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IMMIGRATION IN FRANCE: TOWARD A NOT SO OPEN POLICY?

by Gérard-François Dumont

Paris, November 1986: The government prepared a reform of its Nationality Code, revising conditions for the "naturalization" of foreigners living in France. The announcement of the reform was front page news in every French newspaper for days, first because of the impending reform itself and secondly because of an unexpected event that occurred while the reform was being announced.

The Council of State (cabinet) made public its decision regarding a document that is traditionally kept secret and only for gov-

ernmental use. The minister of justice and president of the council, Albin Chalandon, reminded the council of its responsibility to maintain discretion. The secretary general of the largest party in the majority, the Rassemblement pour la République (Rally for the Republic), or RPR, vehemently criticized the "politicization" of the Council of State.

What basically is the reform's objective? Citizenship laws in France are generally broad. One part of the old code grants automatic citizenship in certain cases to aliens who make no voluntary

effort nor have the desire to become French citizens. Some critics say that such a law is contrary to human rights, because a democratic country should not impose its nationality on any alien without asking permission. During a recent census, in fact, thousands of legal Frenchmen proclaimed themselves to be of another nationality.

The fact of the matter is that the reform proposed by the government is at the heart of the immigration debate. The French evoke the specter of racism and others the specter of immigration



Members of the League of Human Rights demonstrate in Paris against alleged "Algerian repression."

for political or electoral motives. European immigration since 1880, after World War I, and after World War II was most valuable to the French economy, especially in light of the aging population linked to low birthrates and of the deaths caused by the wars. African immigration during the 1960s provided the economy with needed manpower.

This is why for some the Nationality Code reform jeopardizes a French tradition of openness. There is a feeling that France should remain the country with the easiest nationalization standards. From this principle, a three-fold reaction against the reform has emerged: that of the political opposition, who see in it an occasion to rally its supporters; that of jurists, who contest various wordings in the reform texts; and that of religious leaders, who oppose all that might appear xenophobic.

The Nationality Code affair is destined to take on larger dimensions, feeding the media and exciting passions for months to come.

In reality, if the current Nationality Code in France is examined rationally, it can be seen that it is the result of a series of texts, some of which were drafted for transitional purposes during the various stages of decolonization. Today the totality of these texts is of immense complexity, and a reform toward simplification is in order.

Trouble over Malians

Paris, October 1986: The French government chartered a plane to expel 101 Malians living illegally in France, a quarter of



Algerians arriving in France fresh off the boat *Zeralda*.

whom had criminal records. The affair created a great sensation and made the front pages of French newspapers for several days.

It was a measure without any real precedent. Previous regulations for expulsion of foreigners in irregular situations—those who have entered the country clandestinely—made it next to impossible to expel illegal aliens rapidly. The laws did nothing to discourage clandestine immigration into the country. These illegal aliens, some of whom participate in drug trafficking, have given foreigners living legally in France a bad name. The ease of entry into France and the scant risk of expulsion has encouraged an illegal immigration

phenomenon, estimated today at between 300,000 and 500,000 people. Compare these figures with the 101 expulsions on October 19. To compare the expulsions to the overall population in France would have little significance. Clandestine immigration is strongly concentrated in some neighborhoods of Paris (mostly the eastern and northern suburbs), Marseille, and Lyon.

On September 9, 1986, a law authorizing officials to expel illegal aliens was passed. The affair of the 101 Malians was a direct consequence of the application of this new law.

The expulsion evoked indignation within the opposition parties and among religious leaders, especially because of the tactics

J. PAULOVSKY/XYGMA

used. A charter plane owned by a private company was utilized. "For us this was a completely normal charter flight," stated the president of the company that

The fertility index for the French population is at 1.6 children per female. The foreign resident population in France has an index of 3.3 children per female—in other words, twice the rate of native French women.

chartered the plane. The Catholic and Protestant churches published a joint communiqué because they felt that the expulsion measure "[could] only serve to create a feeling of fear and inse-

curity within the immigrant communities in France."

The question of immigration in November as in October remained a central theme as each new occurrence sharpened the debate within French society.

A project provocateur

The immigration issue blossomed following a racially motivated murder and a bombing that occurred in the city of Toulon in September 1986. Calling for calm, Mayor François Trucy denounced two things in particular: first, the groups who threatened to create a North African militia, calling it illegal and dangerous because of its provocative nature. Then, he stated publicly and in his municipal bulletin: "Yes, 50 percent immigrants is too much, far too much for the old city of Toulon. Because I have realized this, the renovation of the city center is being planned, with redistribution

of the population in mind. Yes, I am waiting for the authorities to control identity papers throughout the city, because illegal workers and criminals must be returned to their countries of origin. And yes, it is not for foreigners to impose their life-style, morals, and politics upon us. They must respect our hospitality, our life-style, and our laws."

Thus, immigration in France becomes the focal point of debate because of two violent incidents in Toulon in September, an expulsion by charter airplane of 101 Malians in October, and in November a project for reformation of the Nationality Code approved by the Council of Ministers.

So as not to be carried away by the passions of the moment, a clear evaluation of the immigration situation in France, and an attempt to determine potential future developments, should be made. Three questions merit examination:

- How many foreigners are living in France?
- Why did they come?
- What are possible future scenarios?

Official population statistics are obtained in France through censuses, which take place every seven years or so. Unfortunately, the French statistical system does not allow for measurement of migratory movements between two census periods. The most recent precise data available is from 1982, the year of the last census, as indicated in the adjoining table regarding the number of foreigners in France.

These figures need clarification. First of all, figures are presented for the number of foreigners, that is, persons not having



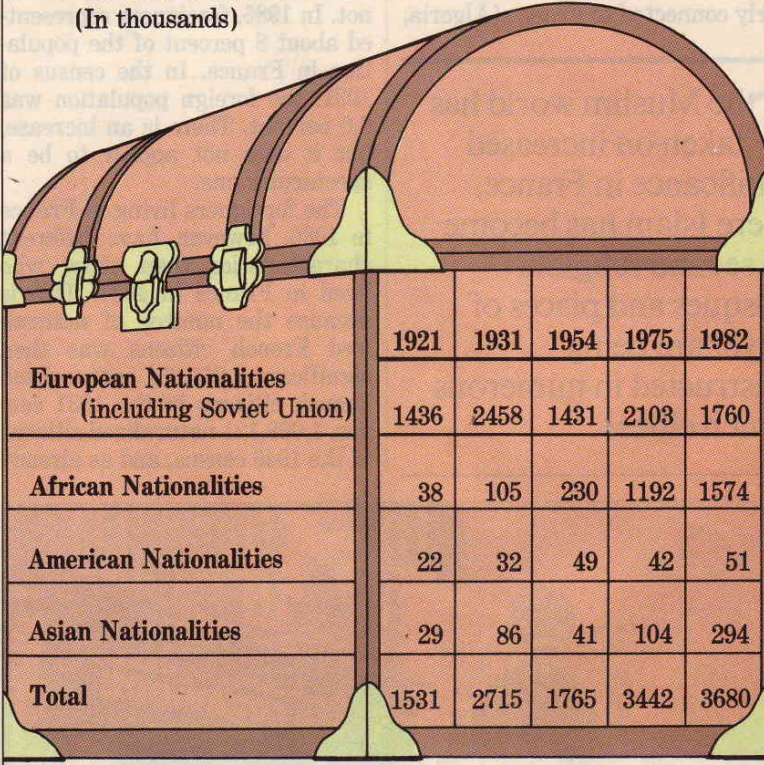
Non-French-speaking children in Paris are given an orientation to life in France.

French nationality, at the moment when the census was taken. To ascertain the exact number of immigrants (persons from foreign countries having established themselves in France), the number of French citizens who acquired French nationality (1,426,000 persons in 1982) must be added to the 3,680,000 foreigners counted in the 1982 census.

If illegal residents are included in this figure, the number of immigrants can be evaluated at 5,500,000 for 1982. Four years later, the amount was estimated at between six million and seven million for a population of 55 million inhabitants in metropolitan France. This estimate does not include French citizens living in French territories and overseas departments (Reunion, Guadelupe, and so forth) who migrated to the "hexagon" but have had French nationality for several generations.

The relationship between the total foreign population and the overall French population has limited significance. What is more important are the specifics regarding various foreign population groups. Foreign population is strongly concentrated in three geographical regions: Ile-de-France, Rhône-Alpes, and Provence-Côte d'Azur. In Paris, the foreign population portion is estimated at 20 percent. In certain neighborhoods, however, the percentage is much higher. This concentration of foreigners has been particularly accentuated by recent migrants, especially the Portuguese and Algerians, who as a general rule have concentrated in the large cities. In 1982, two aliens in three lived in a city of more than 100,000 inhabitants, in

FOREIGNERS IN FRANCE (In thousands)



	1921	1931	1954	1975	1982
European Nationalities (including Soviet Union)	1436	2458	1431	2103	1760
African Nationalities	38	105	230	1192	1574
American Nationalities	22	32	49	42	51
Asian Nationalities	29	86	41	104	294
Total	1531	2715	1765	3442	3680

ARTWORK BY EMIKO OZAKI/THE WORLD & I

comparison with two persons in five for the rest of the population.

For each of the four nationalities, the proportion of those younger than 15 years of age corresponds to a third of the total population (whereas for French citizens, the portion is only about 20 percent). Inversely, the proportion of immigrants over 65 years of age is only 1 to 2 percent, compared to 13 percent for the overall population of France.

The foreign population groups and the French nationality population group have different ferti-

ty rates. The fertility index for the French population is at 1.6 children per female. The foreign resident population in France has an index of 3.3 children per female—in other words, twice the rate of native French women. The non-European foreign population, however, has a fertility index of 5.5 children per female. Thus, in several dozen schools in Paris the number of foreign children is more than half the total number of students.

One final observation is necessary to characterize the foreign

population in France. A large portion of the foreign population is from countries that are former French colonies or countries formerly connected to France (Algeria,

Morocco, Tunisia, black Africa, and others).

Is immigration to France a recent phenomenon? Apparently not. In 1986, foreigners represented about 8 percent of the population in France. In the census of 1931, the foreign population was 6.6 percent. There is an increase, but it does not appear to be a spectacular one.

The foreigners living in France in 1986, however, have different characteristics than those who lived in France in 1931. This is because the number of naturalized French citizens was then significant: 361,231 naturalized French citizens in the 1931 census, 1,068,121 naturalized citizens in the 1946 census, and as already

stated, 1,426,000 in the 1982 census.

In 1931, nearly all of the foreigners in France came from other European nations. This is the case for 90 percent in this group. Their cultural origins were only slightly different from those of the French. They were heirs to Judeo-Christian traditions, just as the French people are.

The "melting pot" functioned very well. For example, the Polish came in large numbers after World War I to replace French manpower depleted during the war, mostly in the mines in the north and in Lorraine; they adapted easily to France. They consider themselves well integrated into French society and do not

The Muslim world has taken on increased significance in France, where Islam has become the second religion. Mosques and places of prayer are being constructed in numerous French cities.



North African Muslim immigrants praying near a mosque in Marseille. Islam is now the number two religion in France.

E. FRANCESCHI/GAMMA LIAISON

desire to return to Poland.

Most foreigners present in France in 1986 were originally from African countries, primarily from the Maghreb (more than 50 percent), as a result of a significant increase in their populations since 1960. The Muslim world has thus taken on increased significance in France, where Islam has become the second religion. Mosques and places of prayer are being constructed in numerous French cities.

The presence of these new immigrants from the Muslim world presents various problems:

- Many among them do not know the French language—a fact that creates communication difficulties.

- The French legal system is based upon secular law and the principle of separation of church and state. The major interpretations of the Koran establish Islam as a state religion, posing a problem of coexistence between French civil law and the sometimes contradictory sharia, Islamic law. The role that the mosque plays in the city is not comparable to that of a church. The church is essentially a place of prayer. The mosque is a place of prayer as well as a meeting place for educational and cultural purposes that guides the social life of its population.

The first immigrants from the Islamic culture had the desire to respect and adhere to the laws of French democracy, while at the same time conserving their Muslim traditions. Today, a phenomenon of rejection, with children of immigrants refusing to respect the laws of the country they are living in, can sometimes be observed.

Before describing scenarios for the future, reasons for immigration to France should be reiterated.

Because of its particular demographic history, especially its precocious Malthusianism, resulting in manpower shortages in various economic sectors, France became a country of immigration from the nineteenth century on.

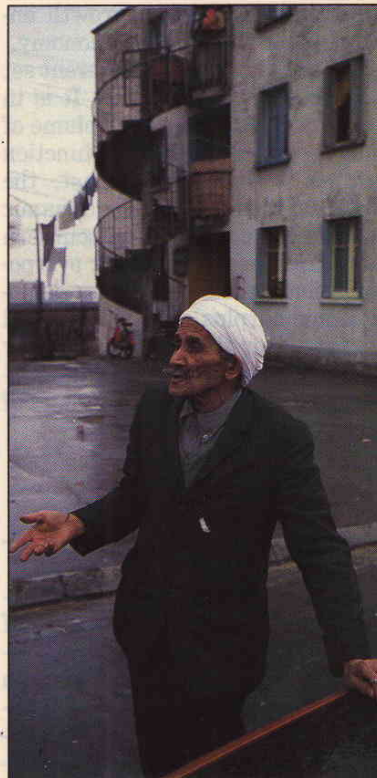
Present and future concerns

This tendency took on larger dimensions immediately following World War II to make up for war losses of the young adult male population. The decrease in the birthrate in the years 1930–1945, and therefore a slackening of the flow of potential entrants into the work force during the period 1946–1964, and the exceptionally high level of economic growth engendered manpower needs that could only be satisfied by international immigration. The postwar replenishment of sectors in the work force and the sudden decrease in economic activity exhausted these needs. Governmental measures were taken from 1974 on to limit the entrance into France of new foreign workers. As was demonstrated by the last population census, a definite current of immigration continued nonetheless after 1975. Three causes are behind this positive balance:

- Immigration of families (within groups permitted by law).

- Political agitation in territories historically linked to France (the arrival of political refugees, from Indochina in particular).

- “Clandestine” immigration (the regularization program undertaken by the socialist govern-



The Arab quarter, Place d'Aix, in Marseille. Many of its inhabitants do not speak French.

ment helped clarify figures in this category).

If through quantitative analysis an attempt is made to project the future evolution of immigration in France, a double contradiction results.

Recourse to foreign immigration on short- and medium-term bases should be limited to specific sectors, because of several diverse factors: the continuous flow of sufficiently large numbers into the work force, the rise of professional activity levels for women, the existence of a large unemployment sector, modernization of production equipment, and the

probability of a slow growth ensemble for the national economy.

In the long term, a different set of problems is presented. It is in no way certain that the volume of migratory currents is a function of, as it was in the past, the internal demo-economic dynamic within the country. The southern countries, because of their overpopulation problem (strong demographic surplus), will be tempted to take over the vacancies left by the northern countries in the process of demographic aging of their populations.

Three scenarios

In qualitative terms, three approaches are possible:

- There is the approach as experienced by France at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century. This is the way of assimilation. While conserving certain cultural traditions, immigrant populations in France adhered without difficulty to French identity and its language, which represented, as Fernand Braudel remarked, "80 percent of France."

It must be remembered, however, that this assimilation essentially concerned populations impregnated with European culture and heir to the Judeo-Christian tradition. This assimilation perfected itself during the postwar period of renewal. Demographic rejuvenation and the economic upsurge combined to facilitate bonds within the second generation. A family policy, opening the way to the rejuvenation of European population groups, is therefore essential for the minimization of immigration problems. The demographic imbalance found in the

classrooms is evidence of this problem. A primary handicap and source of segregation among foreign children is an accumulated educational retardation, particularly in French language skills.

One of the surest indicators of the assimilation process is that of mixed marriages. The Muslim religion, however, forbids Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims. Even if men confer the Muslim religion upon their spouses through marriage, the inverse is not permitted. For this reason, Muslim women cannot, in principle, marry non-Muslims. This is obviously a powerful restraint, one proportional to the secularization, or religiosity, of French Muslims and also to the future of Islam. In other words, this restraint will depend especially upon whether or not there is an erosion or a resurgence of religious fundamentalism in the years to come.

- In addition to assimilation—a process that is certain to secure freedoms for the future—another possible option is that of unity within diversity. This option—in which population groups with a wealth of different cultural heritages coexist, like the Armenian, Jewish, or Lebanese communities—is already found in France. Each of these communities has its own bonds of solidarity, rules, and beliefs, but each accepts a common universality beyond its own individual tradition—those values inherent in French society that encourage unity—without which diversity could lead to conflict between communities and civil disorder. These communities accept in particular the laws of the secularized government without questioning

its right to exist.

The Jewish community in France, for example, does not demand application of Hebraic law in the context of French civil law. Each person recognizes that first of all he owes his existence and his opportunity to live according to his own cultural specificities to values accepted by all within the nation.

- If there is neither assimilation nor unity within diversity, there is a great risk for confrontation between cultures. It is sufficient to note the example of Lebanon. A scenario of hypothetical conflicts between communities cannot be ignored as a possibility for Europe. The probability of this happening can only intensify if the imbalance between the European sector of the population and the immigrant population groups becomes greater because of demographic impoverishment and high demographic growth rates, respectively.

Political policy in Europe should therefore develop in a two-fold, complementary direction: (1) toward a realistic immigration policy that helps immigrants and their descendants enter Europe; and (2) toward a family policy that promotes the elimination of demographic decline and contributes to the diffusion, through education, of a civic spirit with particular care to the transmission of the values essential to European identity. ■

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