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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 Tyler Stovall, Fordham University

One of the key themes of the history of modern France, one that often underlay and determined much of the nation's political, social, and cultural life, was its weak natality. For nearly 100 years, from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1940s, the French had one of the lowest birthrates in Europe, reaching negative population growth by the interwar years. In her stimulating and valuable new study, *Reproductive Citizens*, Nimisha Barton explores the attempts of the French state to boost the national population, and the impact of those efforts on immigrant women and men. Focusing on Paris, Barton argues that French social service workers often emphasized the promotion of family life above all other concerns, and that immigrant women, in particular, often turned this preoccupation to their advantage. In doing so, Barton vibrantly portrays the life of immigrant women in modern France.

Exploring the many connections between natality and immigration makes a great deal of sense, adding significantly to our knowledge of modern French history. Importing people from abroad is of course a common and logical response to the failure to produce them at home, and during the interwar years, in particular, France combined historically low birthrates with high immigration rates. Although *Reproductive Citizens* covers the era from 1880 to 1945, it focuses primarily on the 1920s and 1930s, when this intersection was most pronounced. As Barton makes clear, French authorities did not just bring in more immigrants, they also took measures to ensure that they had children. Such efforts took a number of forms, including supporting the appeals of French women to have their foreign husbands allowed into France and facilitating paternity suits, made legal in 1912, by both French and foreign mothers against recalcitrant fathers. Although generally hostile to racial intermarriage, French authorities at times even favored allowing colonial men involved with French women to settle in France if it seemed they were likely to have offspring. In an interesting perspective on gender relations in modern France, Barton argues that concerns for boosting natality often gave women in France, both citizens and immigrants, the ability to use state influence to gain power over men, especially immigrant men. While it takes two to produce a child, social workers and others often gave priority to the interests of the mother, so that even in a society where women could not vote, the importance of "reproducing" the nation helped to empower women of all kinds.

One of the most attractive aspects of *Reproductive Citizens* is Barton's ability to blend a sophisticated overall analysis of the politics of immigration and natality in France with vivid portraits of individuals and families who lived them. Her mastery of archival sources enables her to use both approaches, thus creating a fascinating portrait of family policies from different but

interacting perspectives. She opens the book, for example, with a discussion of French woman Emilienne Goata's successful efforts to secure state benefits and naturalization papers for her Romanian husband, Nicolas, demonstrating how these efforts involved a sophisticated knowledge of the state bureaucracy (pp. 1-2, 53-54). Moreover, this is not a one-off portrait: we also learn about how Nicolas had gone from serving the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I to coming to France and eventually pleading with the French state for recognition as Emilienne's husband (pp. 19, 53-54). In another case, Barton relates the story of a 1933 murder case in the Sainte-Marguerite quarter of Paris, and how it involved several different immigrants, including a Polish delivery boy, an Italian schoolgirl, and a Russian Jewish couple (pp. 127-128). Throughout the book, Barton skillfully interweaves these individual stories with her broader narrative, giving us a vibrant portrait of the complexities of personal stories and the complex world in which they lived.

Barton is able to bring together intimate case-studies with broader institutional structures by focusing roughly half her book on one section of Paris, the eleventh arrondissement. During the interwar years, this was one of the poorest areas of the capital, with some of the city's highest percentages of immigrants. Observers of working-class Parisian communities, such as the writer Jacques Valdour, came here to observe and record life in the slums of the French capital. This focus on Paris represents at its extreme the contrast between low natality and high immigration rates, a condition that would characterize the capital city for much of the twentieth century. The concentration on the eleventh arrondissement enables Barton to consider how immigrant women in particular developed networks that helped them and their families survive, ranging from socializing with neighbors to learning to deal with concierges and establishing play circuits for their children in the streets. It also allows her to explore their interactions with a variety of social service organizations, such as the Foyer Français and the League for the Protection of Abandoned Mothers, created to help immigrant and working-class families.[1]

This focus on working-class Paris powerfully illustrates the ways in which immigrants worked with French officials to create family-friendly spaces during the interwar years. At the same time, I think Barton misses an opportunity by not also casting her gaze a bit farther afield, to the suburban areas growing by leaps and bounds beyond the city limits. The years between the wars witnessed the explosive expansion of the Parisian *banlieue*: the town of Drancy, for example, grew from 15,000 to 50,000 people in ten years. It was the one major part of France experiencing population growth during the interwar era, and much of this new population was made up of families with children. Heavily working class, more so even than the slums of Paris, and with large immigrant populations, although not nearly as large as those of the eleventh arrondissement, the suburbs of the department of the Seine represented another perspective on immigration and natality, a perspective that anticipated the nation's future after 1945.[2]

One of the most interesting aspects of *Reproductive Citizens* is its exploration of the role played by race and racial concerns in the interactions between immigration and family-friendly policies. In a nutshell, Barton argues that when push came to shove, the desire of French local and even national offices to promote family growth and high natality rates often trumped even racist concerns about miscegenation and the pollution of the national population by inferior stocks. She does this in two cases, that of migrants to France from the French empire, and the situation of immigrant Jews during the Vichy years. A very small population of colonial subjects, almost entirely male, lived in the French metropole between the wars. Although French authorities

certainly did not look with favor upon interracial relationships, at times, they did intervene to encourage marriage between colonial men and their French women lovers, and to enable such married couples to stay in France: even mixed-race children constituted a valued addition to the French population. This racial tolerance testifies above all to the French state's commitment to boosting its birthrate.

In making this argument Barton tends to neglect some important considerations surrounding the presence of colonial immigrants in interwar France. These practices took place in the larger context of the massive expulsion of colonial subjects from the metropole at the end of World War I. During the conflict, over 300,000 nonwhite workers from the empire and China had come to France to bolster the war economy, but in 1919, largely out of racist fears of the development of a multiracial society in the metropole, French authorities sent virtually all of them home. France during the interwar years imported hundreds of thousands of European immigrants, but most kept its colonial subjects out: in 1924, for example, nearly 300,000 foreigners from Europe lived in Paris, but less than 20,000 colonial subjects.[3] In spite of their desire to boost the national population, French authorities showed absolutely no interest in encouraging colonial men in France to bring their wives and children to the metropole, to form colonial families there. Moreover, at a time when some French authorities showed an interest in boosting the population of white women and families in the colonies, tolerating let alone encouraging mixed race families might happen in France but certainly not in the empire. In general, both the natality and immigration policies of the interwar French state conceived of the growth and vitality of France in racial terms.

Barton is on firmer ground in arguing that during the Occupation French family policies resisted and cut against the anti-Semitism of the Vichy regime. In this final chapter of the book, in particular, Barton shows how local social workers and agents of the state, people who had developed relationships with immigrant communities over the years, pushed to continue their emphasis on supporting immigrant families even as the broader political context changed radically around them. As a result, during most of the war years, social workers and other local officials worked to protect Jewish families from the increasingly oppressive and ultimately murderous policies of Nazi Germany and the Vichy regime. Many continued to do so even after the July 1942 Vel d'Hiver raid, which for the first time systematically targeted Jewish families and children. As this became less feasible, some also took the lead in organizing clandestine services to save Jews, especially Jewish children, by spiriting them away to the countryside. Barton's focus on the eleventh arrondissement, with its large immigrant Jewish population, is particularly useful here. She gives an excellent portrait of the rue Amelot group, founded by the district's Jews to protect their community, and in general uses this detailed local history to give an agonizingly graphic portrait of the Holocaust in France.

In her chapter on Vichy, Barton suggests that her analysis from the perspective of immigration and natality helps us answer two important questions about the dark years in France: why did more Jews survive there than in virtually any other occupied country in Europe, and why did so many Jewish children, in particular, escape the Nazis? This perspective, and her focus on local Parisian history, does indeed help us understand how this could be so. I would suggest, however, that *Reproductive Citizens*, in fact, has the potential to answer another key question in the history of modern France. In the middle of the twentieth century the long decline in natality that had shaped so much of modern French history finally came to an end. The great baby boom of the era, part of

the global surge in births that followed World War II, would fundamentally reshape France in the late twentieth century. Although often associated with the Fourth Republic, as French historians have pointed out, the baby boom actually began during the Vichy years. It has been a mystery why the French would start having more children during a period of national trauma, when food was in short supply and many French men were sent to Germany for forced labor. Nimisha Barton's research on the important local networks that supported French and immigrant families during the war years help illustrate how and why this happened.[4]

Reproductive Citizens is a wonderful addition to the historiography of modern France, one that addresses the many complex interactions between gender, immigration, and state policy. It brings into vivid relief the lives of immigrant women and men, as well as their relations with French citizens and social service workers. In doing so, it offers a range of important new insights into what it meant to be French in the early years of the twentieth century.

NOTES

[1] See for example Jacques Valdour, *Ouvriers parisiens d'après-guerre* (Paris: A. Rousseau, 1921).

[2] Annie Fourcaut, *Un siècle de banlieue parisienne: un guide de recherche* (Paris: Harmattan, 1988); Tyler Stovall, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); -----, *Paris and the Spirit of 1919: Consumer Struggles, Transnationalism, and Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[3] *ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

[4] Sara Fishman, *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War, 1940-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Knopf, 1972). For a recent provocative argument that France's wartime baby boom owed much to German fathers see Patrick Buisson, *1940-1945: Années érotiques, tome 1: Vichy ou les Infortunes de la vertu* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008).

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