“Will They Always Have Paris?”: Observing, Understanding, and Informally Engaging with Undocumented African Souvenir Sellers at the Eiffel Tower

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Abstract: The Eiffel Tower is an enduring symbol, and people from around the world dream of travelling to Paris to gaze at it. Walking amongst the millions of tourists who visit the famous site each year are an enterprising group of African souvenir vendors whose livelihoods rely on the sales of miniature versions of the structure. As visibly omnipresent as these sellers are at the tower, their experience as undocumented migrants working unofficially makes them invisible. For the Paris authorities, the mere presence of Africans offering cheap keepsakes at the Eiffel Tower is considered an illegal nuisance that must be eradicated. No matter, recurrent police interventions have failed to cease the unauthorised souvenir market. Because these independent entrepreneurs are neither wanted nor welcomed, Africans selling trinkets at the iconic Parisian site face daily challenges. Until now, no one has ever investigated or profoundly surveyed their experience working at one of the most-visited places in the world. This study aims to demystify this unique group of Africans in Paris after observing and informally engaging with them directly concerning various topics. Despite the demur realities confronting them as undocumented migrants living clandestinely in a country that does not want them, these migrants remain hopeful for the future.

Keywords: Africans in France; Africans in Paris; undocumented migrants; Eiffel Tower; immigration; France; Paris

1. Introduction

Designed by Gustave Eiffel in 1886 as a monument to celebrate the centennial of the French Republic, his iron-beamed masterpiece was completed a few years later in time for the World Exposition in Paris. What later became known as the “Eiffel Tower” is now instantly recognisable to almost everyone on Earth, and its image is emblazoned on products sold across the planet. At its inception, the tower was criticized and ridiculed, not beloved, and its construction was meant to be temporary. In the years that followed the initial mockery of its existence, negative opinions slowly shifted. Over time, the massive structure came to symbolise France itself [1]. The Eiffel Tower is cherished by people all over the world and it receives over six million visitors annually [2]. Without question, it is the most popular landmark in Paris. For those visitors who seek to purchase a keepsake that denotes their time spent in the City of Lights, Eiffel Tower-related souvenirs are widely available for sale in shops and kiosks. However, this type of merchandise is not only found in brick-and-mortar stores. Tourists visiting the famous site will quickly notice a thriving alternative market led by numerous souvenir vendors hailing from countries across Africa. This diverse group of self-employed sellers earns a livelihood by offering miniature Eiffel Towers of various sizes, often at far lower prices than similar items found on the shelves at licensed shops. Yet, there is more to this story than merely denoting this alternative sales market that results in cheaper sales transactions for visiting consumers. Due to its enduring image that is affixed on a variety of things sold in stores and markets globally, the Eiffel Tower has deep meaning to many [3–5]. For some, it may be viewed as a testament to French
expertise in engineering during the era of the Belle époque, while others might associate the celebrated symbol of Parisian beauty with the subject of love. Due to this sentimentality and more, many people dream of seeing the massive structure with their own eyes, and millions of visitors arrive to Paris annually with an aim to accomplish this goal. At the same time, the undocumented African migrants peddling miniature Eiffel Tower replicas at the famous structure have something in common with the hordes of tourists who visit the site year after year: They have arrived in Paris to fulfill their own dream, which for them means gaining upward mobility. Each of these hardworking individuals from the African continent arrived in Europe via wide and often dangerous underground migratory networks, often by risking their lives to traverse both the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. None of these vendors have legal status in France. As migrants without official documentation, life is not easy due to social and structural exclusion that marginalises them, long work hours, and low daily wages. Yet, for these Africans, the Eiffel Tower represents a form of hope and optimism. Although those who sell souvenirs on the grounds of the site seem visible for the tourists who are their customers, their uncertain status in France also makes them invisible. No postcards or photos featuring the Eiffel Tower ever show the any of the vendors present at this renowned monument, despite their enduring daily existence there selling mementos to tourists. In other words, the realities of the Africans and others working unofficially at this illustrious place remains a mystery hidden in plain view. The objective of this study is to learn more from an observational frame of reference about the daily (in)visible lives of the African migrants labouring at the Eiffel Tower. After spending considerable time watching, listening to, and learning more about this assiduous group of individual entrepreneurs over the course of several years, this investigation discusses their daily experience via on-site observations that are augmented by information gathered from surveys that deliberate on a few important subjects. Although their presence as undocumented workers offering underground souvenirs in Paris is unwelcome and imperceptible from an official standpoint, these sellers are a perpetual and integral part of the Parisian landscape due to their presence at several monuments and museums throughout the city. Thus, for these (in)visible vendors, the Eiffel Tower represents an optimistically sanguine first step towards a better life. Challenges notwithstanding, these enterprising Africans remain hopeful for the future.

2. Paris and Africans

The presence of people from the African continent in France has a long and often complicated history. Since the advent of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the slavery-based sugar industry that greatly enriched and developed France into a wealthy nation, small numbers of people from Africa have lived in the country. Later, during the era of French global colonialism forward from the 1880s, the flow of people from Africa to France increased substantially. In fact, Africans have been a part of the diverse mosaic of people in Paris for as long as the Eiffel Tower has stood along the banks of the Seine River. Moreover, they have continuously assisted France’s growth and history, often forcefully. Amongst many examples to consider, one cannot forget the bravery of les grands tirailleurs from Sénégal and elsewhere in West Africa, infantrymen who fought and died for the French Republic during the First World War. Further service (and sacrifice) was given to la République by colonial African soldiers and others who assisted the resistance during the Second World War. However, despite these dettes de sang to France and the heroics of Africans who fought for their imperial master in those two conflicts, their contributions were not fully recognised until the 1990s [6–9] Aside from these circumstances, the flow of Africans to France has not only been limited to military service. Forward from the 1920s, Paris was a centre and gathering point for intellectuals, artists, musicians, writers (etc.) hailing from around the world, which includes those from France’s overseas colonies in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Caribbean [10–12]. It was during this era of European colonialism that students from the latter were granted bursaries to study in Paris and other cities. This financial support often came with the expectation that these talented individuals
would fully assimilate into the ideals of French culture [8,10]. Once their studies were completed, it was assumed that these former students would return home and be employed as fonctionnaires who would then assist in sustaining the concept of empire [7–9,11,12]. When describing this period as a “point of contact” for this group of colonial subjects, Thomas [9] labelled Paris as a privileged site for assimilation regarding young éliges from Africa. As this group of African intellectuals and privileged workers continued to arrive in Paris, social and political associations were created that catered to them and entire neighbourhoods were transformed, notably Bellville and Barbès-Rochechouart [11,13–15]. Many of these networks and associations remain intact to this day. Despite the growing presence of Africans in Paris, issues related to racism restricted them to the margins, even with assimilation. Because of that, the cherished ideals of the French Republic in terms of its égalité represented nothing more than a mirage. Moreover, due to official State Secularism, any notion or acknowledgement of one’s Africaness was dismissed as non-French and, therefore, not worthy. Thomas [9] p. 29 argues that types of discourse and exchange of African cultural influences at that time was “truly symbiotic because French authorities made concerted efforts to interrupt the flow of ideas between France and Africa.” The true goal was to assimilate students and newcomers to become “French” at the exclusion of any other culture(s) [7–12]. The was due to racism that was furthered by the so-called superiority of French culture. Yet, over time, students from France’s African and Caribbean possessions began to re-evaluate this type of racial conditioning directed at them and they began a cultural renaissance based on their own backgrounds. In terms of this shift towards self-perspective over that of the coloniser, Thomas [9] p. 29 stated that for young students in Paris, one’s Blackness soon became “a defining concept that served to organise/mobilise individuals” as a response to this sort of abrogation and invalidation on the part of France. Consequently, this structural denial of one’s origins in favour of assimilation into French culture gave birth to a literary movement known as la Négritude. Started by young African and Caribbean students in Paris, their poetic and artistic expressions were a Black response to the racism, exclusion, and lack of visibility that existed in the space of French poetry, literature, and art. For the first time in the French cultural sphere, Africa was showcased as a place of beauty that was worthy of recognition and celebration on its own.

In the years following the Second World War, pressure was placed on the European powers to de-colonise and grant independence to their possessions across the Global South, including those located on the African continent. However, in the case of France, due to the country’s massive war debts and other post-war socioeconomic troubles, politicians did not wish to do away with the concept of Empire in a way that would not be favourable to the French coloniser. Many of the young élites who studied in France prior to World War II were considered as useful allies as the colonies of their origins slowly moved towards gaining greater autonomy. During the 1950s, many of these same future leaders, then known as évolués, were groomed for key positions as colonial députés in the National Assembly. To slow the tide of independence across its African colonies, France re-organised them legislatively in the constitution several times in the years between 1944 and 1960, first as the French Union, and later as the French Community (which was rejected by Guinée, the first African colony to declare independence from France). By the end of the 1960s, almost all of France’s African territories were independent nations, albeit with close ties to the former coloniser by way of a monetary policy (the CFA currency across much of Francophone Africa) and a neo-colonialist stratagem known as Françafrique, where officials in Paris maintained a favourable economic and cultural status for France via its connections with the former évolués who later became presidents and leaders of the new countries. In the early years post-independence (and even now in many cases), economic growth in France’s former colonies in Africa often depended on the amount of French investment in these nations and/or connections with local élites to the government in Paris. Nepotism and corruption across Francophone Africa served as inhibitors of a stable economy for many citizens, which in turn helped to stimulate migration north to France by legal and illegal means [8,9,16]. Moreover, as France’s former territories transitioned to
independent countries throughout the 1960s, the migration of tens of thousands of Africans towards France for employment and education occurred [12–14,17,18]. This new presence of workers was especially important during the French era of les trentes glorieuses that marked three decades of economic and cultural growth following the Second World War that lasted into the late 1970s [8,9,12,16,17]. During this time, massive industrialisation increased the need for unskilled workers in factories and other jobs. Africans from across the continent arrived in France with various temporary work visas, and they were housed in massive housing estates known as cités that were built on the periphery of Paris and other cities. The expectation for many of these new workers was that they would return home once their employment contract was completed [8,9,16]. However, most of these immigrants stayed in the country, after which they and their descendants now make up a large percentage of those employed in blue-collar careers [8,13,19].

In the years that followed the demand for workers during the 1960s–1980s, the rate of African migrants moving to France has not slowed down. Motivated by economic and political factors, leaving one’s country in Africa to live and work in a European country is a decision that many across the continent continue to make. Concerning their past and continuing presence in France, Africans are necessary migrants and employees because they represent the backbone of day-to-day Paris in the service sectors [8,9]. With regard to this subject, several studies discuss how the city would not be able to function without the presence of these essential workers [8–10,16,20–22]. Despite the number of people from the African continent living in Paris today, France has a complicated relationship with its residents from visible ethnocultural groups, which includes people from Africa. Past research on this subject discusses that this is due to structural racism that is nourished by official State Secularism, which continues to nullify the existence of any cultures other than French [6–8,12,21,23–27]. Because of this, people from visible ethnocultural groups exist in a sort of duelling cultural ground concerning identity. In other words, Africans are inhabiting what was described in one study as a sort of third space and identifier since they are unable to integrate fully into French society [23]. Therefore, they and others from visible ethnocultural communities navigate two cultural worlds (heritage versus French).

Even with negative daily realities such as these, Africans continue to arrive in Paris, just as they have for decades [14,17,19]. Every day, scores of migrants from the continent make the long and dangerous trek from countries south of the Sahara Desert to seek employment or refuge in France and elsewhere in Europe. This new group of immigrants primarily hails from the working class, and they are often disenfranchised in their home countries. For them, residing in a European country is seen as a ticket to a better life [8,14,16,17,21,26]. No matter the challenges facing them, this contemporary flow of people towards France remains constant, even with the hassles of trying to navigate the complicated system that encapsulates the processing of refugees upon arrival or working in the country clandestinely [6,13,16,17,28–30]. Nevertheless, despite France’s commitments for helping refugees according to the European Union’s legislative policy, their presence in the country has not been harmonious, nor have they been welcomed by some [15,17,18,24,26,29,30]. Over the past three decades, immigration has become a very divisive political and social issue. Further scrutiny has occurred since the widely publicised terror attacks at the Bataclan theatre in Paris in 2015 and related terrorism elsewhere in France in subsequent years. Events such as these have augmented feelings of suspicion towards youths from ethnocultural communities. Residents from Arab and African countries are increasingly being described by government ministers and the French media with negative vocabulary, which represents a sense of “othering” (i.e., via words like “clandestine, illegal, delinquent, and dangerous”) as denoted in studies [24,29].

Whether documented or without legal paperwork, immigrants in France continue to face immense hardships. French political parties on the right have made the subject of refugees a platform issue, and they continuously promise to restrict or stop the flow of migrants. Public opinion polls concerning the growing number of undocumented people in France indicate that the issue of immigrants remains critical amongst many citizens. At
the onset of 2024, the National Assembly created and quickly adopted a newly overhauled immigration law that tightened several aspects regarding residency qualifications whilst also reinstating fees and instituting other penalties for undocumented migrants [31,32]. Furthermore, additional parts of the new legislation stipulate that immigrants now need five years of legal residency to be eligible for social aid (instead of the former six months), and it removes the automatic right of citizenship for children born to foreign parents in France [32]. These new rules were endorsed and pushed through by the governing centrist party of President Emmanuel Macron with support from political parties on the right (a few of which indicated that the law did not go far enough). The law passed with a broad consensus, despite some on the political left describing it as the “worst” legislation about immigration that France “has ever seen” [31]. Critics of the new measures state that the legislation was inspired by parties on the political far-right and some municipal and departmental officials controlled by parties on the left are vowing not to support it. That said, information from opinion polls across France shows that more than 70% of the French public favour a more hardened approach towards migrants, which makes this subject an unresolved wedge issue for national politics.

Paradoxically, no matter the current discriminatory challenges that confront migrants from Africa or elsewhere, a new life in France represents the embodiment of a better life for many. Several important research studies discuss how the City of Lights is considered by many Africans as a ticket to upward mobility [7,12,16,17,21,33]. However, the reality of living in France often differs greatly from any optimistic expectations before arrival. For example, pre-conceived goals of achieving instant success may end in frustration since most migrants are limited to low-skilled and low-paying jobs [8,17,28]. Moreover, feelings of malaise are amplified further by the high cost of living in Paris, a lack of official paperwork for undocumented migrants, and/or constant harassment by the police for those employed and/or working unofficially [12,15,18,24,26,28]. These issues are not limited to France. Additional investigations concerning Africans or immigrant vendors working in cities elsewhere on the European continent and in New York City show similar findings among their subjects [34–38].

3. Situating the Vendors at the Eiffel Tower

The esteemed American writer Ernest Hemingway once described Paris as being “a moveable feast”, and few places better exemplify this depiction than observing the masses who gather daily at the base of the Eiffel Tower. No matter the season or weather, tourists from around the world converge at the iconic site, where they mix with a variety of local citizens. For the former, a visit to the Eiffel Tower might be described as the most important stop on their Paris itinerary [4]. In terms of Parisian residents, many locals gather to watch the sunset with friends sitting on the vast grassy area that is the Champ de Mars whilst enjoying a glass of wine or a snack. Mixed in with the diversity of people who appreciate the Eiffel Tower all year round are police officers who watch for pickpockets and other street hustlers whose jobs entail taking advantage of the gathering masses from all walks of life. Tour operators with large buses and vans come and go, a merry-go-round carousel spins round with happy children, and a variety of crêperies, cafés, and other small eateries provide tasty bites and beverages to those who wish to partake.

The space also hosts a duality of economic activities, both legal and unauthorised. There exists an official market economy and an informal one that is based on subsistence, which can be best described as an active hub of underground economic activity. There are two groups of underground sellers present at the Eiffel Tower. Vendors who peddle bottles of water or wine tend to be from India, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka. They are joined by sellers who offer Eiffel Tower-related souvenirs each day in the grounds on all sides of the monument, all of whom hail from countries across Francophone Africa (from places including, but not limited to, Sénégal, Mali, Gabon, Cameroun, Guinée, Burkina Faso, Chad, and the Central African Republic). In terms of their immigration status, almost everyone engaged with selling souvenirs at the site is residing in France clandestinely (defined in
the local venacular as *sans papiers*). Upon arrival, for the African migrants who wish to learn about the trade and work at the Eiffel Tower or at other touristed locations, they rely on contacts or friends from their own country already labouring at these sites. When making observations for the present study, it was noticed that there is a cohesive respect for one another’s boundaries and positioning, with most sellers confining themselves to a particular area. Many have worked in the same spot for years, season after season. Although there is a sense of mutual respect amongst these underground vendors, their overall presence at the Eiffel Tower is not welcomed by everyone, especially by authorised shops that cater to the tourist market. Operators of regular souvenir stores for tourists have indicated in newspaper reports that they bemoan the competition and potential loss of revenue due to the presence of these migrants [39]. That said, complaints about those who sell cheap souvenirs and the overall impact they have on licensed shops are often overinflated. When researching this exact subject, it was found that shopkeepers react to the underground souvenir market by often overestimating its actual impact on their store’s bottom line [40]. For example, some owners expressed they are “the taxpaying operations” whose sales are continuously threatened by the “illegal” sellers who gain profits of “300 euros a day” [40]. In another report, shopkeepers working near the tower estimated profits earned by the undocumented “hawkers” to be 1000 Euros for a day’s work [41]. Despite these claims, the reality is in stark contrast to these assumptions. Due to the Eiffel Tower’s popularity, it could be assumed or hypothesised that it represents a sort of privileged place to peddle underground souvenirs and that any profits made there would be quite substantial. However, actual money gained by African vendors remains below the living wage in Paris [39,41,42]. When analysing this information, it was discovered that sellers earn on average around 300 Euros for the entire month, because in order to be competitive with sales transactions, prices must be kept low [41]. Related to this, another report denoted that most vendors are lucky to receive 30 Euros in sales in a day [42]. To emphasise limited profit margins such as these, it was observed that vendors at tourist sites in Paris offer pricing as low as selling five small keychains for one Euro, with the costs for other trinkets thereby increasing in value.

Due to their unauthorised status, along with the complaints about them, police routinely harass and aggressively discourage the African souvenir sellers from working at the Eiffel Tower. Yet, regardless of many years’ worth of interventions, efforts to curb the practice have been unsuccessful [39]. Security officials who supervise and protect monuments across Paris have indicated they are increasingly frustrated with the situation involving the African vendors. In two reports that investigated the underground souvenir market, it was discerned that the authorities are unable to make a realistic difference in stopping the sellers’ activities [41,43]. Amongst the reasons listed why it is not easy to stop unauthorized sales of souvenirs, officials remarked that they are outnumbered, and they lack the necessary resources to end the illegal trade [41,43]. In one interview, a police supervisor expressed frustration with the African sellers by blaming visitors by stating “*les touristes sont de leur côté*” (tourists are supportive of the vendors) [43]. Also, when comparing the apprehension and prosecution of underground sellers with the more important topic of general security and protection (especially concerning threats of terrorism), any desire to engage in a sort of intense pursuit of vendors at the tower is not considered an immediate priority by authorities [41,43]. Moreover, police supervisors have repeatedly stated on record that they do not want to risk the lives of their officers or those of the vendors [41–44].

Throughout several years of observations at the Eiffel Tower with respect to the present research, it was noticed that a sort of “cat and mouse” routine is played out daily with few alterations in tactics. Police patrol the wide area around the structure by employing various surveillance techniques (usually in groups, often on bikes) to guard against threats and to curb illegal sales activity. Upon noticing any possible security interventions that might be eminent, the African sellers present at the space quickly pull the ropes on their homemade blankets and swiftly escape (this action converts the presentation blankets into
large sacs). Once relocated to a safe place (still in the area), the absconded vendors wait for the police to depart, after which they return to their previous spots. Others located further out of eyesight of these actions might alter their bearings whilst keeping an eye on the position of any intervening security officials in the distance. This dramatic storyline is repeated several times a day. For anyone who is apprehended during these operations, the usual punishment results in tickets and fines. Repeat offenders are often placed on garde de vue, which is a sort of probation [41-44]. In addition to receiving a citation, all merchandise is seized from the apprehended vendor, which results in a financial loss for them because they acquire their wares by paying wholesale prices in advance. Apart from this individual forfeiture of items, the collective value of seized souvenirs by French authorities is high. Newspaper articles written by that dozens to hundreds of tonnes of miniature Eiffel Towers worth 800,000 to two million Euros have been seized over the years [41,42,45]. Almost all merchandise is imported into France illegally from syndicates based in China, after which it is funneled through businesses owned by Chinese or other migrants in the Paris region. Little is known about the network activities of these underground organisations. It is then assumed by the authorities that African sellers purchase the clandestine souvenirs from local merchants, after which they sell them to tourists [41-45]. During observations made by the researcher of this study, African vendors selling Eiffel Tower miniatures were not asked how and where their merchandise was obtained. Furthermore, police and federal authorities interviewed and featured in previous published reports concerning the trafficking of souvenirs into France from China provided little detail about the structures of these clandestine networks. It should be noted that despite the presence of the alleged groups that traffic these Chinese-made trinkets mentioned by the media, published stories have found no evidence connecting any mafia source or organised crime element to the vendors themselves, apart from supplying them with the items that they wish to sell. In a report concerning police involvement that deals with the importation of souvenirs, one chief of the organised crime unit of the Paris police expressed that “there is no street mafia [behind these sellers]: We have not found a route with smugglers who would bring people to sell souvenirs in France (. . .) Here, illegal immigrants stay in France and engage in this business because this activity is enough for them to survive” [39]. Operations against African sellers have occurred for years with no change in the situation. Another story denoted that in 2009, more than 5000 contreventions were issued, most of which went unpaid [43]. The following year, it was stated that more than 270 tonnes of miniature Eiffel Tower souvenirs were seized after being discovered in a storage facility in the nearby Paris suburb of Saint-Denis [41]. Over a decade later, it was found that during the months of spring 2022 alone, the police seized more than two tonnes of merchandise over the course of conducting at least 34 separate interventions [42]. Another report from March 2023 stated that more than 11 tonnes of merchandise and money were captured at the Eiffel Tower (worth a total value of 114,000 Euros) and a dozen vendors were placed under garde de vue [44]. No matter the amount of merchandise appropriated and/or fines levied by the authorities, the underground souvenir trade continues to thrive at tourist sites in Paris. Appadurai [46] describes this multi-level type of landscape lived in by migrants around the world as an “ethnoscape” where transnational migration patterns vary widely in a more global sense depending on familial and economic ties. When examining the latter more deeply, Appadurai [46] further labels this sort of movement as a sort of “technospace” or “financescape”, depending on the jobs or money that might be attached to these forms of economic output (authorised or illicit), with the second term covering various underground markets that deal with the international flow of goods (to learn more, readers are recommended to consult the book Deciphering the Global: Its Spaces, Scales and Subjects by S. Sassen [47], which contains many chapters that cover related subjects regarding global commerce and the transnational movement people from around the world).
4. The African Vendors and Limitations

To give a brief portrait of the individuals who sell souvenirs at the Eiffel Tower, these vendors come from several Francophone countries located across sub-Saharan Africa in the west and central regions, (with Sénegal representing the majority of entrepreneurs). All sellers at the structure are undocumented migrants living in France without any sort of legal permanency. This means that if any of them were to leave France and/or any country located in the Schengen Zone, they would have to re-enter illegally, which would place them at risk of being either unsuccessful or subject to arrest, or even potential death in the Mediterranean Sea during the crossing from the African continent to Europe. For this reason, it was learned that several vendors have not returned to their home country for years. At the time of this writing, there have been no large, concentrated efforts by the French government to legalise these and other migrants who are living in France with an undocumented status. In terms of employment, all the vendors with whom the researcher engaged indicated that souvenir selling was their only source of income.

Everyone in the queried sample group listed in the present study indicated that they worked day and night, with many being present at the site seven days a week, 10–14 hours a day (or longer). All the vendors were males, with females being absent from the area. Each person sells the exact same types of wares (miniature Eiffel Towers or other cheap Paris mementos). When dealing with tourists, any fixed-positioned sellers usually remain quiet and are constantly surveilling the space for police. Those who are more mobile traverse areas of the tower on foot and will sometimes greet tourists by offering them a low-cost item that might provoke a sale of something of greater value. All vendors speak French, with some also being able to answer various questions in English and other languages (e.g., Spanish, Italian, German, Mandarin). In terms of how long this group of migrants have lived in France, answers varied depending on one’s age. For example, most younger vendors indicated that they have been living in the country for less than 1–5 years, whilst several older sellers stated that they have resided in France anywhere from 5 to 20 years. Previous studies further elaborate and give detailed information on recent undocumented migrants from the African continent residing in Paris [8,9,15,17,18,27].

To protect the Africans selling miniature Eiffel Towers on site and at other locations in Paris, there are several things the present research does not aim to accomplish. First, it should be noted here that although the researcher got to know many vendors personally whilst also becoming quite recognisable to almost everyone over time, for the sake of full anonymity in the present study, as well as to protect those working at the site, no names were sought (although some were voluntarily given). Moreover, this study does not discuss where these sellers reside in Paris. That said, it can be mentioned that it was learned that almost everyone indicated that they share a room or small space in the low-rent arrondissements in Paris or in one of the nearby disenfranchised working-class suburbs located along the métro lines that serve the city. Only a few people stated that they have their own space, as the majority of Africans labouring at the Eiffel Tower choose to share a residence with another seller or other friends (usually also undocumented) to keep costs low due to their meagre earnings. No matter where they reside, the residential locations and communities of these sellers are more disenfranchised in their socioeconomic characteristics, which means the monthly room or apartment rents in these areas is lower than the Paris average.

In terms of their personal life away from their work at the Eiffel Tower, no vendors were asked either formally or informally about their marital, relationship, or family status, although some whimsically mentioned that they were married or involved with someone back in their home country. Sellers communicate daily with family and friends in France and/or at home via virtual messaging services such as WhatsApp or by using social media networks. Meals and snacks are bought at streetside kiosks or cafés or prepared at home more collectively with African friends or family who also work as souvenir sellers or in other menial jobs in Paris. Little time is available for personal means apart from work. Apart from connecting with their peers, friends, and family via social media and
messaging, some vendors indicated that they converse with others at cafes in their local neighbourhood (or suburb) or at African-populated establishments in the 18th, 19th, and 20th arrondissements. Connections to local French people are minimal at best. During casual chats with the researcher, a few of younger vendors stated that they arrived alone in France and were single and unattached (with some jokingly remarking that they would like to have a French girlfriend someday). When freely speaking with sellers during interactions, all of them stated that a percentage of the money that they earn from sales is sent back to their home countries, to either family or friends. Remittances are transferred to these locations via one or several applications available for use on mobile devices. Although it was assumed that any financial support given to people at home is based on earnings from the sale of Eiffel Tower souvenirs, no one was asked about the amounts sent as wire transfers. The researcher also did not pose questions about who received these remittances, although a few sellers mentioned that their families would use money sent to them for various needed expenses (e.g., medical care, general bills, or debt repayment). That said, some of the older sellers mentioned that they have children back in their home country who rely on any funds sent to them for fees related to educational purposes (e.g., school supplies, uniforms, other expenses). Furthermore, this study does not inquire about the amount of money earned per day by each seller, nor was anyone questioned about exactly how their merchandise was obtained (i.e., from which networks or individuals). Sourcing this type of information was not the goal of the present investigation and it is a subject that is not easily discerned. Moreover, the researcher strongly believes that inquiries such as these might have resulted in a loss of trust and a lack of participation from the Africans working at the tourist site. Queries that probed too deeply would have raised suspicion. Previous media reports published at the site have also not been able to determine or deconstruct the networking aspect of the merchandise sold by African vendors [41–44]. The aim of this investigation was to become familiar with these sellers from an observational standpoint, as this would help to achieve the goals of the present study. Asking too many personal questions about one’s residence or how they obtained their merchandise would have endangered participation and casual conversations. The researcher is fully cognisant that some readers may want to have more detailed information about the lives of vendors when they are not working at the Eiffel Tower. That said, the primary goal of this study was to be observational at the site itself and to deconstruct and understand working conditions faced by the Africans working there if they were willing to converse with the investigator.

Because the researcher is a foreigner who might have been considered suspicious by undocumented people working in the underground market, and due to the need to earn trust from the vendors present at the site, personal questions were generally avoided (aside from what might come up or be stated within a casual conversation). In other words, readers should be made aware that the present study is not a comprehensive ethnographic investigation; rather, it is one that is more observational in scope. This decision was made to protect the identities of the African vendors who took time to fill out the surveys used in this research. Due to the extreme amount of scrutiny by the national police placed upon those engaging in the underground economy at the Eiffel Tower and other landmarks, it was promised to all participating respondents that personal information about them would not be shared. Because they knew that their anonymity was protected, all African sellers who engaged with the researcher were amicable, and they freely answered all questions posed to them as they concerned the topics highlighted in this investigation (to learn more about additional subjects not mentioned in this investigation, readers are recommended to consult the publications of Bazurli [34], Mbodj-Pouye [17], Piazzoni [48], and Richter [18].

5. Methodology

To accomplish the goals of the current study, the first and most important task was to observe the round-the-clock ceaseless activity occurring at the Eiffel Tower vis-à-vis the African vendors present at there and engage with them informally. Passive and active observations were conducted at the site over the course of several years during both the
winter low season and summer high season. To gain a better perspective of the terrain, initial research for the present study was undertaken in all weather over the course of numerous visits, starting in January 2017. More intense and detailed fieldwork observations commenced in the months of January–April 2019 and picked up again during the summer months of that same year (June–August 2019). Following the COVID shutdowns, fieldwork was restarted in the months June–August 2022 and observations were concluded the following winter (from December 20 to January 2023). All of these engagements were purely informal, and no recording devices were used. No matter the time of year, observations were made at locations surrounding the tower on both sides of the Seine at all hours of the day and night from a voyeur/flâneur angle. The researcher visited the site every day of the week during each trip to Paris, no matter the season or conditions (day and night, rain, snow, or sunshine). At times, observations were made near the busiest métro stations on either bank of the river (e.g., Bir-Hakeim, Trocadéro). During other occasions, vendors were consulted on the various bridges that are adjacent to the structure (e.g., Pont de l’Alma, Pont Bir-Hakeim, Pont des Invalides). Active surveying also occurred on the Champ-de-Mars, which was particularly busy during the summer months. Stationary positioned African vendors could be found selling their wares at each of these locations, whilst others who are more mobile would walk around. The flat concrete area facing the Eiffel Tower is another place where vendors and tourists interact due to its position directly facing the monument, which makes it a popular place for photos. Due to the smooth, flat surface of this esplanade, one can encounter street performers, musicians, break-dancers, and others. As one walks downhill towards the tower below this space, tourists can admire fountains where more mobile souvenir sellers ply the grounds and solicit potential customers.

The totality of vendors present in the environs of the Eiffel Tower varies by day and by season, with the warmer months being the busiest time of the year. Dozens of African vendors are stationary-positioned on bridges and sidewalks on both sides of the Seine, and mobile sellers walk back and forth, including in winter. Vendors and tourists interact with one another in various ways. If a seller is in a non-moving position on a sidewalk or grassy area, his wares will be spread out on a large sheet or thin blanket that can be pulled up immediately and converted into a sack for a quick escape from approaching police officers. Each vendor neatly arranges their items for sale on this sheet in rows where potential shoppers can browse and ask questions about prices. Upon observing this, it was noticed that most sellers who are positioned in this stationary manner remain quiet unless an inquiry is sought. In terms of the mobile vendors who walk around the site on both sides of the Seine, they will often greet and entice passersby by pitching a sale of their lowest priced item, which are the Eiffel Tower miniature keychains (price varies from either four or five for one Euro). None of these moving sellers lingers too long in a single place. If it appears that a tourist is not interested in buying anything, the vendor continues walking. Surveilling the entire scene that is made up of visitors, authorised sellers, street performers, and the Africans engaged in the underground market are numerous police officers that can be found on foot, bikes, and horseback.

In addition to this general surveillance on all four corners of the huge Parisian space that the tower occupies, it was initially important to meet and hear from the vendors themselves in their own words without any official formality (as this might discourage them from speaking at all). Over time, the researcher became more recognisable to several of them. Eventually, the aim of our study was explained to this group of sellers, and we gained their oral consent for their participation before proceeding. The aim of conducting these informal conversations was to engage in casual conversations, after which a few willing vendors could answer questions posed to them via a short survey. Although the researcher learned some of the names of these individual entrepreneurs, no one was asked to identify themselves. The primary aim was to observe and at times converse with various sellers located in all four corners of the grounds daily and nightly during each visit to Paris. During these conversations, the researcher stood (or sat) next to them and engaged in small chats. At other times, discussions started by bending down and perusing their
souvenir supply, sometimes augmented with the purchase of some keychains to help to break the ice and ease into a conversation. The purpose of this small talk was to earn confidence since some individuals might feel suspicious of a complete stranger asking them too many questions. After repetitive visits each day or night, several vendors agreed to be queried as it related to the goals of the present study. To do this, a short questionnaire was put together, and it was used when speaking in depth with a small sample group. Although the researcher spoke to many sellers at the Eiffel Tower, the questionnaires were not distributed to everyone. Most of the engagement with vendors was in the form of general conversations. The reason for this is due to the fact that vendors must constantly remain alert for police activity. It was not the intention of this study to be in their way of anyone, should a quick departure be necessary. The questionnaires were enumerated directly with the sellers by the researcher, and this was undertaken at a time where the police were not active, or when vendors were positioned in a location where any impending intervention would be recognised with plenty of advance notice (such as being in a wide space or well-trafficked area with optimal views of the surroundings. Examples of this include positioning on bridges, on wide sidewalks, in the spaces by the Bir-Hakeim or métro stations, or on the Champs-de-Mars, amongst others). The goal of the informal chats with vendors was to enable them to recognise and consider the researcher as a trustworthy person with whom they could feel confident. The questions on these surveys queried respondents on subjects concerning identity, racism, language, integration, and opinions about the police, all of which will be discussed forthwith.

During each visit to the site, the present research was conducted by a single investigator so that vendors felt comfortable speaking with only one person familiar to them. This approach helped the researcher gain the trust of the respondents. Still, earning confidence takes time, and repetitive daily stops to the Eiffel Tower facilitated and expedited that process. Other things also helped gain certitude, albeit slowly. The researcher and author of the present research is neither Parisian nor French. Perhaps, more importantly, because the French spoken by the investigator engaging with the sellers has a distinctive Québécois accent, this small but important contrasting linguistic variation from the local vernacular demonstrated to everyone involved in selling souvenirs at the Eiffel Tower that the person querying them was not one of the “tatounènes” who are frequently present at the site (this term refers to a word that comes from the Wolof language spoken in Sénégal that is used by many vendors, including non-Sénégalaise, to describe the large number of undercover police officers working in street clothes). In terms of encouraging sellers to participate in the study, once the goals of the investigation were explained, no resistance was encountered. To make things easy in terms of data analysis, 50 respondents were chosen out of the dozens who labour at the site regularly. These vendors were selected out of friendliness and their willingness to participate, with no other formal requirements or expectations. Due to the constant presence of the researcher who engaged with sellers often, those who collaborated felt comfortable and everyone participated willingly.

6. Self-Security and Racism

To commence this investigation, it was first necessary to measure feelings as they concern how secure this group of undocumented migrants feel in France. The ongoing debate over the status of the sans papiers is a topic that has produced a lot of discussion over the years, especially amongst politicians and the French media. Due to these circumstances, migrants from ethnocultural communities have received even more scrutiny from the authorities than in previous decades, and the vendors represented in this study are no exception to this sort of suspicion. Other studies concerning undocumented African vendors working elsewhere in Europe also indicate that underground sellers feel worried [14,21,38,39], which is the reason why it was important to start the present investigation with this question. Moreover, immigrants and even citizens of ethnocultural communities routinely face scrutiny in France [24,42]. It was hypothesised that sellers at the Eiffel Tower would state that they do not feel secure due to their lack of permanent status, which would
be particularly amplified because they are from a visibly under-represented group. When asked the question, 36 respondents (72%) indicated that they do not feel secure versus only 14 who stated the opposite (28%). However, because this initial query asked about “security” in terms of residence, this question was followed-up with another one that dealt with personal security. For the 72% of respondents who indicated that they do not feel “secure” in France, an additional oral question was posed where they were then asked to provide more information to help clarify what motivated their response. Upon doing so, almost everyone indicated that due to their *sans papiers* status, they do not believe their place in France is fully stable. At the same time, few respondents indicated that they feel their lives are endangered apart from the possibility of deportation. In other words, any worry as it concerns the word “security” was about “permanency” in terms of immigration status and not about personal safety.

The next set of inquiries dealt with the subject of racism. To begin, African sellers were asked if they considered France at large or especially people within it to be racist (i.e., French society as defined by them). The hypothesis here was that they would be fairly divided on their answers, all based on their own personal experience in Paris. Results from this inquiry showed that 21 people (42%) believe that French people are racist versus 29 (58%) who do not share that sentiment. This finding is noteworthy for a few reasons. As mentioned previously, on occasion, the local media publishes short stories that discuss issues relating to the non-authorised African vendors. Some of these reports bring journalists to the area of the Eiffel Tower and other tourist sites to interview the few sellers willing to speak with them. Most of these brief articles focus on the legal status of those participating in the sales trade or the seizure of merchandise, whilst others discuss police interventions to curb or mitigate it. It has been reported that security operations have been increasingly more bellicose and belligerent in approach, with more citations being issued and larger amounts of merchandise being seized than previously [39,42,44]. Due to an uptick in these sorts of aggressive security operations, it was expected that results from the previous question would shift when a follow-up inquiry was pursued about racism that only involves the police. Indeed, when queried about whether the vendors believe that the security forces assigned to work at the tower are racist towards them, the data show a reverse opinion from the first question about racism in French society, with 37 (74%) respondents stating that the police are racist, versus 13 (26%) who disagreed. An interesting outcome from this inquiry is to denote how closely it mirrors the findings of the first question where the sample group was asked about their sense of security in France. The fact that the responses to that previous inquiry signify a similar result to those given for this question about the police suggests that feelings about “security” can be directly correlated with how vendors are treated by those same authorities.

7. Relations with Tourists and Job Satisfaction

After these initial questions about topics related to the host country in terms of general acceptance, sellers were then asked about how they view the diverse group of international tourists who are responsible for their daily earnings. Due to a police supervisor’s response as denoted in a previously mentioned report, it was hypothesised that visitors to the Eiffel Tower would be amicable towards African sellers [43]. This assumption was presumed because of the gamut of positive and happy emotions tourists might be feeling whilst visiting the Eiffel Tower. However, the results of this question suggest otherwise by fully counteracting the presupposed hypothesis. When asked the question “are tourists friendly/nice towards you”, 29 people (58%) said no, whilst 21 (42%) stated the opposite. This finding was not expected. In fact, this surprising answer provided a good reason to seek further information from the sample group about the difficulty of the job, as this might have motivated that response. During informal conversations with many vendors, it was learned that everyone works long hours that stretch from the early morning late into the night, often seven days a week. As echoed in previous newspaper reports, no matter how many hours or days one sells souvenirs at the site, there are no guarantees
about how much merchandise will be sold during these shifts. The vendors with whom the researcher engaged orally indicated that they earn, on average, between 20 and 50 Euros daily, which mirrors what was discerned in previous reports [41–45]. To outsiders, it may appear that the task of selling souvenirs at one of the world’s most famous landmarks is an easy job where vendors positively socialise with visitors from around the world (even if most interactions are limited), but the reality is different. For example, selling souvenirs is a tiresome task that produces little financial gain [41–45]. Moreover, because these African vendors must always keep a watchful eye out for the police and any random interventions initiated by them, this limits any meaningful engagement with buyers other than informing them of a price and making a quick transaction. This might be the source of the negative sentiments shown in the results of the previous question. To gauge these feelings further, our sample group was then queried regarding their individual thoughts about their job. For this follow-up question, it was initially hypothesised that respondents would split their answers based on their age and time spent in France. However, it was quickly discovered and discerned that there was no need to divide anyone by age based on this distinction. An overwhelming number of vendors indicated that they do not like their job at all (42, or 84%, indicated that they do not enjoy it versus only 8, or 16%, who stated the opposite). Thus, no differences existed based on one’s age.

8. Happiness and Permanency

The next inquiry sought to measure whether these sellers at the Eiffel Tower consider their life in France as something positive. This is an important question to ask due to the multi-layered circumstances representing the enormity of the dangerous steps facing these migrants as they arrange each phase of their journey to the European continent. The African vendors labouring at the Eiffel Tower come from impoverished circumstances in countries located across Francophone Africa, and each risked their lives in various ways to make the arduous journey from south to north. For this reason, it was speculated that most would indicate that despite the rigorous nature of the job, they are happy to have arrived in France and they wish to remain in the country permanently and officially. To measure these two sentiments, respondents were asked about their happiness in France. Concerning this question, a majority of respondents stated that they are pleased to be living in France (or 66%) versus a minority who have an opposing opinion (17 or 34%), which was the hypothesis. That question about happiness was followed with a subsequent inquiry asking if they sought to remain in the country long-term. For this subject, it was theorised that the sellers would indicate that they wished to stay in France permanently due to the difficulties of their journey to Europe. Also, because the ultimate desire of these migrants is to seek a better life for themselves by earning money to assist and provide for their families back home, it was presumed that they would indicate that they wished to live in France with the proper documentation that affords them that permanency. An overwhelmingly majority of respondents stated that they wished to stay in France (41 or 82%), with only a small number of respondents disagreeing (8 or 16%). A few of the respondents who dissented clarified their answers about why they did not seek to remain in France permanently. Some indicated that they considered their time in the country to be temporary (until enough money was earned, which would enable them do something different), whilst others mentioned that they wanted to pursue other opportunities elsewhere.

Finally, as a sort of summary inquiry that serves to encompass the entirety of the previously mentioned investigative topics, it was important to discover the overall opinion that this group of sellers have about France in general. To this end, the questions “what is your opinion about France” and “what does the Eiffel Tower mean to you” were posed to everyone, without giving any further clarification or specifics that might have motivated a response. For the first inquiry, the two possible answers to this inquiry were “favourable” and “unfavourable.” Because this question was more open-ended, it was expected that opinions about France would not to be as straightforward as with previous inquiries. In other words, responses would be based on each person’s own individual experience in Paris.
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The data from this question show that most vendors indicated that they have a favourable view of France (29, or 58%), with only 42% (21 respondents) having an opposite view. The second question was open-ended, as to allow each vendor to say whatever crossed their mind. For this query, the most common answers that were echoed as they concerned what the Eiffel Tower meant to these sellers can be summarised by comments that described it as “a place for a job (or income)”, or “hope for”, or “a place to make or build a new life.” A few people also mentioned the word “freedom”, which referred to their ability to restart their life in a new location (in this case, by working at the Eiffel Tower in France). No one described the famous monument in a negative manner. An additional part of these informal discussions often included short conversations about what it means to vendors to sell trinkets representing one of the most famous landmarks in the world to tourists, to which the most common reply was “ce n’est qu’un travail” (it is just a job) and a source of economic empowerment, however (in)significant.

9. Overview of our Findings

Based on numerous observations made by the researcher as an observateur/flâneur at the environs surrounding the Eiffel Tower over the course of several seasons and years, a few hypotheses were presumed prior to starting this research. Some of the things that were speculated mirrored assumptions based on previous research or newspaper reports, whilst others ran in contrast to those postulations. For example, it was presupposed that racism would be an important factor to consider when measuring/analysing the daily experiences of the African vendors present at the site. Indeed, the findings show that respondents believe that the authorities of the French State are biased against them, which is principally the result of past and present harassment towards these sellers by the police. Additionally, negative feelings such as these are further amplified due to the suspicion directed towards other Africans in Paris with undocumented status. When engaging in formal and informal conversations with respondents as surveys were conducted, the researcher frequently heard refrains and complaints concerning heavy-handed “aggressive” policing by the security authorities present at the site, which echoes findings published in previous media reports (e.g., comments like “les policiers sont souvent agressifs”, or “the police are often aggressive”). As mentioned previously, even if police interventions against the unauthorised selling of souvenirs are fully within the law, these repetitive interactions have not produced significant results in terms of curbing this activity apart from negatively affecting the well-being of Africans (whose merchandise is seized after being fined or being placed on probation). Due to the insubstantially modest amount of money earned by sellers, as well as a failure by the authorities to reign in the trade in which they engage, the actual threat level to licensed stores in terms of sales and profits is minimal at most. No matter, police operations at the Eiffel Tower were described by everyone with whom this investigation interacted formally and informally as being unnecessarily aggressive. At times, vendors have been severely hurt and even hospitalised after injuring themselves whilst under pursuit by the authorities [40,49]. In terms of medical care after cases when migrants need to treat an injury resulting from any difficult interactions with the police, sellers were asked about whether treatment is provided to them. Everyone who spoke about this topic indicated that all hospitals and clinics in Paris care for any incoming patients for emergency services irrespective of one’s migrant status or legality in France. At the same time, although several respondents indicated that the police “doit faire son travail tous les jours” (have a daily job to do), sellers also repeatedly remarked that they are increasingly being targeted more assertively than is needed. Furthermore, many vendors further indicated that they condemned interventions such as these as “unnecessary” (“pas nécessaires”) since none of them become wealthy from the job, and tourists are neither harassed, nor forced to purchase anything. Furthermore, almost all Africans working at the site frequently stated that they absolutely believe race plays a factor in how they are viewed by the authorities. Simply put, despite a general understanding amongst them that
the police are a necessary part of the landscape and are enforcing the law, these sellers also feel that they are being unfairly targeted. Apart from this finding, it was found that the subject of racism towards the vendors at the Eiffel Tower is not only limited to actions carried out by the police. For example, nearly half of the sample group of the present study stated that they believe French people are also racist against them and other migrants of colour, especially with respect to those who lack proper immigration status. This was result is not at all surprising, as it echoes what has been discussed in numerous past investigative studies concerning visible ethnocultural groups in France. Amongst those, researchers such as Akin [28], Boubecker [24], Dewitte [6], Fassin [29], Richter [18], Tevanian [22], Winders [16], argue that France has long had an uneasy relationship with ethnocultural communities in the country, be they sans papiers individuals or residents/citizens. Because Africans make up the entirety of unlicensed souvenir vendors at the Eiffel Tower, this notion of “otherness” contributes to the disproportionate amount of harassment and surveillance of those selling souvenir keepsakes at the site.

Along these same lines, results from the questions posed show that a large percentage of respondents indicated that tourists (without respect to their nationality) who visit the Eiffel Tower are also not typically friendly towards them despite the lack of aggression from sellers towards visitors. This was a surprising finding. Although it was correctly speculated by the researcher how sellers would respond vis-à-vis their opinions about the police, as well as, to a lesser extent, French people from French majority society in general, this result was not expected as it concerned tourists at the site. Although this finding runs contrary to the assumed hypothesis, it can be related to the previous question that examined feelings of exclusion and racism felt by these undocumented vendors in France. Furthermore, this finding mirrors similar sentiments as expressed in studies investigating unlicensed African vendors working in other European countries (Deluca [50], Fouskas [35], Harney [36], Ragone [37], Piazzoni [48]). Put another way, since the sellers at the Eiffel Tower are Africans (most of whom are young men), the racial origin of the vendors indeed plays a factor in terms of how they are viewed by their prospective customers. In other words, a substantial number of African vendors express feelings of uneasiness vis-à-vis their customers, which they believe is due to racial differences. It should be noted that respondents were not asked to distinguish or classify visitors based on their assumed nationality, as “tourists” were defined as anyone non-local with whom these vendors interact. Because of perceived racism or impolite indifference directed towards the African sellers by international visitors at the Eiffel Tower, this subject may be something important to pursue and examine in a future study due to its very unexpected nature.

The job of an unlicensed African souvenir vendor at the Eiffel Tower is not an easy one. Every day, no matter the weather conditions, many of these unofficial sellers spend many hours walking back and forth in the wide area of the site located on both sides of the Seine River, whilst others stand in one place and wait for sales. Even though several vendors indicated that they enjoy meeting people when their engagements with visitors are positive, the countless hours and days spent at the site do not yield profits that would support a daily living wage for them. Because of this arduous type of employment, few respondents remarked that they enjoy the work that they undertake, which was hypothesised. Based on previously published articles about these sellers and the little profits gained, it was assumed that the vendors would answer this inquiry based on the self-defined challenges of their daily travails at the Eiffel Tower. However, it was also surmised that older members of the sample group of the present study would have more negative feelings towards their job than younger sellers who are more recent arrivals, As such, it was theorised that this finding would be due to the former group’s longer time in France relative to that of the latter. In fact, it was initially thought that it would be necessary to classify vendors (young versus old) in terms of their responses to this inquiry. However, tabulating and codifying by age group was quickly abandoned because it was rapidly and clearly discerned that the findings indicated that an overwhelming majority of sellers have an unfavourable view of
their job without any regard to how old they are, and no distinctions in data existed based on that indicator. Furthermore, this response was further reaffirmed when the researcher engaged in individual conversations with each vendor as they enumerated the surveys (i.e., again, the age of a respondent or their time in France mattered little). Some contributors to these feelings of general malaise shown by the results are the long hours worked at the site without a day off, the small profits earned per shift, constant harassment by the police, and as previously discussed, a lack of friendliness from their customers that is due to racial bias against Africans in France.

Despite any negative indicators in terms of the previously mentioned findings as expressed by the African vendors present at the Eiffel Tower, the results show that they are optimistic about their futures. A majority of respondents remarked that they would like to remain in France permanently with the legal paperwork that would enable them to find more meaningful and profitable employment. Also, these hardworking sellers indicated that they are happy to live in the country at present, even though their residency status is not secure. This is the case regardless of any police harassment, low sales earnings, and any other daily challenges that they face. Everyone in the consulted sample group of this study stated in conversations that they viewed this job at the Eiffel Tower merely as a sort of entry-level position that will eventually enable them to find better employment that will ameliorate their economic situation. Interestingly, even the longtime sellers shared this sentiment of impermanency with regard to the job that they have been doing for years. In short, the legalisation of one’s status might be one way that authorities could curb unlicensed selling at the Eiffel Tower. During informal conversations with them, migrants repeatedly stated that if were they able to gain possession of valid French work visa and legal residency status, that would be the ultimate hope and aspiration, after which they no longer would sell souvenirs at the structure. Every single seller with whom the researcher engaged mentioned that a significant amount of their earnings made from their days and nights working at the Eiffel Tower is transferred to family members or friends living in their home countries. This transnational support in the form of remittances represents a lifeline for food, bills, and other living expenses for many across Francophone Africa. Thus, a valid work visa and permanent residency paperwork would assist these undocumented workers and their families substantially whilst also elevating one’s upward mobility. That said, not all respondents indicated that they viewed their personal time residing in Paris as something temporary: a moment in which to make a little bit of money for a few years. Even amongst those African vendors who seek to remain in France, several mentioned that they would like to return to their home countries eventually (e.g., once enough money has been saved to build a house, or after improving the family compound, or after investing in a new business). No matter the many challenges that confront these Africans working at the Eiffel Tower, their hopeful outlook for a better life in France, whether temporary or permanently, remains intact. This optimistic sentiment is represented because everyone described in various ways how the Eiffel Tower and a life in France represent a place of hope.

10. Summary

The presence of Africans selling souvenirs at the world’s most famous tourist landmark has become as much a part of the Parisian landscape as the Eiffel Tower itself. Even though these vendors face continual hardships, these enterprising sellers are an enduring testament to the multicultural gathering point that is Gustav Eiffel’s masterpiece of engineering. One might even say that the large presence of these migrants at the structure arguably represents a better set of eyes in terms of keeping the area safe and secure than those provided by the authorities who are posted there. No matter how often police operations result in seizures of items, or despite the number of tickets being given to sellers, or any fines being levied, vendors from Africa remain omnipresent at the Eiffel Tower from day to day.

It should be noted that the present study of this group of assiduously industrious African sellers in Paris is not exhaustive. A deeper ethnographic analysis would yield
results that are more specific to the things introduced in this present research. That said, the findings from the survey questions mentioned in this paper could be a starting point for future investigations bearing upon this subject. Future investigations could eliminate the anonymity from this study and allow researchers to get to know a few sellers more intimately and openly. In other words, the present investigation serves as an introduction to further analyses. More research is needed to deconstruct this topic from additional angles. For example, future studies could categorise the Africans working at the Eiffel Tower by age and/or time spent in France. Also, future researchers might investigate and classify these vendors by their home country to see what findings might emerge in terms of similarities and differences. Other studies could ethnographically examine the sellers at the Eiffel Tower in terms of their residence in Paris, their family status, or the amount of merchandise they sell per day/week. In addition to these suggestions, more detailed research is also needed to be conducted by economists or sociologists in order to gain a deeper understanding in terms of the vast scale of networking of the miniature Eiffel Tower souvenirs sold by vendors. Apart from very brief local newspaper articles from time to time, nothing detailed or substantial has been published about the structure of this international smuggling system that facilitates the importation of souvenir wares from their points of origin (factories in China) in terms of their distribution and eventual sale in France via the underground economic market. To understand the lives of these vendors more deeply, future researchers could approach this subject by conducting more in-depth and personal ethnographic studies with sit-down interviews that centre on one or more people working at the Eiffel Tower. Profound and intimate ethnographic studies such as those could help explain the deep personal motivators that inspire the migration of this subset of Africans to France despite the risks involved with making such a dangerous journey. Finally, it is recommended that researchers investigate the numerous African vendors who work at other locations in Paris (such as those at Sacre-Coeur in Montmartre) to compare their experiences with those of the sellers at the Eiffel Tower.

For centuries, the lure of the City of Lights has beckoned people from all over the world to its streets as residents, visitors, or workers. No matter the category of person seeking to land, visit, work, or live in Paris, nothing represents the city more than the Eiffel Tower. Whether they are tourists travelling to France for the first time or the undocumented African vendors whose presence at the site is to sell souvenir trinkets to those same visitors seeking to remember their Parisian trip, everyone strolling at the base of Gustave Eiffel’s invention share one commonality: the desire to fulfill some sort of dream or ambition. Similar to those who might become emotional at the very sight of the tower after seeing it as a visitor, the migrants selling miniature souvenir versions of the famous monument view the unique metal structure as a place that represents their first step to having a better life. This sort of optimism occurs even though these African sellers are living in a country that has not made any positive steps forward into legalising or accepting their presence. For this reason, the Eiffel Tower a paradoxical symbol, be it for the romanticised version of Paris for which many beret-wearing visitors search, or the cautious optimism expressed by the undocumented souvenir sellers whose livelihoods depend on the tourists frequenting the monument to survive. Despite their invisibility from an official point of view, the Africans offering and selling cheap miniature keepsakes of world’s most recognisable symbols whilst walking in the shadow of it are a visible part of the terrain. For them, and for others who are currently risking their lives to traverse a desert and sea to arrive in Paris, the Eiffel Tower remains one poignant symbol of a better future.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** This research did not use human subjects aside from when collecting survey data. No personal information whatsoever was sought in the surveys that were
distributed. All conversations that we had with the African vendors mentioned in this paper were completely informal and are not included here.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Oral informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study, and things were explained clearly before asking any survey questions. No names were requested, nor are they used. No personal questions or any sort of personal details about any individuals were either sought or mentioned in this research.

**Data Availability Statement:** To protect the subjects of this research, the author prefers not to make the data publicly available. That said, any data mentioned in this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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