

H-France Review Vol. 4 (July 2004), No. 74

Peter Sahlins, *Unnaturally French: Foreign Citizens in the Old Regime and After*. Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 2004. xiv + 454 pp. Maps, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$67.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8014-4142-0; \$27.50 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-8014-8839-7.

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What meaning did "citizenship" have under the old regime? Convinced that French jurists had completely misconstrued the term, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (in)famously argued that true "citizenship" was incompatible with the royal monopoly of sovereign power and that even to speak of it was an act of *lèse-majesté*.^[1] In the wake of 1789, historians have been inclined to agree with Rousseau, for how could one be a "citizen" in a polity that excluded the people from political decision-making and divided them into particularistic groups differentiated by corporate privilege? On this view, "citizens" in the old regime were mere "subjects." During the last decade, however, as historians have re-examined the origins of nationalism, they have also taken another look at "citizenship," with the result that it is now possible to perceive the presence of "citizens" without sovereignty and without common rights before 1789.^[2] Yet the question remains unresolved: how much institutional flesh adhered to this notion during the old regime?

A great deal, argues Peter Sahlins in the most thorough analysis of the problem to date. For Sahlins, "citizenship" was not rendered meaningless by the development of absolutism; rather, it was transformed from a set of political rights held by residents of a locality into the national legal status of subjects over whom the king had jurisdiction. In constructing the "absolute sovereign," Sahlins argues, royal jurists created as its counterpart what he calls "the absolute citizen," defined by Jean Bodin as "a free subject depending on the sovereignty of an Other" (p. 21). Within this conception, "citizenship" did not confer rights or even confirm pre-existing ones, for its essence lay in "the gratitude and obedience of the free subject towards his sovereign prince" (p. 22). Consequently, "citizenship" was broadly inclusive, since men, women, and children of all estates could be equally obedient. This notion came into its own by the end of the sixteenth century, Sahlins argues, even if it did not strip the term "citizen" of all its classical and medieval connotations. Possibly for this reason, surrogate terms like *naturel français* were favored over *citoyen* until the later eighteenth century.

Although the reconfiguration of citizenship bore directly on the relationship between subject and sovereign, Sahlins focuses most intensively, as his title indicates, on the implications of the new citizenship for what it meant to be and to become French. Putting a fresh twist on the commonplace idea that national identity is constructed "against" those of other nations, Sahlins shows how citizenship was defined in opposition to the legal status of aliens living under the jurisdiction of the king. Aliens were most notably subject to the *droit d'aubaine*, an imposition of late medieval origin that, among other liabilities, deprived foreigners of the right to deed property to designated heirs. In an age when so much depended upon the building of patrimony, the *droit d'aubaine* could place a significant burden on those on whom it was imposed, even if it also true, as Sahlins might have reminded his readers, that a complex of laws, varying from province to province and estate to estate, also restricted citizens in the deeding of their property to a lesser degree.

To the monarchy, the *droit d'aubaine* had relatively little fiscal importance; as Sahlins shows, it never yielded much revenue. But it had broad political significance for several reasons. First, the *droit d'aubaine* invested the king with an authority that distinguished him from other contemporary European sovereigns, for although it was also levied elsewhere, only in France was it monopolized by the crown and applied so rigorously. Second, the ability to impose the *droit d'aubaine* in the face of residual local resistance served as a demonstration of the strength and geographical reach of the royal administration. Third, the *droit d'aubaine* enhanced the king's authority to adjudicate the legal status of people under his jurisdiction, for in assessing the *droit d'aubaine*, the crown was empowered not only to arbitrate rank and privilege, but also to make clear who was and who was not a French national. To be sure, just as the king was subject to the *tyrannie d'usage* as regarded linguistic practice, even he could not dispel the clouds of distrust that often surrounded foreigners he had naturalized, especially in periods of acute xenophobia. When one

jurist asserted during the 1570s that "in the heart of the foreign-born ... there is a suspicion of some hidden poison, dare I say treason," he no doubt expressed a prevailing sentiment (p. 69). But by the next century, when citizenship had been transformed from a political into a legal status, enough daylight had emerged between citizenship and national culture to make the monarchy's discretionary authority in determining the status of aliens unchallengeable as a juridical matter.

The largest part of this book is devoted to an analysis of the naturalization process based on a necessarily incomplete, but still substantial database of naturalization cases the author has gleaned from the archives. Only some of the major conclusions drawn from these cases can be mentioned here. First, Sahlins shows, the process of naturalization became bureaucratically routinized, such that it was usually handled without direct input by the king or his councilors. Second, naturalization did not come cheap. By the middle of the eighteenth century, a letter of naturalization could cost more than 600 *livres*, well beyond the means of common folk. Third, not surprisingly in light of the cost, naturalization was infrequent. Sahlins has located only 6,263 cases of naturalization in the period 1660-1789, and the true number was probably not much higher. Less than fifty per year was surely a modest number, given that the French population stood at about 28,000,000 by 1789; indeed, the number of ennoblements during the last decades of the old regime was more than twice that of naturalizations.[3] Fourth, citizenship could be granted for reasons of merit and service and was often requested on these grounds. But many petitioners, including a substantial number of clergy, openly expressed their venal reasons for applying for citizenship--e.g. they wanted to purchase an office or receive a benefice--and such motives were probably the primary ones driving the majority of petitioners to undertake this long and costly process. Citizenship was thus only incidentally a matter of nationalist sentiment. Finally, nearly half of all naturalized citizens came from northern Europe, including Britain, about a third from southern Europe, and about a sixth from central Europe.

In the last section of this book, Sahlins deals with the citizenship "revolution" of the eighteenth century. Traversing ground that has become familiar from the work of Keith Baker, Jeffrey Merrick, David Bell, Charlotte Wells and other recent historians, he notes how fresh political meaning was assigned to the "citizen," who was now conceived as an active participant in the public sphere with natural rights. Sahlins's most important contribution to the study of this development is his investigation of the decline of the *droit d'aubaine*, which gradually disappeared by 1789 as a result of reciprocal treaties negotiated by the monarchy with foreign governments. The main reason for its suppression appears to be a growing recognition among economic reformers associated with the Enlightenment that the *droit d'aubaine* retarded commercial enterprise at a time when the government was trying to restructure and re-energize the economy as a means to increase tax yields. Whatever its de facto economic benefits, Sahlins argues that the suppression of the *droit d'aubaine* constituted a narrowing of the monarchy's de jure legitimacy. For although there was little kinship between the language of the new citizenship and the discourse surrounding the elimination of the *droit d'aubaine*, this imposition had become such an acknowledged mark of the king's sovereignty that it could not be surrendered without eroding royal authority and by extension legitimating the sphere of an autonomous "civil society." However, the disappearance of the *droit d'aubaine* did not mean that foreigners were any more warmly received in France than before, for what they gained from escaping its liabilities, they lost in the form of more oppressive police surveillance of aliens at the end of the old regime.

By 1789, Sahlins contends, a fully gestated post-"absolute citizen" had yet to emerge, which surely helps to explain why citizenship became a locus of bitter contestation during French Revolution and why attitudes toward foreigners fluctuated so widely at this time. In the early 1790s, even as women and the unpropertied were disenfranchised, liberalization of requirements for citizenship made it available to those aliens who embraced revolutionary principles. This development Sahlins attributes not simply to a burst of revolutionary xenophilia most enthusiastically advocated by Anacharsis Cloots, but also to the growing politicization of citizenship already evident in the pre-revolutionary philosophy of the Enlightenment. However, liberalization was quickly followed by a return to state oppression recalling the tighter policing of aliens in the late old regime, for under the Terror the foreigner was less likely to appear as a hapless victim of old regime tyranny than as a vicious counter-revolutionary implicated in the *conspiration de l'étranger*. From 1793 onwards, residency requirements for citizenship became more stringent, and under Bonaparte even the *droit d'aubaine* was restored. Did a return to authoritarian government mean that France had come full circle in terms of citizenship? No, Sahlins concludes, for the new *droit d'aubaine* was not construed as a mark of sovereignty, but simply as a civil limitation, and in any case it was abolished definitively four years into the Second Restoration, that is, in 1819. The modern citizen had, indeed, come into his/her own.

There can be no doubt that this is a book of major significance. To be sure, Sahlins builds on the work of other historians, and in its broad outlines the story he tells--depoliticization of citizenship under absolutism and politicization during the Enlightenment--is a familiar one. Nevertheless, wide in scope, thoroughly researched, brilliantly argued, and lucidly written, this work tells the story better than it has ever been told before and constitutes the most substantial integral history of early modern French naturalization and citizenship to date. Perhaps its most important contribution is to demonstrate with unprecedented insight how closely citizenship was bound up with the definition and history of royal sovereignty. This perspective allows the author to make a number of important points. Among them, it enables Sahlins to demonstrate how the politicization of citizenship during the late old regime was not simply rooted in an assault upon absolutism launched from without--as it is usually presented--but was also unwittingly fostered by the monarchy when, for reasons of economy and on its own initiative, it negotiated the *droit d'aubaine* out of existence.[4] Internal contradictions, it suggests, were as critical to the collapse of political authority under the old regime as Bastille-like stormings. In addition, Sahlins's close study of the negotiations behind and the results of the naturalization process will make this book of great interest to historians of French diplomatic and cultural relations with other nations during the early modern period; for them in particular, this book will be an indispensable resource.

Like all significant studies, this one invites further research into the general issues it raises. First, it makes evident the need for more work on the history of immigration during the old regime; the history of naturalization offered by Sahlins is surely a critical part of that history, but it is only a part. Second, Sahlins's work calls for a fuller examination of the interface between claims to power and resources made on the basis of citizenship and those made on other grounds. Sahlins may be fully justified in eliciting from the thicket of old regime jurisprudence a discourse of "absolute citizenship" that entailed an equality of political obligation in the form of obedience due the sovereign. But it is evident that the institutional logic of the old regime often required the king, when he negotiated the *terms* of that obedience, to speak a different language, one rooted in a highly contested history of particularistic privilege and royal concessions. Even after this book, it remains unclear how these discourses intersected, especially once terms like "nation," "patriot," and "public" filtered into political speech. Third, there remains a lot of work to be done on the processes whereby the ethic of modern citizenship took root in the consciousness of ordinary people during the late eighteenth century. David Bien has made some intriguing suggestions in this regard, but it remains somewhat mysterious how concepts of citizenship in a republican mold could so quickly and so profoundly inform the thinking of vast numbers of French people, the *sans-culottes* in particular, upon the collapse of the old regime in 1789.[5] What is safe to say is that historians who make progress on all these fronts will owe a substantial debt to Peter Sahlins's superb book.

NOTES

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, bk. I, chap. 6.

[2] The phrase "citizens without sovereignty" comes from Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). For a perceptive review of some of the recent literature, see Gail Bossenga, "Rights and Citizens in the Old Regime," *French Historical Studies* 20 (1997), 217-43.

[3] William Doyle, *Venality: The Sale of Offices in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 163-64.

[4] For more deliberate efforts of the monarchy to enlist the patriotism of French citizens on its own behalf, see Edmond Dziembowski, *Un Nouveau patriotisme français, 1750-1770: La France face à la puissance anglaise à l'époque de la guerre de Sept Ans* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998); David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), chaps. 3 and 4.

[5] David D. Bien, "Old Regime Origins of Democratic Liberty," in Dale Van Kley, ed., *The French Idea of Freedom: The Old Regime and the Declaration of Rights of 1789* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 23-71.

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ISSN 1553-9172