system that tends to favor “open and democratic” associations over those with a clear ethnic component despite policies that favor the maintenance of cultural traditions. Migrant leaders have thus had great difficulty in providing the members of their communities with associations that represent ethnic minority interests since they may ultimately express more affinity to the Swedish government that funds them than to their own communities. However, even within historical social movements with a strong emphasis on overcoming inequalities, migrant interests have been discounted. In her account of relations between Italian and migrant women, Pojmann traces how gender-conscious migrants to Italy have been excluded from participation in the national women’s movements. Migrant women have formed their own associations to deal with problems related to gender and migration, such as employment opportunities, while engaging in a difficult relationship with Italian feminists who have generally not reflected on the impact of migration on women’s rights. Pojmann brings to light why it is only in the past decade that the antiracist and feminist movements have united on the question of immigration and why two types of women’s movements developed simultaneously. In both of these chapters, it is clear that extraparliamentary politics and culture are tied to broader systems that require migrant activists to seek ways to work with native Europeans.

In their chapters on recent events in France and Germany, Ezekiel and Boucher use specific cases to illustrate how the native European and immigrant populations have mobilized around issues connected to immigration and minority rights. Both authors explore the volatile headscarf issue, a matter of debate in France since the late 1980s and in Germany especially since 2003, and demonstrate the ways in which migrant and minority activists have engaged in local and national discourse. Ezekiel turns especially to France’s secular, Republican history to attempt to make sense of why a head covering has caused such heightened emotions there. She then explains the response of “women of color” groups to the headscarf ban that went into effect in 2004. Immigrant and minority women activists have not taken a united approach to the ban. For example, some women’s groups have taken the position that the headscarf is a sign of oppression, but they oppose the ban nonetheless. However, immigrant and minority leaders have mobilized their communities on the issue and have followed the model set by such national antiracist groups as the SOS Racisme. Some of these groups, especially the women of color feminist association, Ni Putes Ni Soumises, have attained national attention and the support of French celebrities.

In 2005, the parliament of the city-state of Berlin passed a ban on headscarves. As in France, the issue generated public discussions, demonstrations, and a great deal of media coverage. Boucher looks at how Turkish migrant groups, those she identified as most directly affected by the ban, participated in the political debates about the headscarf in formal political institutions and local government bodies. By comparing migrant participation in debates on
the headscarf at the city-state level to those that took place at the federal level in 1998–99 over the Nationality Act, Boucher shows that Turkish migrants participated to a greater extent in the political discourse about the headscarf. Interestingly, the cultural–religious legislation generated more of a reaction than did the legislation directly affecting migrant political rights. Boucher connects the different responses to the political opportunity structures available to Turkish migrant activists at local versus national levels rather than to the emotional nature of the headscarf issue. Both Ezekiel and Boucher underscore the importance of activists of Islamic backgrounds in France and Germany who are working to combat negative cultural interpretations of their communities while also striving for greater political rights.

The contributors and I hope that this volume will advance understanding of migrant activism in Western Europe and reopen research and lively discussion of migrant political participation in the contemporary era. Also, we look forward to further cooperation among historians and social scientists in grappling with the many issues raised here. Interdisciplinary scholarship is sure to offer insights into the question of migrant activism, and we welcome the opportunity to share our piece of that work with you.

Notes

5. Authors’ names in parentheses in this introduction refer to their chapters in this volume.


15. It is worth noting that in Germany each Land was granted autonomy to pass its own legislation on the headscarf issue. That was not the case in France where a national law was enacted.
PART I

Migrant Activists in National and Transnational Social Movements
CHAPTER 1

For the Nation and for Work: Black Activism in Paris of the 1960s

Felix Germain

Until 1945, sub-Saharan African and Caribbean migrants to France were especially soldiers and professionals. During World Wars I and II, thousands had answered the call to save the mère patrie. After each War, however, most of the soldiers were quickly dismissed. A few, such as the former Senegalese writer and president Leopold Senghor, remained in France, mingling with other black professionals, intellectuals, and artists from francophone Africa, the French Antilles, and the United States. By 1960 the black migrant community in France was still relatively small (about fifty thousand), consisting mostly of students, professionals, and a few low-skilled African workers typically recruited by car factories and naval companies. While the car factories used the Africans as temporary summer replacement, naval companies often hired the men as soutiers (coal room workers) and manoeuvres (manual laborers), two unpopular trades among French seamen.

At the turn of the 1960s, the creation of the Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations Interressant les Département d’Outre Mer (BUMIDOM), a state-sponsored agency that recruited workers from the French Antilles, and the lack of economic opportunities throughout sub-Saharan African nations spurred a large-scale working class labor migration to Paris. However, this postwar labor migration occurred in the midst of changing mentalité (attitudes). The attributes of colonialism had recently been challenged. As citizens of independent nations, sub-Saharan Africans negated the idea that foreigners with supposedly higher social, cultural, intellectual, and political accomplishments were entitled to make laws, govern, impose their language, their educational system, and even their customs on them. On the other hand, the French Antilles (Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana), which were
conquered and ruled by France since 1635, became Overseas Departments in 1946, and thus became totally integrated into France’s socioeconomic and political structure. Although seemingly different, these political statuses conferred Antilleans and sub-Saharan Africans a greater sense of pride, freedom, and equality.

However, when Antilleans and sub-Saharan Africans migrated to France in the 1960s, their former colonial status still determined their social conditions, especially in the labor and housing markets. As the Antillean writer Françoise Ega who lived in France during this period observes, “the French government and society perceive all Polish people as agricultural workers, all Algerians as unskilled construction workers, and all Antillean women as maids.” Although race, gender, and ethnicity structured the labor landscape, only offering people of African descent menial worker, household employee, or lower rank tertiary worker positions, Antilleans and sub-Saharan Africans had migrated to France with clear-cut professional goals; they desired decent wages, congenial and respectful treatment, and the possibility of receiving a job promotion relative to their hard work.

This chapter chronicles the tensions resulting from the gap between the migrants’ expectations and their designated position in French society. Specifically, it examines the relationship between the working class black migration and activism in postwar France, particularly in Paris of the 1960s. I first analyze the relationship between French labor unions and black activism. I then map the different forms of black activism and interrogate how they fit within the larger narrative of social protest depicted in conventional contemporary French history, especially in regards to May 1968. Most importantly, I discuss the transnational dimension of black protest in Paris in the 1960s, suggesting it results from social inequalities and political turmoil in France as well as in sub-Saharan African countries and the French Antilles.

This chapter aims to compensate for the lack of scholarly research on the African Diaspora in postwar France. Fascinating texts by Paul Gilroy, Winston James, Stephen Small, and Stuart Hall discuss the multiple consequences of the postwar Caribbean and African migration to the United Kingdom. However, although blacks migrated to France in equal numbers, virtually nothing is written about them in English, rendering our intellectual landscape on contemporary French history incomplete and longing for new perspectives on race, ethnicity, nationality, identity, and social activism, which, ultimately, would also complement an already burgeoning French scholarship. In sum, this chapter emphasizes Antillean and Africans’ sociopolitical agency, and as is commonly recognized, it demonstrates that social change often occurs from the bottom–up. By combining archival research and interviews, I attempt to restore silenced voices to the historical record. I suggest that black organizations and movements that have been traditionally perceived as unimportant are in fact worth studying, for they reveal that contemporary Europe is, in fact, a heterogeneous space wherein cultural and sociopolitical identities are constantly invented, reinvented, and negotiated.
Black Activism in Paris of the 1960s

The French Labor Unions and Postwar Black Protest

Following World War I, French officials were preoccupied by ideas of racial purity and by the decline of the population, which had persisted since the Franco-Prussian War. As a result, they encouraged increasing the national fertility rate via a number of social interventions. Facing unsuccessful results, demographers and officials from the Ministry of Labor began to contemplate importing foreign labor migrants as a means to strengthen the ailing nation. Europeans whose culture was supposedly similar to that of the French were identified as the most desired migrants. Although conservative elements of French society always remained hostile to all types of immigrants, by virtue of their “superior” position within the ethno-racial hierarchy, the migrants who for the most part came from Italy, Poland, and Belgium received an enthusiastic welcome for the hands and sperm they offered France.

The desire for white labor migrants influenced the representation of colonial workers who had been conscripted during World War I to work in military factories and fight against the Germans. The French journals and newspapers that advocated for European labor migration and increasing the national birthrate reinforced the idea that colonial workers represented a problem for France. For instance, the monthly journal *L’Alliance Nationale pour L’Accroissement de la population Francaise* (the National Alliance for the Increase of the French Population) declared:

> After having been flooded during the war with Kabyle street sweepers, Annamese stokers, Negro dockers, and Chinese laborers, whom we had to import because it was the best we could get, we were forced to send the majority of these worthless immigrants back to their faraway homelands. They were more disposed to pillage and thievery than serious labor. The re-establishment of the peace has permitted us to replace these “undesirables” with our usual immigrants, the Italians and the Spaniards.

The trope of the black worker as a problem, which becomes apparent as soon as the horns of victory are blown, continued throughout the following decades, structuring government immigration policy and industrialists’ behavior vis-à-vis black people. Yet, since the logics of capitalist society entails reducing production cost to maximize profit, the importance of whiteness and ethno-cultural similarity as a prerequisite for socioeconomic growth was sometimes dismissed. Although the French government and the industrialist community strongly believed that people from the colonies were inferior colonial subjects, they perceived them as a pool of cheap laborers, which they could exploit and utilize to stabilize the wages of the French working class.

Despite their seemingly nonthreatening position in the society, the French working class and their labor union representatives viewed nonwhite immigrant workers as a problem, if not a threat. From the interwar to the French labor unions of the early 1950s, of course, also contaminated by racism, asserted that foreign workers, and especially the colonials, undermined the strength of