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Patrick Weil, *Liberté, Égalité, Discriminations: L'«Identité Nationale» au regard de l'histoire*. Paris: Grasset, 2008. 208 pp. 17.50€ (pb). ISBN-10: 2246646812.

Review by Richard Derderian, California Lutheran University.

This latest publication by French political scientist and immigration policy expert Patrick Weil delves into issues of central concern to the French present, Weil examines the history of French immigration policy, the repercussions of official forms of discrimination, and how the state has deployed its legislative authority to address past injustices.

In the first of the three chapters, which comprises half the book, Weil takes issue with Hervé Le Bras' charge that French immigration policies are the product of a history of racist thinking stretching back to the 1930s. The men who crafted France's first comprehensive immigration policy in 1945 were marked by racial, ethnic, and anti-Semitic thinking. However, if we look more closely at their writings and official correspondence, issues ranging from the need to reverse France's long demographic decline to the physical health and moral well-being of potential immigrants were of far greater importance. Only the demographer and immigration specialist George Mauco remained entrenched in racist convictions about a hierarchy of ethnic and racially defined populations—convictions that helped lend legitimacy to the xenophobic and anti-Semitic policies of the Vichy regime.

Appointed by de Gaulle to head a special committee to formulate immigration legislation, Mauco found himself in a strategic position at the war's end. He used his influence to promote an ethnically selective immigration policy and tight controls on refugees. Mauco, however, was only one voice among many. His colleagues—Alexandre Parodi, Alfred Sauvy, and Pierre Tissier—did not share his belief that immigrants were locked into fixed and unchanging group identities. They were far more confident about the ability of immigrants as individuals to assimilate into French society. For these men, relegating refugees to special internment camps, as Mauco proposed, evoked the worst abuses of the recent Vichy past. They were generally bolstered in their convictions by high ranking jurists in the Council of State like René Cassin. Cassin, an early participant in the Resistance, was instrumental both in striking ethnic criteria from the 1945 immigration legislation and removing restrictive measures for refugees and asylum seekers.

Weil asserts that France was not alone in adopting liberal immigration policies and more generous rights and protections for refugees in 1945. In the wake of the crimes of Nazi Germany and the creation of new international norms, all Western democracies were moving away from older policies based on discredited ethnic and racial thinking. If France was unique, it was that these changes happened earlier than in other countries such as the United States, where ethnic quotas remained in place until the mid-1960s.

On a less flattering note, Weil contends that France may also be unique in that early on officials began to question and challenge these policy changes. By the 1970s French policy makers reverted to an older ethnically influenced skepticism about the prospects for assimilating North African immigrants and their children. During the presidency of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the

French government enacted measures to restrict family reunification and to encourage the voluntary repatriation of North Africans in France. By the end of the 1970s, plans were in place for the involuntary removal of several hundred thousand North Africans. It was once again the Council of State that thwarted discriminatory policies and upheld what Weil regards as core egalitarian Republican values. Weil is careful to point out that these policies were inspired and directed by President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. In no way did these objectives reflect the desires and aspirations of most officials, who generally looked back on this period with shame and embarrassment.

Chapter two examines the history and repercussions of four cases of discriminatory citizenship policies. In some cases these policies left no trace whereas in others they continue to resonate well into the present. First, from 1803 to 1927, hundreds of thousands of French women who married foreigners were stripped of their citizenship. Denationalized women were forced out of civil service jobs, subjected to the laws of their husbands' country, and even obligated to leave France if their spouse decided to return home. Second, while Algerian Jews were granted French citizenship with the Crémieux decree in 1870, only 7,000 Algerian natives received French citizenship in the period from 1865 to 1962. In some cases even those Algerians who converted to Catholicism remained bound to a separate and unequal legal status known as the Native Code. Third, between 1927 and 1984, naturalized French citizens had to wait ten years before being eligible to run for elected offices. Further laws, decrees, and ordinances passed between 1934 and 1952 barred naturalized citizens from working as lawyers, accepting appointments to public posts, and denied the right to vote for periods ranging from five to ten years. Fourth, targeting Jewish citizens in Algeria and France, the Vichy regime repealed the Crémieux decree and reviewed tens of thousands of naturalization cases stretching back to the 1927 naturalization law, which reduced the waiting period for French citizenship from ten to three years. As a result, over 110,000 Algerian Jews were stripped of their citizenship while some 7,000 Jews naturalized in France lost their citizenship.

In the case of discriminatory policies towards women and restrictions placed on naturalized citizens, Weil argues that the trauma experienced either faded from collective memory or had no lasting consequences. The deplorable treatment of women who married foreigners was largely overshadowed by the hard fought and eventually successful suffrage movement. The limited rights of recently naturalized citizens were still an improvement over their earlier condition. Moreover, the eventual benefits of full citizenship helped diminish the impact of past injustices. Only in the case of Jews and Algerians do we see the long term psychological damage caused by official forms of discrimination.

If France has moved from repressing to obsessing about the Vichy past, as Henri Rousso postulates in *The Vichy Syndrome*, Weil argues that one way to understand the current obsession is through the Freudian idea of screen memories. The outpouring of work on Vichy's role in the Holocaust which began in the 1970s, represented a screen for the true source Jewish anxiety—de Gaulle's shockingly anti-Semitic characterization of the Jewish people voiced in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War. Triggering the still unhealed wounds of the past, France's Jewish community fixated on the Vichy regime because of the impossibility of leveling charges at de Gaulle—the leader of the forces of Free France and hero of the liberation from Nazi Germany.

The memory trigger that evoked a still troubling past for France's Algerian community was the decision to reform French naturalization policies in 1993. No longer would citizenship be automatically granted to those born in France. Instead, those desiring naturalization would have to express this desire by making a formal administrative request. The measure did not directly affect most Algerians born in France. This was because their parents were born in Algeria when it was considered an extension of France giving their children the double and

automatic birthright to French citizenship. Nevertheless, the measure did awaken memories of a long and still unresolved history of discriminatory citizenship policies in French Algeria. Without the equivalent of a Vichy regime to release pent up sentiments of anger, Weil suggests that Algerian youth seek refuge in a mythical Algeria—as seen in the public expression of support for the Algerian national team during the 2001 France-Algeria soccer match. Weil contends that only through more research into and instruction about the traumatic events in the national past will it be possible to achieve a greater degree of mutual understanding, sensitivity, and acceptance.

The third and final chapter features the recent uproar by many of France's leading historians in response to government efforts to legislate interpretations of the past. From the criminalization of Holocaust deniers (1990 Gayssot law) to the commemoration of the abolition of slavery (2001 Taubira law), many historians argue that these memorial laws run the risk of distorting the past by applying terms and perspectives from the present—such as the Taubira law's labeling of slavery as a crime against humanity. Moreover, prominent historians such as Pierre Nora, argue that memorial laws represent a dangerous trend on the part of victimized groups seeking to transform narrow and often self serving memories into officially sanctioned history.

Rather than feeling threatened by memorial laws, Weil sees them as being perfectly in keeping with Republican traditions. From the banning of parliamentary discussion of a return to monarchy to the enactment of Bastille Day as a national holiday, Republican governments have long used interdictions and commemorations to foster shared values and a sense of unity—especially during divisive periods. If recent memorial laws represent any kind of historical departure, Weil posits that it is the emphasis now being placed on the need to recognize the fundamental equality of all citizens.

Written in a clear and engaging style, *Liberté, Égalité, Discriminations* is an enlightening and engrossing volume for francophone readers interested in learning more about French immigration policy, the repercussions of official discrimination, and recent memorial laws. Weil offers a useful counterpoint to studies that stress the continuity of racist thinking in French immigration policy. This reader applauds Weil's call for more research into the traumatic episodes of the national past as a means of promoting healing and reconciliation in the present.

Only the celebratory tone of the study left this reader with a sense of unease. Time and again, Weil stresses how the French Republic, despite all its flaws and shortcomings, has remained true to its core egalitarian values. Indeed, in both his introduction and annexes, Weil highlights a Pew Research Center poll comparing the outlook of Muslims in fifteen Western democracies to underscore how Muslim minorities are more inclined to identify with France precisely because of its commitment to equal treatment under the law regardless of one's origins. In fairness, Weil is quick to point out that in all countries there is a divide between the letter of the law and the persistence of discriminatory policies. While Weil may be justified in his enthusiasm for the strength of France's egalitarian ideals, we should be careful not to overlook the history of neglect, disrespect, and non-recognition experienced by communities such as Algerians in France.

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