

BOOK REVIEW

Gillian Glaes. *African Political Activism in Postcolonial France: State Surveillance and Social Welfare*. London: Routledge, 2019. xxiv + 235 pp. List of Figures. List of Abbreviations. Selected bibliography. Index. \$48.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0367588793.

African Political Activism in Postcolonial France: State Surveillance and Social Welfare by Gillian Glaes focuses on sub-Saharan labor immigration to France from the 1960s to the early 1980s. The number of sub-Saharan migrants increased tenfold between 1954 and 1962, 1960 being the year in which fourteen of France's African colonies gained their independence. This rate of immigration changed in 1974, when France enacted legislation that was much more restrictive going forward. The concept of family reunification modified the overall approach to immigration and meant, in fact, that many migrants settled permanently in French territory. Until 1974, movement between France and its former colonies had remained easy because of the cooperation or immigration agreements between France and the new states. This did not exclude strict surveillance, in which an organization such as the Service de coopération technique internationale de police (SCTIP) played a role. The author does not pretend to write a general history of this immigration, but focuses instead, in six chapters, on as many aspects that characterized its existence.

The first of these chapters focuses on an association, the General Union of Senegalese Workers in France (UGTSF), and its founder Sally N'Dongo. The goal of the association was to provide aid and assistance to its members; however, it quickly became politicized. Glaes deepens and completes in this regard the innovative work put forth by Jean-Philippe Dedieu in his book *La parole immigrée* (Klincksiek 2012).

The second chapter deals with a rent strike that took place in Ivry in the Paris suburbs, a strike quite exceptional due to its longevity. This strike was part of a larger set of social conflicts that took place in generally insalubrious and poorly equipped homes, conflicts in which left and extreme left groups organized the immigrants' struggles and accentuated their anti-capitalist character.

The third chapter examines a tragedy that occurred in Aubervilliers, also in the Paris suburbs: the death of five workers in a fire, which caused a scandal. In *L'immigration et l'opinion en France sous la Ve République* (Seuil 2000),

Yvan Gastaut had already emphasized the extent to which this tragedy was a turning point in the way public opinion viewed immigration. Glaes takes a fresh look at this incident and its fallout.

The fourth chapter focuses on the control exercised over this population by the authorities, who were initially worried about the influence of extreme left-wing organizations but soon came to believe in the absolute political neutrality of these workers. The author also discusses welfare practices specifically aimed at postcolonial subjects.

This foreshadows the next chapter, which analyzes the role of the Bossuet Center, a health and social assistance institution dedicated to African workers, and examines its changing role as the families of the migrant laborers arrived. This is perhaps the most innovative part of the book, as no systematic study on this center has been carried out until now. Finally, in the last chapter, Glaes looks at the anti-slum campaign, which meant the dispersion of the occupants of the targeted houses for the purpose of integration, and the resistance it provoked.

Each chapter could almost be read separately, but the volume as a whole gives an accurate picture of the developments that took place, both in terms of the sociology of the population under consideration and the policies pursued by the French state. There are also some common threads that run through the whole book. One of these is the continuity between colonial and post-colonial policies, as well as between trade union practices at the time of colonization and post-colonial modes of organization in France. But this is perhaps where the author is least convincing. Even if there are indeed continuities, it would have been necessary to produce a more reasoned analysis, for which the work of Jean-Pierre Bat, Romain Tiquet, or Emmanuel Blanchard could have provided a basis. The short paragraph devoted to trade unionism in French West Africa considers only the General Union of Black African Workers, which was created late, in 1957. It is not clear how the UGTSF fits into this genealogy. In short, it would probably have been necessary to substantiate more precisely what these continuities and affiliations consist of. This does not invalidate the point. One could perhaps also criticize the author for taking so little account of the 68 moment and the strong involvement of immigrant workers in that social movement. There is necessarily a link between what happens in the factories and in the houses, and 68 was a decisive moment in the process of the politicization of postcolonial workers.

But these are only a few drawbacks that in no way undermine the value of Gillian Glaes's study, which should be seen as an important addition to the historiography of postcolonial migrants.

Françoise Blum

University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne/

Centre national de la recherche scientifique Paris/Aubervilliers, France

doi:10.1017/asr.2021.58

Francoise.Blum@univ-paris1.fr

If you liked this, you may also enjoy:

- Dedieu, Jean-Philippe. 2018. "The Rise of the Migration-Development Nexus in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960–2010." *African Studies Review* 61 (1): 83–108. doi:[10.1017/asr.2017.95](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.95).
- Patterson, Tiffany Ruby, and Robin D. G. Kelley. 2000. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." *African Studies Review* 43 (1): 11–45. doi:[10.2307/524719](https://doi.org/10.2307/524719).