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Anne-Sophie Bruno, *Les chemins de la mobilité: Migrants de Tunisie et marché du travail parisien depuis 1956*. Paris: Editions de l'École des hautes études en sciences, 2010. 287 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, index. 23€ (cl). ISBN 978-2-7132-2263-4; ISSN 1962-7505.

Review by Tyler Stovall, University of California, Berkeley.

The historiography of immigration to France has come a long way since Gérard Noiriel first published his pathbreaking *Le creuset français* in 1988.[1] Currently there exists a wealth of studies, by both French and foreign historians, on the contributions of outsiders to French history. Moreover, the recent controversies over the National Center for Immigration History underscore the importance of this subject far beyond the bounds of academe.[2] Similarly, French colonial history has enjoyed a renaissance recently, inspiring both a wave of monographs and broader reconceptualizations of the place occupied by the empire in French history as a whole.[3] Both subjects have gradually moved from the margins to the center of historiographical discourse and practice in France.

In her important new study of Tunisian immigration after 1956, Anne-Sophie Bruno explores the relationship between these two historiographies, and the significance of this relationship for the history of contemporary France. Bruno is particularly interested in the *trentes glorieuses*, the postwar boom years that not only fundamentally reshaped France's economy and society, but also witnessed decolonization and the birth of a new postcolonial order. Bruno is by no means the first scholar to address the intriguing relationship between postwar domestic prosperity and the end of formal empire. She approaches this question with a detailed analysis of immigration from one particular colony, Tunisia, in the aftermath of independence. In doing so, she provides a careful and convincing look at not only how Tunisian immigrant workers fit into French industry, but also at the connections between colonial society in Tunisia and postcolonial society in France.

As Bruno makes clear, Tunisia does not fit any simple characterizations of French colonialism. A protectorate rather than a formal colony, Tunisia was notable for the diversity of its population. Mostly Muslim, colonial Tunisia also contained substantial French (both born in France and naturalized), "European" (mostly Italian), and Jewish populations. Under the protectorate, not just culture and religion, but also social and legal categories distinguished these groups from each other. With the onset of independence, they also emigrated in different numbers and at different times. Between 1955 and 1957, for example, most French citizens left Tunisia in reaction to independence. The early 1960s, marked especially by the new Tunisian state's nationalization of agricultural land, saw an increase in the departures of Tunisian Muslims as well as of those Bruno terms "colonial intermediaries," namely Italians and Jews. This emigration intensified in the late 1960s, marked notably by the massive departure of Tunisian Jews in the aftermath of The Six Day War of 1967. With the exception of those Jews who opted for a new life in Israel, virtually all of these emigrants settled in France.

In discussing this migration, Bruno argues that the position of migrants in colonial Tunisian society had a major impact in determining the shape of their new lives in France, and did so in

ways that reinforced the differences between population groups. For example, many of the French who left Tunisia were state employees, a fact which largely ensured continuity of employment in the French administration. Yet even those who worked in the private sector were generally able to find similar positions in France. Throughout her study, Bruno pays close attention to gender differences and notes that this continuity is less marked for women who had left the job market for family reasons before their departure from Tunisia. In contrast, Tunisian Muslims were much more likely to work in new types of jobs in France, such as construction, in large part because they had lived on the margins of Tunisia's colonial economy, working mostly in agriculture, and thus had fewer opportunities for continuous employment. According to Bruno, therefore, the segmentation of the colonial labor market in Tunisia played a central role in creating a segmented postcolonial labor market in France.

In evaluating the lives of Tunisian immigrants in France, Bruno places heavy emphasis on the structure of the labor markets that received them. *Les chemins de la mobilité* grounds itself in sociological theories of dual and segmented labor markets, which grapple with the existence of internal divisions among working-class populations in modern industry. A central thesis of the book is that there were three types of labor markets that employed Tunisian immigrants after 1956, which she labels the primary market, the secondary market, and the intermediary market. The primary market consists of enterprises with more than fifty employees in "stable" industries like transportation, electrical and mechanical construction, banks, commerce, and public services. The secondary sector consists of enterprises with more than fifty employees in construction, textiles, and clothing. Finally, the intermediate sector consists of enterprises in all industries with less than fifty employees. Bruno's fundamental distinction exists between the first two sectors, with the intermediate sector offering the perspective of small industry. This tripartite division corresponds to another among Tunisian migrants to France, that between French men, French women, and foreigners (mostly Muslims). As Bruno consistently argues, the experience of these migrants is not uniform, but is heavily shaped by the nature of the labor market in which they find work.

The bulk of *Les chemins de la mobilité* considers how the presence of different types of Tunisians in different labor markets, to an important extent the product of the segmentation of the colonial society and economy, shapes the collective experience of immigrant labor during the *Trentes glorieuses*. Bruno approaches her subject from the perspective of a quantitative social science historian, using the technique of factorial analysis to make sense of her data. These data consist of several hundred retirement dossiers of Tunisian immigrants, organized along the lines of three different samples. Bruno supplements this quantitative data with in-depth interviews with five Tunisian immigrants who, although not chosen to fit specific population categories, do nonetheless represent the breadth and diversity of the Tunisian immigration in postwar France. She skillfully interweaves these two different types of sources, along with an extensive reading of the secondary literature on the history and sociology of immigration in France, to give us a fascinating portrait of Tunisian labor in French industry and society in the third quarter of the twentieth century.

This is a portrait that underscores the idea of a segmented labor market in French industry, one that generally relegated Tunisian Muslims to the least desirable jobs. As Bruno observes, the image of the semi-skilled immigrant worker became a stereotype of the postwar French economy, notably in the automobile industry, and many Tunisians found themselves in exactly that category. In one chapter, devoted to the question of social networks among immigrants, she describes their importance both in enabling Tunisian immigrants to find work and in perpetuating the inequalities of colonial society. She makes the interesting observation that French citizens from Tunisia had better developed and more extensive social and professional networks, yet at the same time were less likely to admit to the existence of such networks. In

another chapter, on skilling and social mobility, Bruno argues that skill levels reflected less the training or capabilities of the individual worker and more the structure of the labor market in which she or he worked. She details the existence of a “glass ceiling” that limited the opportunities for professional advancement for both Muslims and French women, restricting their abilities to rise through the ranks at their workplaces. She also shows how this varied between different labor markets: in the primary sector employee loyalty and stability was key to advancement, whereas the secondary sector was more likely to reward those who moved from job to job.

The final section of *Les chemins de la mobilité* analyzes the impact of the 1970s economic crisis on Tunisian labor. Here again Bruno finds ample evidence of labor market segmentation. In general, foreign workers in France were most heavily affected by the downturn. In construction, immigrants accounted for almost 100,000 out of 113,000 job losses between 1973 and 1976. However, paradoxically, the percentage of immigrant workers unemployed barely rose at all. According to Bruno, two primary factors explain this conundrum. First, many Tunisian immigrants left France, either voluntarily or otherwise. One third of Tunisians (one half in the secondary sector) returned home between 1973 and 1978. Second, many Tunisians shifted to self-employment, so that the figure of the semi-skilled immigrant worker during the 1960s gave way to that of the immigrant neighborhood grocer after the early 1970s. Bruno gives a fascinating portrait of the process required to obtain a small business license in France, a process that heavily favored men over women, as well as emphasized the importance of “assimilation to the norms of French civilization” (p.205). Here again, colonial legacies remained important in the construction of a postcolonial society.

*Les chemins de la mobilité* is a sophisticated, well-crafted study of the history of postcolonial labor. The approach has both many strengths and a few weaknesses. Bruno gives a very detailed and generally convincing analysis of the reasons for labor market segmentation and inequality in France after the end of formal empire. She shows how the weight of the colonial past shaped the postcolonial present on many levels, both macro and micro. In particular, Bruno does a fine job of interweaving the very personal narratives of her respondents with her more quantitative data. However, those looking for an exploration of the social and cultural lives of Tunisian immigrants may not find what they are looking for here. The author devotes relatively little attention to such questions, instead focusing on issues of labor market structure. Nor does she deal with the hot button issues of racial difference and racism. She does note the existence of discrimination, but perhaps could go further in exploring how racial attitudes were both a product of the colonial encounter and how they helped structure France’s labor market along segmented lines. Moreover, although Bruno’s study is set in Paris, it largely ignores urban history and how questions of immigration shaped and reshaped the life of the city and its suburbs. Given the ways in which immigration has been linked with the *banlieue* in recent years, this would be worth exploring in more depth.

These are sins of omission rather than commission, of course. The fact remains that Anne-Sophie Bruno has written a fine study of immigrant labor in the France of the *Trentes glorieuses*. Historians interested in questions of labor, immigration, and postcolonialism will find much of interest in this book, and no specialist in this period can ignore Bruno’s research or her arguments. She gives us a portrait of immigrant labor both unusual and, for anyone who has ever walked by a construction site in Paris or its suburbs, very familiar.

## NOTES

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[1] Gérard Noiriel, *Creuset français. Histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

[2] Michael Kimmelman, "Ready or Not, France Opens Museum on Immigration," *New York Times*, October 17, 2007; Robert Zaretsky, "What does it mean to be French?" *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 2010.

[3] For a recent overview, see Kate Marsh and Nicola Frith, eds., *France's lost empires: fragmentation, nostalgia, and la fracture coloniale* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011).

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