

# H-France Review

Volume 8

2008

*H-France Review* Vol. 8 (February 2008), No. 26

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ISSN 1553-9172

H-France Review Vol. 8 (March 2008), No. 26

Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918-1940*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. xv + 361pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-8047-5582-5 (cl). \$24.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-8047-5722-5 (pb).

Review by Joan W. Scott, Institute for Advanced Study.

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The image of the French republic, one and indivisible, a nation with none of the racial and ethnic divisions that trouble so many other democracies, has been challenged severely in recent years. These challenges have been both political and intellectual. The protests of so-called immigrant youth in the banlieues in 2005 and again in 2007, burning cars and hurling stones and invectives at police, have only been the latest in a long series of assaults on the complacent universalism that still characterizes so much republican rhetoric. French scholars and students of French history have offered their critiques as well, beginning (if one can actually specify such a thing) with Gerard Noiriel's *Le Creuset français* in 1988, on the eve of the bicentennial of the French Revolution. Noiriel documented a long history of immigration, contesting the notion of a pure lineage reaching back to the Gauls, and he focused attention on the ways in which cultural assimilation had masked the disparate origins of the French population. His work was followed by a myriad of studies of immigration which, in more recent years, have added race and racism to the mix. The question of how immigrants are welcomed and what it takes for them to become fully French has become one of the key issues of the moment.

Mary Lewis' *The Boundaries of the Republic* joins the conversation. From one perspective, it is a classic social history of the articulation and implementation of immigration policy between the two world wars. Because she is interested in looking at concrete, lived experience, Lewis focuses on two cities, Lyon and Marseille. She shows, with extensive documentation, that there was an important difference between national policy declarations and their local enforcement, and indeed, that there were differences between localities as well. One of her major claims for the book is that it provides an alternative to "top-down" (that is state-centered) approaches to immigration history. "Regulations developed by central state authorities to manage France's immigrant populations were altered in the face of local realities that differed considerably from expectations. As a result, through improvisation and negotiation, local authorities and immigrants established boundaries of inclusion and exclusion along quite different lines than those intended by state policy. Over time, this cycle of confrontation and accommodation led to policy changes at the center" (p. 14).

Lewis wants to further complicate this picture by examining the ways different economic and political realities in the two large cities influenced the behavior of local administrators. She also introduces evidence to show that individual personalities, both of administrators and individual immigrants, influenced the ways in which exclusion and inclusion operated. Marseille depended on a transient and cheap labor force (to work at the docks and to transform imported raw materials into commodities for export), while Lyon's "second industrialization" required a more stable labor force in its automobile, machine and chemical factories. Moreover, in each city, different municipal functionaries were charged with regulating migrants to the city and with establishing distinctions between transients (migrants)

and those who became permanent residents (immigrants). Local conflicts between police inspectors and municipal officials could also affect how national policy was implemented. Within the broad parameters of labor force needs and fluctuating economic pressures, the granting of rights to newcomers was a contingent matter. "Even the most exclusionary decrees often engendered difference in implementation. Indeed, new opportunities for inclusion emerged from attempts made to exclude migrants. And, in the first months of the Second World War, some migrants were slated for both inclusion and exclusion" (p. 246).

Local records enable Lewis to offer exemplary anecdotes, both of how arbitrary enforcement could be and how various. It also lets her examine individual immigrants, some successful and some not. Sometimes success depended on how an immigrant's life situation corresponded to perceived local or national needs (natalist policies, for example, made it easier for large families to win residency rights, even if the father's employment was unstable, while skilled single men might have a harder time); sometimes it was just a matter of finding the right argument or the right patronage. As Lewis argued, "[t]he boundaries of citizenship depended not only on how officials viewed migrants but also on how migrants related to authorities and what resources they brought to bear on those relationships" (p. 254).

There were, to be sure, patterns. Despite variations in Lyon and Marseille, in both cities North Africans were treated differently from other immigrants, especially those from countries which had labor contract agreements or other treaties with France. The situation of colonial subjects was more vulnerable even than that of refugees (who didn't have national treaty status to rely on). When they were needed as supplementary labor, or as military recruits as the nation prepared for another war in the 1930's, the North Africans were admitted and granted some rights to assistance; when their usefulness ended, these rights expired and they were sent home. "North Africans' limited access to rights was produced not so much by a lack of legal protection as it was by a surfeit of legal impediments that their status as colonized persons placed upon them. They did not suffer from statelessness but rather from the interest that the French state had in maintaining hegemony over the territories from which they came" (p. 187). It was in the context of this larger preoccupation, that officials in Lyon and Marseille enacted their different adaptations.

The North African case raises questions about the methodology of the book and its line of argument. If there was a consistent attitude towards North Africans, then how significant are the local economic conditions or the variations in policing? How deep, in other words, do these local differences run? What are the commonalities they may share?

If this book is classic social history in one sense, in another sense, it departs from the community and local studies of the 1970's and 80's. Those earlier studies sought to see how large scale processes of change (capitalism, industrialization, urbanization) were experienced locally and what sorts of political responses they engendered. The point was to generate not only insight into the sources of political action, but to challenge and/or contribute to the theorizing of the action. *The Boundaries of the Republic* lacks that theorizing impulse. Indeed, its major argument is, if anything, anti-theoretical. Historical contingency is the answer to questions about how national boundaries are established and whether equality for newly arrived strangers can or cannot be assured.

Lewis has written diversity and difference into the history of the French nation and she has shown how prevalent it was, how preoccupied with its management were politicians at all levels. She has shown as well how variable was the enforcement of legal and social norms, how dependent the enforcement was on contingent factors. But in her insistence on local implementation and on the impact of "contingent relationships" on the expansion and contraction of migrants' rights, she neglects questions that her own material raises. Were there national policies that prevailed despite local variation? What sorts of premises did national and local leaders share? How was it that some immigrant groups were consistently more able to win privileges and rights than others? What is the significance, for example,

of the different treatment received by North Africans whatever city they lived in? Were the boundaries of the republic really set by local variation or did local variation add up to some consistent national policy? When did it? Around which issues? Did some issues matter to the central state more than others? How did that affect the state's tolerance for varieties of local enforcement? Could one theorize about the relationship between local enforcement and legal norms beyond saying that they aren't always in synch, or that sometimes local practice effected change in central policy? Could one make some generalization about how France maintained its standards of citizenship beyond saying that the practice varied or that the boundaries were fluid in individual cases?

Having set out to show the complexities and local variations of boundary maintenance and immigrant access to equality, Lewis leaves it at that. She disputes existing generalizations with mounds of evidence without, however, providing a real alternative—beyond contingency—to them. It's a negative argument and one wants (I wanted) a positive one. In the place of those forests whose contours she disputes, she gives us only trees. I kept hoping for a better way to conceive the relationship between forest and trees, for something more substantial than "contingency" as a way of understanding "the limits of universalism" in France.

Joan W. Scott  
Institute for Advanced Study  
[jws@ias.edu](mailto:jws@ias.edu)