

Literature Review

The role of French unions in the civic integration of immigrant workers

Laetitia Dechaufour

Social and Economic Sciences teacher

Lycée Hector Berlioz, 8 avenue Antoine Quinson, 94300 Vincennes, France

laetitiadechaufour@gmail.com

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Introduction

The aim of this review is to summarize the main currents of research and analysis in the French literature on unions and immigrant workers. In order to do so, the paper will start with a brief history of immigration in France, followed by a historical perspective on the issue of trade unions and their role in integrating immigrant workers throughout the second part of the XXth century. Then, more recent works will be reviewed in order to emphasize the current issues for consideration.

The project “Unions and the integration of immigrant workers: Germany, France, the U.S. and U.K. in Comparative Perspective” straddles two fields of sociology: sociology of immigration and sociology of social movement, specifically the trade union movement. But there seems to be very few academic attempts of mixing these two fields. A general academic search was conducted across the disciplines of sociology, political science, history, mainly through the medium of BiblioSHS, a data base which is an exhaustive gateway to academic journals and articles, but also through the national catalogue of university libraries SUDOC. The entries that were searched through were: “trade unions immigration”, “trade unions immigrant workers”, and “trade unions racism”. This search did not prove to be very prolific; very few books and articles were found that dealt precisely on this specific issue. However, two particular studies were used for our review, on which a substantial part is based: the first one is Leah Haus’ article “Labor unions and immigration policies in France” written in 1999; the second one is more recent (2005) and is Véronique De Rudder’s research paper entitled “Perspectives on racism and trade unions in France”, available on line (see bibliography). The issues developed in those two papers are slightly different from our problematic here, but they have the advantage to be based on the field, and have very thoroughly reviewed unions’ internal documents – which I haven’t.

Note on terminology

A particularity of France is that migrants are systematically referred to as “immigrés” (which could be translated as “immigrees”) rather than “immigrants”, which is grammatically possible, and which emphasizes the *state* (being a migrant forever) and not the temporary *process* of immigration (prior to being a French citizen). According to Véronique De Rudder (2005:3), this is “the common sense category by essence¹ ». This nourishes confusion between real immigrants (who are coming from a different country, and have a specific status in France) and those who are of immigrant origin, who was born in France (sometimes from parents themselves born in France) and who have for most of them nothing to do with their countries of origin. “Mostly, the notion of « immigré » refers to a special ‘condition’ in the nation and the society, to a renewed precarity over at least two generations. » (De Rudder, 2005:3) As for the official terms, this is how the INSEE (French National Institute of Statistic and Economic Sciences) defines a foreigner: someone living in France without the French nationality; and an ‘immigré’: someone living in France, born foreigner in a foreign country. This means an ‘immigré’ can either be a foreigner or a French citizen (by acquisition of the French nationality), whereas a foreigner can be born in France. In this literature review, we will use different terminologies

¹ Every quotation is my translation.

("immigrant worker", "of immigrant origin"; etc.), not because the terms are interchangeable, but because there is a continuum of status in the situation of those people who are not of French origins: this continuum shows how exclusive and discriminatory the representation of the Nation is. Quite logically, this is the representation trade unions had for a long time, and it determined which types of actions and demands regarding 'immigré' workers issues. And for the purpose of readability, we will not keep the French word 'immigré', but translate it by the English word 'immigrant'; the reader should keep in mind that 'immigrant' is the translation of 'immigré' (a state and not a temporary process) but also of "étranger" (foreigner) and of "of immigrant origin"...

I- A brief history of immigration and racism in France

In order to understand the evolution of trade unions positions and practices towards immigration, one needs to go through a brief history of immigration, especially a history of the evolution of the legal framework that aims at controlling and criminalizing first labor, then family immigration until now.

A- France: Europe oldest country of immigration

In order to fill in for the labor shortage as early as the second half of the 19th century, the country turns to mass immigration, first from border countries such as Germany and Belgium. Then, as the country needs reconstruction after Second World War, immigration becomes more and more diversified: « *Between 1945 and 1974, France experiences a time of very high economic growth never seen before in its history. There is a need for a massive recruitment of new immigrant workers. Colonial, then postcolonial immigration explodes. These flows of migrants will supply French economy with the necessary workforce, which will be assigned to the hardest jobs of the production apparatus.* »

(Boubeker and Hajjat, 2008:81) Indeed, the first sectors to incorporate immigrant workers are the mine, building and steel trades. First, Italian and Polish, then after the Second World War, Spanish, Portuguese, Yugoslavian, Turkish, Tunisian, Moroccan, and finally, sub-Saharan African workers settle wherever they are needed (Tripier, 1990; Schor, 1996; Réa and Tripier, 2003). Still according to Boubeker and Hajjat (2008: 81), “[b]etween 1962 and 1965, France experiences the highest immigration rate of its history. Between 1962 and 1982, migrants from Algeria increase from 350 000 to more than 800 000, migrants from Morocco from 31 000 to more than 440 000, migrants from Tunisia from 26 000 to 190 000, and migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa from 17 000 to 157 000.”

Immigration to France is thus very closely linked to its colonial (or postcolonial) history, because the country draws heavily from its former colonies to fill in its labor shortage.

B- Hardening of immigration laws and family reunification

In July 1974, the French state decides to put an end to work immigration; this means for foreign workers that they won't be allowed to travel as much as before between France and their country of origin where their families live. Indeed, most of the entries after 1974 come from family reunification requests made by fathers who have legally entered the French territory either by way of a work permit, of the acquisition of a refugee status, of the sorting out of their status, or because they already had the French nationality. Although the right for family reunification is written in the French constitution and in the European law, the authorities have restricted it very often. Criteria such as the minimum accommodation surface area needed according to the number of expected newcomers, the nature of wage incomes or of social benefits, the nature of family relationships limited to nuclear family, the age of the children or the length of their stay in France, the stability of the job, or even the sincerity of the marital commitment, have been tightened. According to Véronique De Rudder (2005: 16), all government – whether left or right – following the 1974 suspension of work immigration and the various public aids for return, have developed a two-fold immigration policy: “the supervision of migration flows (especially in) and the control of undocumented immigration, on one side, and the insertion of legal and already there migrants, on the other side.” According to the sociologist, this

paradoxical orientation contributed to the gradual set up of the conditions of the precariousness which characterizes more and more immigrant workers: “The result of this is that there actually is an extreme confusion between legal immigration and undocumented immigration, on one hand, and between regular migrants and irregular migrants, on the other hand. But especially, it results from an increasing insecurity for the foreign populations, and even French of foreign origin, a fundamental casualization of 'immigrant's' condition in France. Confronted with a generalized suspicion, the "immigrants" are subjected to an increased control and security pressure, the most spectacular aspect of which is the generalized practice of identity checks which strengthen, in the collective representations, the association immigrant-delinquent.” (De Rudder, 2005: 17). We can thus say that since 1974, the laws on the immigration kept on hardening.

C- Immigration legal framework today

Since 2002, when the right came back to power, « not less than three laws in four years hardened the conditions of the family reunification, weakened the foreign spouses, and eliminated several automatic ways of regularization, in particular the one based on a presence of ten years in France. » (Chauvin et al., 2008)

The policy concerning workers' immigration aims at restricting and at supervising most entries on the French territory, in particular by means of the law of July 24th, 2006, which reintroduces a permit of "salaried" stay, but which quarters it to a certain type of jobs and to certain geographical zones, or again by that of November 20th, 2007 which recommends to realize DNA tests prior to family reunification, and which “only opens to non-European immigrants a list of 30 highly qualified jobs, specified according to regions. Now, these ("expert computer specialist", "sales representative", etc.) are indeed far from jobs effectively occupied today by African or Asian undocumented immigrants.” (Chauvin and al., 2006) This legislative device increases the risks for the immigrants to find themselves in undocumented circumstances, and justify more and more severe police checks in public and at work, “sometimes bringing to systematic checks of all the staff of a company” (Chauvin and al., 2008).

The URSSAF (French body managing social security payments and funds) has also contributed, as well as the “Inspection du Travail” (equivalent of the Labor Board), which “are henceforth summoned to work together with the police, whereas health insurers have to verify in a more systematic way documents produced by foreigners.” (Chauvin and al., 2008) Another decree, of May 11th, 2007, makes it compulsory for the employer, prior to any hiring of a foreigner, to hand over his or her papers to the prefecture for authentication. Labor unions are thus directly confronted with the French legal framework which criminalizes immigrant workers, leads them to undocumented and underground lives, and limits any demands on their part.

D- Occupational distribution of migrants today and discrimination

In 2006, the INSEE (French national institute of statistics and economic studies) estimated that of the approximately 61.5m population, 4.9m are foreign-born immigrants (8%) while the number of French citizens

with foreign origins is generally thought to be around 6.7m. (Meurs and al., 2005; Bouchareb and Contrepolis, 2009). As for the working class in France, a very large proportion of it is made of immigrant workers, because according to the Observatoire des Inégalités (a French observatory of inequalities), 46 % of the active foreigners are working class labor, against 25 % of the born French people. Even more eloquent, 75 % of the foreigners are either factory workers, or office workers ('employés'), or unemployed persons who have never worked, against 56 % of the born French people. Immigrant workers today are massively present in the building sector: according to the "Employment" survey of the INSEE in 2007, 21 % of immigrant men work in the building sector, and 16 % of the male jobs of the building sector are occupied by immigrants. As for immigrant women, we find them in non-qualified jobs in the care sector, as cleaning or as nursery assistants.

This massive proportion of immigrant workers in the least qualified and least paid sectors of employment is explained by their under qualification, but also – for a significant part of them - by the racism which structures the labor market and which maintains the international division of the work (Falquet, 2008 ; Jounin, 2008). Employment is indeed the first area where discrimination is experienced, and supposed origin (which often becomes confused with supposed religion) is the first reason. According to the annual 2008 report of the HALDE (High Authority of the Fight against Discriminations and for Equality), 26 % of the complaints in the field of employment concern discriminations on the basis of origin. These statistics concern foreign population, immigrated population and population of immigrant origins, which makes it difficult to analyze the data, but gives all the same an eloquent outline of the reality of the racism which still exists in employment. Although today, the migratory landscape has considerably diversified itself because new migratory networks (Chinese, Indian, Pakistani) develop, but also those from the East of Europe, with qualified Rumanian and Bulgarian immigrants, Chechen refugees and migrants of transit coming from ex-Yugoslavia and from Rumania - essentially Roma, the question of racism in academic researches remains quasi-exclusively addressed through the prism of the historic link which France maintains with its former colonies, that is the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa.

III- Trade unions and their reactions to immigration

A- *French industrial relations background*

In order to better understand how the French literature analyzed the nature of the relationship between trade unions and migrant workers, let us review very shortly the basic facts about the different trade unions in France and their weight in industrial relations. This is how Bouchareb and Contrepois (2009) describe the French industrial background: *“The national social partners currently comprise five national trade union confederations that were automatically recognized at all levels until 2008 (CGT², CFDT³, FO⁴, CFTC⁵, CGC), and three employers’ associations (including the MEDEF and the CGPME), but there are also other trade unions and other employers’ organizations that may negotiate locally. In 2008, new laws were introduced to determine the representative ability of employee organizations. The CGT and CFDT are the two largest trade unions, with an estimated one million members between them, and FO is the third largest.”* (p. 2) According to the authors, who have been working on French trade unions in a comparative perspective for a decade now (Contrepois, 2003, 2004, 2007; Bouchareb et Contrepois, 2009), *“French employment relations are structured around four main principles that have nonetheless been under question and nearly continuous reform since the early 1980s: the institutionalization of pluralism (despite the weakness of representative employer and employee organizations); a dual system of workplace representation of workers; tripartism at the level of national collective agreements and in the running of national welfare institutions linked to work; and the concept of publicly-guaranteed minimum employment rights that provide protection to individual workers and a hierarchy of agreements such that local terms of employment cannot be worse than those established for the sector or nationally.”* (Bouchareb et Contrepois, 2009).

B- *The sixties and the seventies: the ‘working immigrant’ figure*

Until the end of the seventies, the dominant figure is that of the "immigrant worker", the single man whose passage in France is perceived by himself and by others as temporary, and who makes frequent round trips between France and his country of origin where he is reunited with his family. The only reason for the immigration is supposed to be work, and thus the immigrant can only be a worker. According to Abdelmalek Sayad (1986), whose works are considered both pioneer and extremely relevant even today, this figure of the immigrant worker is associated with that of the ‘OS’ (the “ouvrier spécialisé”, the semi-skilled worker⁶); the author underlines an “almost total identification happening between the immigrant’s condition and the position of the ‘OS’. [...] the immigrant worker constitutes the objectively inseparable ideal figure of the OS; the qualifications of immigrants and ‘OS’ totally merge; and not only partially, in the material reality, but also in the individual consciousness, both for the immigrants, the first concerned, and for the observers”. However, the existence of this figure of the ‘OS for life’ (or at least until his return to his country of origin) does not mean that the immigrant workers are seen as belonging to the working class, of which they are symbolically

² CGT: Confédération Générale du Travail.

³ CFDT: Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail.

⁴ FO: Force Ouvrière.

⁵ CFTC: Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens.

⁶ The name “OS” will be kept throughout this paper, always designating the semi or unskilled factory workers.

and politically excluded, both in the scientific literature and in the labor unions, which makes De Rudder say (2005, 9-10) that the exclusion of immigrant workers is double:

“So we can say that there was an effect of redoubling between the situation of 'banishment' of the immigrant workers from society (concentration in certain regions and certain sectors of production, in the lowest qualifications, the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, the low salaries, the most defective housing) and the blindness of research towards the long-lasting inclusion, and which turned out to be definitive, of these newcomers within the popular layers among which their children, and even their grandchildren, are henceforth an essential constituent.”

Our review of literature effectively showed that few studies had dedicated themselves in a specific way to the question of the role of labor unions in the integration of immigrant workers. As Catherine Wihtol De Wenden and René Mouriaux (1987:794) note it: “in spite of important contributions, the connection between labor unions and immigration did not give rise to a detailed multidimensional study.” It is very likely however that one of the important contributions mentioned by Wihtol de Wenden and Mouriaux is the work of Léon Gani, published in 1972.

A work which opens the way

Few authors effectively tackled the issue of the relationship of labor unions to immigrant workers, but Léon Gani opened the way in 1972 with his book *Les syndicats et les travailleurs immigrés*, whose purpose is “to explain attitudes and labor-union practices towards the immigrant workers, such as they appear in the press since 19718.” (AW, 1973). The work of Léon Gani is still widely quoted as a reference, and is one of the first to propose an analysis of the interethnic relationships in the working class, and one of the only ones to deal with the question of the relationship of labor unions with the immigrant workers. In his book *L'immigration et l'opinion politique en France*, Yves Gastaut (2000) leans on the thesis of Gani to distinguish two different phases in the way labor unions reacted to the new problems which arose as a result of the arrival of immigrant workers on the French labor market: a “phase of approach” (1960-1974) followed by a phase described as “more extensive support” from 1974.

The phase of approach: 1960-1974

Indeed, until the 70s, labor unions adopted a critical position towards the employers and the government's policy of foreign workers recruitment. Thus, De Rudder (2005) reminds us that for a lot of union activists, the nationalist protectionism was stronger than the class solidarity:

“The CGT refused the call for foreign workers, whereas, if it opposed to the politics of the employers, the CFDT considered the migration as an inalienable right. The general trend is, on the long term, mainly for protectionism: the CGT considers that the overexploitation risked by the immigrants puts in danger the unity of the working class by establishing an unfair competition. It left for a long time the immigrants away from its recruitment campaigns, and these became part of it, generally, only after First World War, on the occasion of large-scale social struggles.”

In the same spirit, René Galissot notices that in spite of an asserted antiracist speech, “labor unions are rather incoherent because they speak in the name of the French working class. They are going to claim the preservation of the social benefits of the French legislation and thus to immortalize the border between French people and foreigners. They do not completely manage to free themselves from the ‘national defense’

and it can even lead them to the ‘national preference’” (Galissot, 2006: 100) Schor, quoting a CGT ⁷ internal document dating back to 1936, evokes moreover the tensions between the political statements of the confederate leaders, on the basis of solidarity and brotherhood labor, and the resistances of the base regarding the “intervention of foreigners in the French labor union”. As for Haus (1999: 688), he refers to the work of Gani (1972) and Gary Freeman (1979) who describe a certain resignation of labor unions in front of an immigration perceived as inevitable to explain the change of attitude of the CGT towards immigration at the beginning of the 60s:

“Gani noted that after a decade of calling for a halt to immigration in its resolutions on immigrant workers, two different trends emerged at the CGT congress in 1963 – “the first continued to demand a stop to immigration, expressed in the resolution on unemployment. The other challenged the validity of such an attitude which did not appear after that in the resolution on immigrant workers” (p.74) To explain this trend, Gani pointed to a CGT official who stated that “[t]he working class does not have an interest in massive immigration, but practically, it does not have the possibility to block it. Thus what has to be done essentially is to thwart the competition and division” (p.74)”. Expanding on this, Freeman (1979) wrote that “[a]fter 1961, the unions, especially the CGT, seemed to conclude that immigration was inevitable and that their energy would better be spent dealing with those migrants in France rather than worrying about controls.” (p.229)”

The phase of approach is thus characterized by a rupture with the distrust inspired by immigration and by a growing awareness that the immigrant workers “make the proletariat” too, according to René Gallissot, Nadir Boumaza and Ghislaine Clément's words in 1994. In spite of their hesitations, labor unions came little by little to change their perception of immigrant workers. De Rudder reports that “beyond principal positions that are rather difficult to accept for grassroots unionists – that is more or less firm opposition to the recruitment of foreign workers, on one hand, and support for the immigrants victims of the employers, on the other hand - confederacies began to worry about their recruitment and about their representation.” (2005: 33) The phase of approach is characterized by a progressive acceptance of the inevitable dimension of immigration, and by a growing opposition to the politics of employers and of the state concerning immigrant workers. Always according to the typology of Léon Gani and his successors, the support that labor unions are going to bring to the immigrant workers is going to increase and to solidify after the laws of 1974.

The phase of more extensive support: from 1974

When the circulars of 1974 suspend work immigration and harden the questions related to the rights of settlement and more globally to the conditions of life of the immigrant workers in France, labor unions are forced to take position more frequently, “not without difficulties nor contradictions, in particular for all which concerns the eventuality to obtain specific rights [...] and the cultural and religious expression, including within the company (rooms of prayer, arrangement of schedules during Ramadan, adaptation of the meals of canteens).” (De Rudder, 2005: 33) Indeed, facing the measures taken by the government, the CGT and the CFDT, until then divided on the question of immigration, produced a common declaration in June, 1974 to assert their solidarity with the immigrant workers. According to Withol de Wenden and Mouriaux (1987: 801), this solidarity rests on “the conviction that the stay of the migrant workers in France is temporary. It is advisable to insure them human conditions of welcome and insertion; once at work, they have to benefit from

7 Le Peuple, organe de la CGT, 25 juin 1936, cité par SCHOR (2000).

the same rights as the French employees. [...] the right to stay in France is not expressed, and the problems of cultural cohabitation are not approached.” So, in spite of a considerable headway in the reflections of labor unions, the solidarity is thus limited to the space of the factory, and aims at bringing only a temporary support for the migrant workers. They are thus recognized as workers and members of the labor collective, but as “one ‘isolated’ stratum, either because of its overexploitation, or because of its orientation towards the country of origin and the return”. (De Rudder, 2005:9).

Reflections begin in the 60s, with the organization of study days or with the creation of special committees, and become a reality in the 70s, “after the noticing of the fraternization inferred by the immigrants' strong participation in the strikes and the demonstrations of 1968 vents (multilingual pamphlets, ‘language groups’ within the CGT, institution of ‘immigrants as union paid officials’ within the CFDT)”. (De Rudder, 2005: 34). Indeed, the events of May, 1968 represented a break which was the object of a detailed relatively recent work, in particular thanks to the work of compilation of Abdellali Hajjat and Ahmed Boubeker in 2008. This point will be approached farther on this report.

C- The eighties and nineties: from the “immigrant worker” to the “youth of immigrant origin”

In the years 80-90, the object of the sociological debate gradually changes towards the phenomenon of racism. This is explained in particular by the fact that immigrants of the years 60-70 have children who have become the first generation of French people of immigrant origin, as they are called. So, “the question of racism and discriminations at work appeared as a new difficulty, unplanned, and all the more violent as the arrival on the job market of these new generations with immigrant backgrounds happened in a context of a long-lasting employment crisis.” (De Rudder, 2005: 33-34) The creation, in 1984, of the association ‘SOS Racisme’ (an anti-racist French organization) testifies for these new realities. As for research, we witness a shift in the way issues related to immigration are apprehended, and the advent of a more micro-sociological approach of the relations between individuals. We thus go from the figure of the immigrant worker to that of the immigrant petty criminal/offender, whether we talk about undocumented immigrants or about young suburbanites with immigrant background, as Chauvin, Jounin and Tourette recall: “*While in France of the 1970s, workers' struggles had been in the heart of the question of the immigration, they disappear abruptly at the beginning of the 1980s to give way to questionings on racism, on cultural integration, on the educational future of immigrants' children and on the ‘urban violence’ in popular neighborhoods.*” (2008: 1). For example Philippe Bataille’s book, in 1994, which happens to be a request of the CFDT to produce an investigation on racism at work, in a context of rising of the National Front and increasing legitimization of a certain “respectable racism” (Bouamama, 2004). Bataille’s ambition is to describe the subtle forms of expressions of racism in the relations between individuals, and to bring to light the processes of discrimination and of labor ethnicization in the companies. Bataille also wonders about the possibilities of union action to fight against the massive racism showed by his investigation, and suggests that cultural diversity be the main orientation of the antiracist union action. In the same spirit, Michel Wieviorka (1992, 1997), in his various works on the question, centers his analysis on the theme of cultural diversity and focuses on the individuals and their subjectivity rather than on power structures and domination relationships.

Boubeker and Hajjat have a close analysis when they connect the end of the immigrant worker figure with the emergence of a certain Islamophobia: “the big strike action of the immigrant ‘OS’ of 1981-1984 appears as the moment of the disappearance of the figure of the immigrant worker. Hit quite hard by the economic crisis, these workers are the first to be dismissed. Without benefiting from the support of the left, which takes over the xenophobic discourse on the ‘fundamentalist threat.’” (2008: 82)

The literature of the eighties and nineties is turning away from the figure of the immigrant worker - which had the advantage of addressing questions of class oppression and nationality which foreign ‘OS’ experienced- through a subjectivist and cultural approach to the social problems linked to immigration issues. The question, which is then going to arise, is that of the difficulty for the immigrants and their children to become integrated into the French society and to adopt its codes, its standards and its values. With racism as the paradigmatic key, the social problems (unemployment, violence, precariousness, urban and social segregation), among which the immigrants and their children are the first victims, are going to be analyzed in the light of the fluctuating degree of racism of French society. Labor unions are going to adopt a similar position.

IV- More recent approaches: ruptures and continuities

A- An anti-integrationist perspective

Since the beginning of 2000s, the literature on questions of immigration took a different form, or at least the field of sociology of immigration saw appearing a heterodox perspective (Hajjat, 2005) essentially carried by researchers with immigrant backgrounds themselves (Sayad, 1994; Bouamama, 1992; Guénif-Souilamas, 2002, 2003; Boubeker, 2003; Hajjat, 2005). These intellectuals have in common that they committed to a work of memory to rethink the place of immigrants in the French society (including at work) outside of the republican and universalist frames of thought inherited from colonial times. These works are critical in several ways:

- They bring to light the political participation of immigrant workers, not as followers but as activists for their rights;
- They adopt a theoretical critical location on integration and on the injunction for immigrants and for their children to become integrated into the French society;
- They are inspired by the Palestinian Edward Saïd's (1958, 2000) postcolonial theories while being very careful not to cut and paste these theories without proper judgment with regard to the specificity of the French reality. Hajjat underlines that, due to their theoretical location in rupture with the dominant analyses, and due to the social location of its defenders who are children of postcolonial immigration (Hajjat, 2005), "the anti-integrationist perspective [...] is far from having become legitimate in the field of sociology of immigration" (2005, 26-27). So, the question of immigrant workers is not a harmless object: it is strongly linked to a "place struggle" (Bourdieu, 1984). In the core of this place struggle, the notion of integration raises a certain number of problems. Indeed, it seems important to me to return here on the formulation of the project and not to isolate it from the theoretical debates in France on the issue of immigration. Indeed, the word 'integration' is so much connoted that one needs to go through a critical analysis on what its use involves in a research work. Indeed, the concept of integration has been the object of strong theoretical and political debates in the field of the sociology of immigration. A significant number of social scientists (Schnapper, 1991; Gaspard and Servan-Shreiber, 1985; Costa-Lascoux, 1989) use the notion of integration, whereas they admit regretting its ideological character. Dominique Schnapper for example who defines integration as "the diverse processes by which immigrants, as the whole population gathered in a national entity, participate in the social life" (1991:99) does not break with the dominant ideology such as it is embodied through the creation, by the decree of December 19th, 1989 of the High Council for Integration (HCI) by the socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard. This dominant ideology assumes that there is one French 'we', culturally stable and unchanging, and one foreign (not to say Muslim) 'you', which is supposed to threaten French identity. It is according to this homogeneous vision of France and French people that the Ministry of Integration and National Identity was created, in 2007, at the instigation of the president of the Republic Nicolas Sarkozy and his Prime Minister of then, François Fillon. The importation of an ideological word ('integration') in the scientific analysis by numerous French researchers is thus widely criticized by those especially who recognize themselves in the thought of Abdelmalek Sayad (Bouamama, 1992; Guénif-Souilamas, 2002, 2003; Boubeker, 2001, 2003). They see in the "injunction to integration" (Hajjat, 2005) a colonial inheritance of the civilizing mission of French

people in Algeria and a product of the universalism abstraction (Sayad, 1994) in the core of France national construction.

B- May 68: a turning point

On the occasion of the remembrances of the events of May '68, a certain number of studies on the labor strikes and the participation of immigrant workers in these strikes were made more visible in the French scientific field, in particular in history and in political science. Let us remind that as from 1967, many factories everywhere in France went on strike to protest against execrable working conditions and extremely low wages. The movement extended until it was joined by the high school students and the university students, and knew its peak in May and June, 1968, not only due to the energy which got free of the movement, but also due to the fact that for the first time, students, parties, and labor unions got together to face up to the power of employers, politics and professors. Many research works will be based on the events of May, 1968 to build a history of the workers' struggles which does not hide its immigrant constituent.

The rehabilitation of the migrant worker as a political actor

The historian Xavier Vigna published in 2007 a work entitled *L'insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68: Essai d'histoire politique des usines*; the socio-historian Choukri Hmed, as for him, was interested in the strikes in Sonacotra shelters (collective homes for old migrant workers, made of little rooms that were supposed, there again, to be temporary) and in the immigrant mobilizations, in a certain number of articles since 2005; the historian Laure Pitti dedicated herself to build the history of immigrant workers, by basing her analysis on a symbolic case, that of the workers of the Renault - Billancourt factory; as for the sociologist Abdellali Hajjat, he wrote the political history of the Movement of the Arabic Workers post-May, 68. These works broke with the vision where immigrant workers were seen at best as followers, at worst reluctant to mobilize with their colleagues and to participate in "the most tremendous wave of strikes that France has never known" (Vigna, on 2008: 86). According to Vigna, indeed, "it is without any doubt necessary to get it over with the stereotype according to which the immigrant workers would be novices in any kind of protest or trade union movement. As a CGT activist of Billancourt remembers it, among these men were 'elements who were among the most class conscious of their country of origin, who had to emigrate for political reasons [...]' It is then obvious that a small fraction of immigrant workers joined the head of the movement." (89-92). Although the repression is stronger against immigrant workers than against French workers, and although immigrant workers had objective reasons for not participating in the conflict (threats of deportations that sometimes came true, fear of losing their job, etc.), "their participation in the labor strikes of May, 68 is historically attested" (Boubeker and al., 2008:81) and not as immigrant workers, but as working class members. It is what Pitti proves by underlining the way workers called themselves: "workers of France". According to her, "[...] this naming, workers of France, is symbolic of the watchwords and goals which structured these mobilizations, which were indeed characterized, in the space of factories as in that of the shelters of migrant workers, by a centrality of labor and not by a primacy of the national identification." (2008: 95). Moreover, the historian

shows that the participation of the immigrant workers in the strike action of Renault Billancourt contributed to legitimize their place within the labor collective: “in 1968, the CGT, leader of the strike committee, refuses to the ‘OS’ writers of a platform of demands the possibility of making a speech to the daily general assembly; it argues that the specific demands are to be defended in the specific structures, such as the committees by nationalities. Today, CGT union activists recognize that the fight of immigrant ‘OS’, very active between 1972 and 1975 in Billancourt, benefited all the workers of the factory.” (Pitti, 2005). While for Jean-Hugues Dechaux, the participation of immigrant workers to the various conflicts which stretch over the 70s is the sign of their acculturation to the French society (1991: 100), for Pitti, Boubeker, Hajjat and Vigna, however, their exclusion from the labor union is the sign of the bad will of labor unions to take into account the intricacy of the problems which immigrant workers experienced. It is what Hajjat shows about the MTA.

The example of the Movement of the Arabic Workers (MTA)

As he was searching through the archives of the MTA (Movement of the Arabic Workers), established in 1972 by Arabic activists of committees Palestine (close to the ‘Gauche Prolétarienne’, the proletarian left), Hajjat (2008) returned on “the monopolization of power by labor unions headquarters” (2008, 152) which is responsible for the desire for autonomy of the Arabic workers with regard to the post-1968 left. He explains:

“[...] the Arabic workers will have all the more political weight as they are self-organized to improve on their own problems, which are not taken into account by the French labor unions. So, the demand of political and organizational autonomy is only the result of the political and labor-union exclusion of immigrants engendered by the French law and by the practices of the labor-union devices. If these last ones had met the expectations of the Arabic workers, no doubt that they would have completely become integrated into the labor-union frame, which nonetheless happened at various occasions.” (152-153).

Hajjat thus insists, as Pitti (2008) and Hmed (2007), on the fact that labor unions of the time did not take into account all the problems of the immigrant workers:

“[...] this exclusion is also due to the practices of the labor-union devices, which show a real blindness to the realities of immigrant workers. Labor unions conceive the workers' struggles only inside the walls of the factory: the class struggle stops at the doors of the factory. However, the Arabic workers are also concerned with problems of housing and racism, and widen the domain of class struggle. They experience oppression both in the factory, in the cafés, in the shelters, and in the street. Labor unions do not seem to have seized this new phenomenon.” (151)

Hajjat also explains this exclusion of Arabic workers from the French labor union by the importance of the nation as a reference and a foundation of French working class and by the mental border of the union activist between what is national and what is foreign:

“Besides, the MTA is an innovation in the history of French working class world (it is the first time that Arabic workers try to get organized in an autonomous way) which answers to the actual exclusion of immigrants of the labor-union power. Their demands are not taken into account, openly denied by the labor-union devices [...]. The negation of the rights of immigrant workers results first of all from their status of foreigner, because their exclusion from the political and labor-union world is confirmed by the legislation, which is legally founded on the frontier between the national and the foreigner”. (151)

The experience of the MTA thus brings a particular light on the relationship between labor unions and immigrant workers after 68. Other researchers chose to focus their attention on undocumented workers, and they too give us to see a particular angle of the role of labor unions in the fights of immigrant workers.

C- The “return of the immigrant worker”: undocumented immigrants' strikes

The very recent literature seems to have been interested in the question of immigrant workers, but through the angle of workers without documents (or regular status). The increase of the number of strike actions by undocumented immigrants in and near Paris probably explains the choice of this particular angle of approach. These strikes mark, according to Chauvin and al. (2008), the return of the figure of the immigrant as a worker, so opening new perspectives of actions and testifying for more solid and new alliances with labor unions. Indeed, their analysis is based on the strike of April, 2008, as 300 undocumented workers simultaneously decided to go on strike on a dozen sites of the Paris region: cleaning agencies, restaurants, stores, demolition sites. At the end of April, the number of strikers had doubled: they were more than 600, dispatched on 20 sites, to demand their regularization. First in the history of France, this coordinated strike has, within a few weeks, “relegated raids and deportations in the background and put back on the front of the political stage a figure which had disappeared from it: the immigrant worker.” (Chauvin et al, 2008). What is specific about these strikes is that labor unions (in particular the CGT) are very present beside the strikers. But Chauvin et al remind us that undocumented employees were considered by labor unions as full workers only at the beginning of 2000s. They talk about the new movement of undocumente immigrants (“the “sans-papiers” as they are called, the no-papers), which appears in the middle of the 90s and gives a voice to the undocumented workers who were until then deprived of it. But the demands of this movement are based on a human rights speech, and it is first and above all as citizens that they ask for their regularization. The authors specify: “the strikes are hunger strikes. They occupy churches and not companies. The leaders of the movement identify themselves as citizens of the world more than as employees. Their sources of income stay in the shadow and their employers are not addressed.” The role of labor unions is then very limited, because immigrant workers are not perceived as being an integral part of the working class:

“As for labor unions, they are only a support among others for what appears then as a civil rights movement, morally just but foreign to the world of the work. Although, in 1996, one thousand Chinese undocumented workers of the clothing and catering business become members of the CGT in Paris region, the unionization of the undocumented is not for the agenda. “Labor unions defended undocumented immigrants as deprived of residence permits and consequently deprived of rights, shows Emmanuel Terray, then actor of the movement. But for a while, maybe because of internal resistances, they hesitated to take care of the undocumented immigrants as workers.” The idea to form a new labor union of the Parisian (clothing business, which would could have counted 3000 members, is repelled.” (Chauvin et al., 2008)

Violaine Carrère (2009), who is interested too in the 2008 undocumented workers' strike actions, insists on the evolution of labor unions' attitude towards striking undocumented workers. Indeed, she brings reports that at the beginning of the movements, the practices of solidarity with these workers came from individual initiatives rather than from collective actions:

"Of course, union activists, belonging to the CGT, to the CFDT, to Solidaires, to the CNT, had supported undocumented workers for a long time already, held offices to advise them and defend them, lent rooms for their meetings. But it had especially been individual or local initiatives, which, if they were not denied at the level of confederacies, were not really carried by them. Especially, if during the last two decades, labor unions joined associations and parties supporting the fights of undocumented immigrants, they did it as actors of civil society among others, and not specifically as labor unions: it wasn't time for them to try and unionize these workers."

Now, according to Carrère, it is the "implication of labor unions in this movement which put back on stage the figure of the immigrant worker". The author notes that while putting back the labor law to the heart of the demands of undocumented workers, the movement was able to weigh as it did; it is by means of the labor unions that undocumented workers discovered their rights as workers:

"The workgroup 'Labor union/Non-status', which began to meet in June, 2007, opts for the use of labor law as a weapon to advance the cause of undocumented immigrants, and decides to try to inform them widely of the rights they have as workers. In doing so, the workgroup wishes to improve the real place occupied in the economy by the great majority of undocumented immigrants, and to counter the image that is mostly given of them: a non-working population, victims of the mirages of a rich France, depending on the social welfare system. In the group, some of these union activists have a long time experience of the support for undocumented immigrants: members of SUD and the FSU, among which factory inspectors, a person in charge of the CNT-Nettoyage in Paris, and an activist of CGT, secretary of the local Union of the city of Masy (Essonne), which has been fighting for years on this front."

Chauvin, Jounin and Tourette (2008) have a similar point of view when they evoke the formative dimension of the encounter between union activists and undocumented workers:

"The undocumented workers don't emphasize their marginality but on the contrary their concrete integration to the working class, in its individual and collective dimensions. In this respect, for many of them the struggle is itself the opportunity to discover rights they already enjoyed in France as wage-earners, without always knowing it: the right to minimum wage, to a weekly time off, to redundancy payments, the right to demand unpaid salaries or to pursue their employer to the 'Prud'hommes' (a labor relations tribunal). The striking workers do not appear any more as 'right-less' but as employees who already have rights, and who, somehow, ask for 'it all'"

Carrère explains how undocumented workers and the labor-union activists, within the workgroup 'Labor union/Non-status', produced a common tool, after fruitful exchanges around the concrete problems experienced by undocumented workers; this tool, entitled '4 pages', is the product of meetings during which "undocumented immigrants make propositions, share their experiences, defend their points of view. They speak about consequences of the situation of irregular stay on their relations with employers: the fear to go to work and to be afraid all the time of being arrested, the order given by the bosses to hide during controls of the factory inspectorate or the Urssaf, the rough dismissals, the unpaid wages, the work accident that leaves without resources, etc." This short document, intended to undocumented workers themselves, expresses "the list of their workers' rights" and invites them "to seek help from labor unions representatives for the defense of their rights" and naturally to form a labor union. According to Carrère, the 2008 strike actions produced a strong political link between labor unions and undocumented workers, and thus constitute a turning point in the history of the working class struggles in France:

"The undocumented workers movement of April, 2008 revives in a way the big fights led by labor unions with the immigrants of the 70s and of the beginning of the 1980s. It constitutes a tremendous revolution with regard to the next decades in the course of which labor unions hardly mobilized with undocumented immigrants. It put back on stage the figure of the immigrant worker, so much erased that French people ignored that most of the undocumented immigrants work, and that many pay contributions at the cashdesks of social welfare and pay taxes." (Carrère, 2009)

As for him, Jounin (2008), in his work on the construction workers, shows less optimism and enthusiasm than Carrère. The sociologist, who dived into the world of construction during several months, tells with a lot of sharpness how the social and ethnic division of labor materializes itself on construction sites, where a majority of workers are immigrants. He says: “on other construction sites, I have heard never really about labor unions, even less seen labor-union visits;” (154). If the workers are conscious that their working conditions can depend on a possible unionization (130), their attitude to labor unions and union representatives is ambivalent, for objective reasons: the “explosion of the working class collective” (196), because employers resort more and more to subcontracting and to temporary work, stresses the hierarchical organization of workers according to their status (temporary workers, employees, subcontracted, on the black market, etc.) and prevents any form of collective action. In the current industrial landscape, union activists seem to not have measured this explosion, and the study of Jounin shows a very strong solitude of immigrant workers as victims of a triple oppression.

The 2008 strikes of undocumented workers appear as an interesting angle of approach to understand the relationships between labor unions and immigrant workers, and the concrete possibilities of common action. The undocumented workers are a small part of immigrant and foreign workers, but they crystallize a certain number of political issues such as immigration policies, the definition of the nation, employment law and working class struggles. In this context, the CGT appears to be at the frontline of the struggles, and maintains a continued presence on the striking immigrant workers sides.

D- Tribunals as spaces of joint struggle for unions and immigrant workers

Although very little literature has been produced yet on the subject, let us mention cases of lawsuit actions led by unions and immigrant workers on the ground of racist discriminations at work. These lawsuit actions embody a rather efficient cooperation between immigrant (and often French with immigrant background) employees and trade union structures, and have led to the creation of a useful tool, the panel methods, described by Mirvat Abd El Ghani and Laetitia Dechaufour (2010) as such:

“This panel method consists in comparing the career of one employee, susceptible to be discriminated against, to the career of other employees who present the same characteristics in every aspect except that they have a different presumed or real origin. The “comparative tables” are shown to the court and are meant to prove that, although strictly similar to their colleagues (in terms of seniority, working conditions and professional level), some workers benefited from less promotion, less in-service training, and less remuneration. According to the article L. 122-45 of the Code du Travail (the French employment law), it is then up to the employer to justify the inequality with objective elements.”

The panel's methods are more and more used to prove discrimination in a statistical, mathematical way. Many cases brought to court ended up successfully, and sentenced guilty companies (GAN insurance in 2004, Bosch France in June 2008, Hispano-Suiza – former Snecma – in 2009) to large amounts of money. Although the panel method was designed to fight against union discrimination at first, it expanded to other kinds of discriminations. These decisions have been incentives to the many workers who suffer from sexist, racist, or any other kind of discrimination. But according to the authors :

« there still are obstacles to a generalization of these actions: some workers are reluctant to refer their cases to a court of justice, in a context of casualized labour and economic crisis; the making of a panel table takes years and years of work, in order to gather as much data as possible; and finally, the winning cases are those which appear in the media, but many do not end up with a conviction of the company. But the panel method is becoming a fundamental tool for discriminated against workers, who are progressively learning to use it in a more effective way. »

The trials involving immigrant workers and their union support are an interesting example of the emerging type of collective work that can exist between the two parties but no literature has been found on the subject.

Conclusion

One of the teachings of this literature review is that the relationship of labor unions to immigrant workers - and conversely that of immigrant workers to labor unions - remains an object not much investigated by social sciences, in spite of interesting and important beginnings. The issue is to know if the question is to understand how labor unions can integrate immigrant workers into the workplace and into the society, or rather how labor unions can distance themselves from the injunction to integrate such as it is described by Abdelmalek Sayad and his followers of the anti-integrationist point of view. The evolution of the labor division, with the increasing trend towards temporary work and towards subcontracting companies, makes it difficult for labor unions, and helps create the foreign, undocumented immigrant workers conditions of living. The perspectives of research on the capacity of labor unions to seize the issue of the ethnic division of labor are thus multiple.

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