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Nimisha Barton, *Reproductive Citizens: Gender, Immigration, and the State in Modern France, 1880-1945.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020. Xii, 284 pp. Figures, Tables, Bibliography, and Index. $54.95 ISBN 9781501749636.

Review Essay by Elinor Accampo, University of Southern California

Low birth rates and the depopulation problem that started to permeate French national consciousness in the last third of the nineteenth century are explanatory factors that have gained more prominence over the last several decades in analyses of gender relations, the family**,** and especially, the precocious development of France's welfare state. While many of these accounts address rhetoric, politics, and policy, few have grappled with the channels through which these policies were executed.[1] More significantly, until the publication of Nimisha Barton's book, no one had considered the impact of repopulation policies—and the associated movements of pronatalism and Catholic familialism–on France's immigrants, whose numbers grew in the wake World War I. This book demonstrates that the state, employers, and various "social actors" at the local level, both official and unofficial, shared a goal of countering the huge losses from low birthrates and from the enormous death toll of the war by repopulating France with "reproductive" immigrants.

Barton has developed three useful concepts to analyze repopulation policies: "supportive maternalism," which aided women in bearing and caring for children; "disciplinary paternalism," which encouraged and sometimes coerced men to marry and contribute to family stability as breadwinners; and "reproductive citizens," a concept referring to a beneficial social status resulting from practices associated with the first two concepts. Barton defines reproductive citizenship as "a variety of social rights, privileges, and protections that accrued to procreative men and women in France before 1945, regardless of nationality" (p. 5). Her overarching argument is that these policies "contributed to the development of a regulatory regime enshrining reproductive sexuality at the heart of modern citizenship" (p. 214) and played a key role in the expansion of the French state's bureaucratic reach. The policies also empowered women in both public and private life.

The book is grounded in rich, often unexplored archives, both numerous and varied. Barton's extensive command over and use of secondary sources is also remarkable in its depth. As a case in point, her use of archives from the Bureau du Sceau, whose bureaucrats processed naturalization requests, offers a compelling and important example for the deployment of her analytical concepts in understanding the interactions between migrants and officials. She colorfully depicts what went into the process of naturalization, and also draws on secondary sources to describe who these bureaucrats were: "mediocre" functionaries and "middling magistrates" who presumably had been ousted from previous posts for their poor performance (p. 46). Repopulation policies and national duty clearly drove the decisions they made over the fates of their supplicants; they favored families, women of reproductive age, and men who could provide military service or marry and support a

family. They were also insistent that immigrant men not just marry prior to naturalization, but that they marry Frenchwomen to assure loyalty to France. In pleading their cases for naturalization on behalf of lovers, fiancés, husbands or for themselves, women frequently invoked "reproductive services rendered and dedication to republican motherhood" (p. 58), which more often than not assured their success.

Unsurprisingly, Paris held the largest proportion of immigrants to France (25 percent) and at their peak between the wars, they constituted 10 percent of the city's population. Pivotal to Barton's narrative is her deep research into the eleventh arrondissement and the adjacent neighborhoods of Sainte Marguerite and La Roquette where a large portion of mostly eastern European immigrants were concentrated. Here, she skillfully immerses the reader in street culture and daily life, building a case not only to demonstrate how immigrants assimilated into French society and neighborhood networks, but to showcase the importance of such networks for access to private charities and state services; and under Vichy, for access to survival itself. Her use of these archives takes the reader into factories, cafés, marketplaces, seedy *garnis*, small apartments with huge families, and through the streets where children played, vendors sold their wares, and neighbors and couples engaged in disputes**.** Mothers interacted with neighbors when they took their children to school as well as when they sought services from the state and local providers of social aid. These latter included welfare bureaus, maternity wards, *crèches*, health clinics, hospitals, and charitable organizations. Motherhood in these neighborhoods was not merely a shared "social and spatial experience" among friends, neighbors, and members of the community; it "was an increasingly national public duty bringing [mothers] into regular contact with the state—French social workers, welfare agents, and schoolteachers" (p. 155). In these contexts, Barton argues that French and foreign women developed strong emotional bonds, with the former assisting the latter in accessing welfare resources for women and children. "To be a mother in interwar Paris, she asserts, "was to become, quite simply, French" (p. 179). Workplace relationships and public spaces such as cafés similarly aided immigrant men in assimilating and helping set the stage for their own naturalization.

While most of the immigrants featured in this book are white Europeans, Barton also points to the Chinese and large colonial populations—Indochinese, Africans, and North African Muslims—who had come to serve France in the Great War. Americans, Black or white, never enter the picture here even though many of them also remained in Paris.[2] They are presumably absent because they did not live in the neighborhoods Barton examines, and perhaps because fewer of them married or sought naturalization. Where she does address migrants of color, however, she notes little racial bias in policies associated with supportive maternalism or disciplinary paternalism. While interracial marriages alarmed French officials during the Great War, they were never legally prohibited as they were in the U.S. and Nazi Germany. Indeed, Catholic familialism, pronatialism, and repopulationism had such strong influence and infrastructure, that by the end of the war, government officials encouraged intermarriage to protect French women and their *métis* children. Racial discrimination, furthermore, rarely appeared in documents related to neighborhood life, leading Barton to conclude that gender and family norms were so fundamental to neighborhood relationships that they "often transcended racial, ethnic, or religious differences among French and foreign-born" (p. 210). Neighborhood solidarities became ever more important in the 1930s as the Depression led to job loss, xenophobia, a greater regulation of immigrant men, in addition to a reduction in social services available to mothers, especially those in immigrant families. The latter

came to rely far more on local maternalist philanthropies, private charities, pronatalist organizations, and neighbors.
Barton's analysis about reproductive citizenship becomes most poignantly insightful with her account of how it drove officials to work at cross purposes during Vichy. As formal citizenship of Jews was stripped away with de-naturalization during Vichy, the force of "reproductive citizenship" persisted in protecting them, especially in the cases of women and children. The eleventh arrondissement was not only a site of Jewish persecution, it also generated France's first Jewish resistance organization, the Groupe Amelot. This group pursued social assistance as opposed to political resistance, yet the daily activities of its "army of social workers" has rarely been studied, particularly in the context of the neighborhood welfare networks that had developed in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the increasingly vicious anti-Semitism of Vichy, this group, in keeping with Vichy's ongoing "reproductive mission," centered on mothers and children. Social work escaped official (and unofficial) scrutiny as it became a channel for rescuing Jews. Social workers provided Jewish children with false identity cards fabricated by the Amelot group when they transported them to rural homes. When these activities finally did catch the attention of Vichy officials, Jewish men and women came to rely on their neighborhood networks for protection.

But supportive maternalism as a form of protection did not entirely disappear at the government level because the pronatalist and repopulationist policies of the Third Republic persisted under the even stronger familialist policies of Vichy. Although the bureaucrats of the Bureau du Sceau denaturalized Jews, Barton points out that they continued "to act according to familialist criteria" (p. 207) with regard to Jews despite the state's anti-Semitic stance, at least until 1942. Households headed by Jewish women continued to receive family allowances and many other state and municipal benefits as rewards for their "reproductive service to the nation in ways that, while baffling on the surface, were entirely consonant with the familialist accents of the new régime…" (p. 208). Barton concludes, "In the end the *l'état français* paradoxically offered survival tools forged by *la république* to the very foreign-born Jewish women and children whose families it otherwise sought to destroy—compensating wives even as it widowed them, sheltering children even as it orphaned them" (p. 208). These policies, along with the neighborhood networks and welfare-based resistance that centered on the family, Barton asserts, helps explain the "French enigma" that 75 percent of Jews in France survived the war, a far greater proportion than in other Nazi-occupied countries.

As much as I consider this book a tour de force, I do have some minor complaints and criticisms. Because of rising publishing costs, it is quite understandable that some of Barton's tables and graphs are available only online. Disappointingly, her endnotes do not include specific indicators for the tables or graphs that contain the supporting evidence, or direct links to the appendices that contain them; only the URL to her personal website (https://drnimishabarton.com) is available. At the very least, the endnotes might have included instructions for how to navigate the website. Moreover, one of the tables provides statistical evidence that is confusing.[4]

Another quibble is that the abundance of evidence Barton presents sometimes seems to suggest that concerns about repopulation and assimilation of immigrants formed a monolith that weighed heavily on the consciousness of employers, government bureaucrats, and immigrants themselves. Employers, for example**,** "hoped . . . to encourage [immigrants] to put down roots and dissolve at last into the great French nation of families" (p. 14). As much as they wanted a stable labor force,

one can readily imagine they had other motives such as weakening labor solidarity with lower wages that would actually undermine family life. Similarly, recruitment of foreign women for agricultural labor was not always as idyllic as the description in the *Revue de l'immigration* in which the Director of the Office national de main d'œuvre agricole is quoted as stating that women agricultural workers in the majority of cases undoubtedly shared "the life of the employer and his family," and that their situation was "comparable to that of other women in the household" (p. 33).

Greater nuance might also have been exercised on occasion in the interpretation of immigrants' voices, especially in the self-perceptions of those who used "gendered power" in their pleas. While desperately reciting to bureaucrats their vulnerability as single mothers should their lovers, fiancés or husbands not be naturalized, it is difficult to imagine that these women thought of themselves as bearing children in service to the nation, let alone a national duty in the name of "republican motherhood" (pp. 58, 59), a term coined in 1976.[3] It seems more likely that the children they bore were simply the natural consequence, whether desired or not, of their intimate relations, rather than the result of their national loyalty. Barton later suggests that women's pleas entailed role playing, when they adopted "a rhetorical stance that positioned them variously as spurned women, as abandoned mothers, and by extension, as vulnerable female clients of the French nation in need of paternalist protection" (p. 94). They appropriated the narrative forms of bureaucrats and offered up self-portrayals of female archetypes of "scorned wife, self-sacrificing mother, abandoned lover, desperate divorcée, forlorn widow" (p. 95). This interpretation makes great sense, but also suggests that any authentic sense of what "reproductive citizenship" meant to these women subjectively is likely out of historians' reach.

Barton's occasional tendency to read more meaning into or to impose an anachronistic concept onto her sources, however, is not a major detraction from her overall amassing of evidence and the power of her argument. The book successfully demonstrates that French repopulationist policies empowered foreign and French women in their individual dealings with bureaucrats, regardless of whether they felt genuine patriotism or thought that bearing children served the nation. The state's regulation through paternalistic discipline of immigrant men, which increased over the 1930s, also empowered women to seek legal redress and material assistance for abandonment, adultery, or other infractions, sometimes even on false premises.

Countering previous studies that have focused on the exclusion of immigrants from rights and citizenship, Barton's is the first study to demonstrate how various representatives of the government and voluntary associations incorporated immigrants into France. This beautifully written book seamlessly weaves together evidence from disparate sources to create a compelling narrative that explains how immigrants not only gained citizenship rights, but how they assimilated, two issues that deeply trouble our contemporary world, especially in the case of France and French identity. This book implicitly suggests that we revisit the concept of citizenship. As Barton demonstrates, mothers, or potential mothers readily gained important social rights and power in relation to the state and in private relations with men, especially through the policies of disciplinary paternalism; at the same time, however, women as individuals gained no such rights and continued to be denied the vote, and thus excluded from the act central to citizenship in any democracy. Very different from the right to vote, reproductive citizenship granted rights to individuals only in their relation to the family, a difference worthy of further consideration, particularly because these policies discriminated against the unmarried, "unreproductive"

individuals, who apparently continued to weigh on French society. Finally, this book implicitly raises a question for future researchers: what were the actual demographic results of repopulationist policies, especially with regard to immigrants?

NOTES

[1] Prominent exceptions are the works of Rachel Fuchs: *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); *Poor and Pregnant in Paris* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); *Contested Paternity: Constructing Families in Modern France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

[2] See, for example, Nancy L. Green, *The Other Americans in Paris: Businessmen, Countesses, Wayward Youth, 1880-1941* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[3] Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 28, no. 2 (1976): 187-205. While French historians quickly adopted the concept,-and used it to analyze the culture and politics of gender in the French First and Third Republics, historical actors themselves did not use the term; therefore, more explanation for the claim that these supplicants saw themselves as "republican mothers" and what the concept meant to them would be helpful here.

[4] In chapter 5, Barton notes that foreign women who worked did so in "domestic" situations, such as piece work at home with family members and compatriots or as aids for well-off compatriots and correligionists of the neighborhood rather than French households of the quartier. The point of categorizing women's labor as "domestic" or "non-domestic" is to suggest that foreign women had less opportunity for sociability—not only because "most immigrant wives and mothers of foreign households did not work" (146) but because when they did, they performed work near the "kith and kin" that cloistered them. Footnote 88 directs the reader to the website. The table referenced for this statement appears to provide evidence opposite of what is stated in the chapter: well over half of the women in all categories Barton analyzes— foreign women married to foreign men, Frenchwomen married to foreign men, and foreign women married to Frenchmen—are indicated here as employed in "non-domestic work" rather than "domestic work." A long explanation accompanies this table (as well as others), but in this case, it does not explain the discrepancy with the interpretation in the text.

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