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Jean-François Berdah

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Citizenship and National Identity in France from the French Revolution to the Present

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BERDAH

University of Toulouse II - Le Mirail

Les questions de citoyenneté et d'identité nationale sont intimement liées, dans la mesure où la première conditionne et la définit et la représentation de la nation, c'est-à-dire l'identité nationale elle-même, et pose le problème du processus juridictionnel qui a permis d'établir des réglementations spécifiques et de fixer progressivement les limites légales séparant citoyens et étrangers. Dans cette optique, quelle fut la voie suivie par la France dans son histoire récente depuis la chute de la monarchie et l'instauration d'un nouveau modèle républicain en 1792?

En effet, contrairement à ce qui a été affirmé dans le débat politique de ces vingt dernières années, le droit du sol ou jus soli, qui signifie pour ceux nés sur le territoire national le droit légitime de devenir automatiquement français à la majorité, ne triompha véritablement du droit du sang, qui ne permettait qu'aux seuls enfants issus de parents français de revendiquer la citoyenneté française, qu'après une longue période jusqu'à des temps assez récents. De fait, les droits civils ne furent attachés à la nationalité qu'assez récemment au regard de l'histoire, de sorte que les populations étrangères résidant en France n'avaient pas de raison véritable de demander leur naturalisation, et ce jusqu'en 1889 lorsque la troisième République décida de changer les règles du jeu héritées de la monarchie et de l'Empire, et de renforcer les obligations propres à chaque citoyen vis-à-vis de la nation.

L'objet de cette contribution vise trois buts. Premièrement, expliquer dans ses grandes lignes comment la nationalité française a été définie tout au long de son histoire depuis deux cents ans; deuxièmement, exposer les hauts et les bas du processus légal qui a permis finalement à la nation française de devenir un creuset démographique ou melting pot pour de nombreuses populations d'origine étrangère au début du vingtième siècle jusqu'à nos jours et troisièmement, de montrer comment la définition et la limitation de la citoyenneté a profondément été affectée par un contexte économique et politique changeant, notamment au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale et depuis les années 1970 en un temps de crise économique et sociale durable. La conclusion, enfin, pose la question de la légitimité et de la solidité du modèle d'intégration français et la question même du melting pot, c'est-à-dire la question cruciale de l'identité nationale.

Questions of citizenship and national identity are very closely related since the former commands the definition and representation of the nation, that is national identity itself, and addresses the jurisdictional process that led to specific legislation being formed, which gradually brought about the determination of legal distinctions between citizens and foreigners.

From this perspective, what was this process in French modern history after the collapse of the monarchy and the establishment of a new republican model in 1792?

Indeed, contrary to what has been argued in the political debate of the last twenty years, the ‘right of soil’ or *jus soli* – which means for those born on national territory the legitimate right to become French in due time – did not prevail over the ‘right of blood’ or *jus sanguinis* – which allows only the children of Frenchmen to claim French nationality – over a long period of our modern and more recent history¹. For instance, civil rights were not always attached to nationality in earlier times, so that foreigners living in France had virtually no cause to ask for naturalization until 1889 when the Third republic decided to change the rules inherited from the monarchy and the Empire and reinforced citizens’ obligations toward the nation.

This chapter has three aims. Firstly, to explain broadly how the French nationhood has been defined over the last two centuries; secondly, to reveal the vicissitudes of a legal process that finally led to the French people becoming a ‘melting pot’ of nations from the beginning of the 20th century until today, and thirdly, to show how the definition and limitation of citizenship suffered considerably from the changing economical and political context, especially during the Second World War and, from the 1970s in a long period of economical and social crisis. The conclusion will question the legitimacy and consistency of the French model of integration and also the French ‘melting pot’ issue that is the crucial question of national identity.

In Modern France, before the break-out of the Revolution, there is no conclusive answer to the question of what is a Frenchman. The question appears incidentally when juridical conflicts arise because of family successions, especially when the King or his prime minister made use of the *droit d’aubaine*, a quite common tradition under Louis XIV and his successor. It was a legislative procedure by which the King had complete power to seize any foreigner’s heritage if the latter died without a single French heir. This situation generated so many complaints before the parlements and courts of justice that an ever more precise definition of the Frenchman was needed and proposed. Three conditions were necessary to be recognized as a Frenchman: “To be born in the kingdom of France, to be born from French parents and to accept to settle in a permanent way in the kingdom”².

In fact, royal law established the principle of *jus soli* in 1515 when it was accepted that a child born from foreign parents could be considered a French subject with the capacity to inherit from them, providing that he or she made the French kingdom his sole and only residence. At the same time, one could be considered a Frenchman because of his parentage, regardless of his place of birth.

For those who could not be defined as French in legal terms, in other words foreigners, a third way existed: the *lettres de naturalité* or ‘nationhood letters’ that the King, and only he, could issue. This naturalization instantly transformed any foreigner into a Frenchman with all the “dignities, franchises, privileges, freedoms, protections and rights of the true and original subjects”. It has been estimated that around 6,000 people benefited from the royal grant between 1660 and 1789³.

Finally, to summarize, it may be said that under the old laws, anybody who lived in France, being born in the kingdom or born abroad from French parents or there again naturalized could be considered as French, thus showing that the *jus soli* was at that time the principal criterion.

With the Revolution, the definition and method of acquiring French nationality are clearly modified by two contradictory incidents. The first is the destruction of all kinds of royal privileges, including the *droit d'aubaine*, the power to naturalize. The second is the attempt made by the French revolutionaries to define nationality as an integral part of a new Constitution. Apart from ideological considerations, the abolition of the *droit d'aubaine* in April and May 1790 was of great symbolic and political significance because it opened the door to the naturalization of foreign friends who were already established in France in their thousands and were eager to fight for the new cause. Some of them, even if not living in France, became honorary citizens in August 1792 because of their “feelings, writings and courage”, for example Thomas Payne, George Washington, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Tadeusz Kosciuszko.

The first Constitution adopted in September 1791 did not differ fundamentally from the old laws, except that naturalization became a common, automatic and permanent right (at least until 1795 and the new Constitution) which allowed thousands of foreigners living in France to benefit from French nationality after a five year period or if they married a French woman. The fact that Revolutionary France was facing a future conflict with neighbouring countries was not irrelevant to that decision since the new citizens were instantly requested to enlist in the French army. This situation prevailed until 1794 for all foreigners who arrived in France and the vast majority of those becoming new French citizens, even without their consent. Naturalization then stopped being automatic and was conferred following the 21st birthday of the new candidates on personal request.

Despite this and other small changes which were introduced in successive Constitutions until 1799, the major turning point regarding nationality and its legal definition came with the establishment of the Civil Code, later known as *Code Napoleon*, and a new approach resulting in the political dispute between the future Emperor (still First Consul) and an old legislator, François Tronchet.

For several reasons – among them the wish to remain faithful to the revolutionary spirit and a deep sense of the nation’s interests – Napoleon was in favor of continuity and the *jus soli*. On the contrary, Tronchet – who was president of the preparatory Commission – advocated the *jus sanguinis* and the principle of acceptance. He argued for example: “We cannot give the quality of Frenchman to a foreigner’s son if he doesn’t want to accept it”. In the end, because Bonaparte could not avoid being ambivalent – he was at the same time convinced that the State should reinforce its control over foreign elements – he accepted the juridical point of view⁴.

When the Civil Code came into force in March 1803, the definition of a Frenchman had totally changed compared with previous periods, revolutionary or not. Over the next eighty years, any individual born from foreign parents could claim French citizenship if he was at least 21 years old and declared his will to become a Frenchman and to settle in

France. But for those immigrants who wanted to establish themselves in France, a ten-year period was necessary before applying for naturalization. This was a clear departure from the 'right of soil' since lineage was meant to be an exclusive criterion.

Yet, the definition of the foreigner or immigrant is not very different from the present meaning. Firstly, there is no 'national' classification of individuals (at least until 1889). Secondly, because the July Monarchy, the Second Empire and, of course, the Second Republic in 1848, showed a more liberal attitude towards aliens thus demonstrating greater tolerance of the rules of naturalization. A new law made under Napoleon III in 1867 reduced the time necessary from 10 to 3 years⁵. Thirdly, because the government had many difficulties in putting the law into practice: How could it strictly control all the borders, the growing number of foreigners attracted by economic development and industrialization, identify all individuals, without a strong operational administration?

In fact, applications for naturalization remained atypical for three important reasons. Generally speaking foreigners had absolutely no interest in making such a request, unless they had no heirs and did not want to fall under the reintroduced *droit d'aubaine*. One reason was the very high cost of making an application, roughly the equivalent of 3 or 4 months' salary. Another was the existence of an attractive status called *admission à domicile*, something like a residence privilege. This allowed foreigners to settle in France, to have a professional occupation and to safeguard all their rights with respect to their heirs, no matter whether they lived in France or abroad. The final and most important reason was the opportunity to avoid national conscription and the military service – between 6 and 8 years from 1818 until the end of the Second Empire! – a privilege that created a political problem at a time of competition and rivalry among European nations, especially between France and Germany. If we look at the official numbers between 1851 and 1889, there is no doubt that most immigrants clearly understood what was at stake: while 10,000 of them chose naturalization, more than 32,000 decided to benefit from the 'residence privilege'. Moreover, any French woman married to a foreign man automatically lost her right to take her husband's nationality.

The 1870-1871 military disaster nevertheless shows a radical change regarding the principles and rules of nationality for three main reasons. While in 1876 foreigners represented 1.7% of the whole population, approximately 655,000 people, the numbers change rapidly in the following decades owing to the Second Industrial Revolution to double ten years later and reach 3% of the population, i.e. 1.127,000 people. But the economic crisis – the Great Depression – and the trend for manufacturers to employ immigrants, who are cheaper and can escape military duties, generated criticism among the working class and chauvinistic denunciations of immigration with no impact on employers.

At the same time, the French authorities were increasingly worried about the demographic situation of the country. If France was the most populated country in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century with a population of about 32 million, that was no longer the case in 1861, even after the annexation of Savoy and Nice: the population of France was then 37 million and Germany 38. The loss of Alsace and Lorraine in 1871 led to a new fall, over one and a half million inhabitants⁶. Moreover, the birth rate was dramatically low and excluded any possibility of recovering former demographic power. In this con-

text, the government and members of Parliament were particularly interested in the question of foreign concentration in France and the opportunity of incorporating immigrants in the French nation in order to revitalize both the French nation and the French army.

Despite the reluctance to modify the Civil Code, in 1889 the Third Republic's Parliament after a lengthy debate decided to modify the general rules and adopt a more lenient attitude towards naturalization for the benefit of the Nation. In that sense, it is not surprising that the new law revokes the "residence privilege" or *admission à domicile*. The main novelty or innovation is the double *jus soli* that reinvents the old Republican principle. According to the new law, a foreigner born in France automatically obtained French citizenship if one of his parents was also born in the country or through majority if neither of them was born in France. At the same time, naturalization was increasingly difficult to obtain as a result of the population's concern about immigration. Between 1889 and 1896 only 36,000 foreigners were naturalized, a very low figure compared with the whole foreign population, again exceeding 1 million⁷.

This policy might be considered paradoxical: on one hand, the authorities implement very strict principles on foreign adults; on the other hand, they are keen to integrate the second generation. In fact, there was no paradox, since the Assembly believed in the power of French culture and education, and their capacity to integrate the younger generations. Besides, the Dreyfus Affair dramatically proved that a successful assimilation of aliens could only benefit from the Republic's stability and purpose⁸. Consequently, French high schools became the battlefields for a new war against clericalism and obscurantism, and a fundamental element in the promotion of a new republican elite, partly of Jewish origin.

The Great War represented another more important turning point in France's home policy because of its terrible consequences. Apart from human loss (about 1.5 million military casualties), the drop in the birth rate engendered a 'generation gap' that could only worsen the previous demographic crisis. At the same time, the frequent use of foreign troops in the French army (mostly from the colonies, but also from the Foreign Legion) and fear of the enemy created widespread suspicion of foreigners during the war that is reflected in official statistics. In fact, fewer and fewer naturalizations were registered between 1914 and 1918, decreasing during this period from about 2,100 to less than 300.

With all these elements the French government had to take into account other vital questions like the denaturalization of former enemy populations (especially the Germans) and traitors that increased the complexity of the demographic problem. But the major issue remained the gap between men and women, even greater after 1918, because many widows – they were estimated at 700 000 in 1919 – married again to the few legitimate "available" men, i.e. foreigners. Why? Because, according to the Civil Code, French born women immediately took their husband's nationality, so that France 'lost' more than 50,000 women between 1919 and 1924. This is why a new law was passed under the first leftist government in 1924, a law allowing French women married to foreigners to retain their original nationality and to pass it to their newborn children on their marriage⁹.

This decision illustrates a major change in political thinking as well as in public opinion, and opens the way to a general law and a new open attitude toward foreigners in 1927. Indeed

according to demographic obligations created by the war it became clear that the old laws had to be changed: since 1889 and more specifically after the Great War only 15,000 to 20,000 applications had been registered when the entire foreign population reached over 2 million. The only solution to this problem was to open the doors of integration more widely and to modify legal requirements for obtaining French citizenship. This is exactly what Parliament decided on 10 August 1927 with the new law reducing the waiting period from 10 to 3 years, even if administrative checks on the applicants were to then become more effective and strict. From then on, the number of new French citizens grew rapidly with an average annual increase of around 65,000 until 1931, somewhat lower than the 'populationist' aims of 100,000, but nevertheless extremely valuable in the Government's opinion.

The public consensus on the nationality question did not last very long in spite of the conviction that the German military threat could be rapidly overcome with the growing number of conscripts, thanks to the naturalizations. Actually the facilities offered to the foreigners gave rise to new prejudices and consequently to a fierce political debate on the immigration issue. For the National Right, particularly the *Action française*, the new law was unacceptable. How could the "scum of the earth" expect to replace the "three millions of vigorous, sane and honest Frenchmen who have been sent to the slaughterhouse" during the Great War? Besides, the massive integration of foreigners could only result in a rapid decline of the French nation, and maybe in complete disintegration.

The international economic crisis did very little to curb this xenophobic feeling. On the contrary 1930, and even more so 1931, not only saw a dramatic change in the labour market with an increase in unemployment, but also highlighted the growing contradiction between Republican principles of generosity and brotherhood, and egoistic and intolerant reactions among the French population¹⁰. As a consequence, the chauvinistic and racist ideas of the national right spread further thanks to newspapers such as "Le Figaro", then controlled by a prominent right-wing businessman, François Coty. The political debate on the immigration issue, i.e. the capability of the French nation to assimilate foreign newcomers, was sustained by immigration experts, in particular George Mauco, who introduced new controversial theories, affirming that some foreigners could be "easily assimilated" whereas others could not.

The official response to the general unrest regarding immigration took the form of general discrimination toward foreign workers, so that hundreds of thousands of them were made redundant. Moreover, a new decree was promulgated in August 1932 creating more difficult conditions in the labour market and protecting "national manpower". As a result the foreign population experienced a substantial drop from about 2.7 to 2.2 million between 1931 and 1936¹¹. If these numbers conceal the fact that 257,000 persons were naturalized during this brief period, they clearly show however that the Third Republic was no longer in tune with its fundamental principles. In spite of liberal declarations toward the refugees, successive governments did nothing to alleviate the harsh living conditions and status of foreigners, except for those who were already serving in the French army. Even the Popular Front embodied by the socialist Home Ministers, Roger Salengro and Marx Dormoy, took part in the reinforcement of sanctions and labour restrictions for foreign workers (*numerus clausus*, exclusion of some professions such as doctors, engineers, lawyers...)¹².

The new legislative decrees made in May and November 1938 represent another step forward towards selective restriction of freedom to work: special identity cards therefore become necessary even for less competitive manpower like small shopkeepers or craftsmen. At the same time, the refugee question creates a growing nervousness in the political spheres, and consequently a rising suspicion of foreigners based on the idea that all those migrants might be members of an invisible 'fifth column' working for the enemy. This is the case for all the German anti-nazis and Italian antifascists, but also most surprisingly for German and Austrian Jews, who were soon to be packed into improvised concentration camps, mainly in southwest and southeast France. Famous foreign intellectuals have widely testified to their incomprehension and distress at the time of being arrested and imprisoned, Lion Feuchtwanger and Arthur Koestler among others.

Perhaps the most dramatic example and on the largest scale was that of the Republican Spaniards who between December 1938 and February 1939 crossed the French border in their hundreds of thousands, first and foremost because of the terrible conditions in the concentration camps, but also because they wholeheartedly wished to fight against the dictatorships by any means whatsoever, as workers or soldiers, and were however considered from the start as 'reds', i.e. as dangerous communist elements¹³. Le Boulou, Amélieles-Bains, Prats-de-Mollo, Saint-Cyprien, Argelès, Bram, Le Vernet, Gurs, Barcarès: the lists of the French camps is but a painful and a never-ending succession of names¹⁴. Obviously they were not in any way as bad as Auschwitz or Buchenwald, nevertheless they reveal the shifting alteration of democratic principles and the inexorable breakdown of the Republic. Thousands of Spanish prisoners were gradually incorporated in hard labour units called *Compagnies de Travailleurs Étrangers* [Foreign Workers Companies] from March-April 1939 as reinforcements to the French Defense organization or in the French economy, mostly in the service of private farms or industries. Because of the general mobilization among the French citizens and the needs of the national economy, these Spaniards played a growing part in the war effort because many of them were skilled workers and committed to the struggle against fascism. At the end of the year, the internment camps were almost empty, but this situation would not last after the military defeat of the French army and the political triumph of the Vichy regime¹⁵.

The collapse of the Third Republic and imminent installation of a personal dictatorship under Marshall Pétain in June 1940 marked a dramatic change with regard to citizenship and our basic question: Who is a Frenchman? In fact, the new French policy of Vichy France radically put into question the Republican tradition and heritage based on *jus soli*, which could be summarized with the following facts: 15,154 individuals denaturalized, 446 deprived of their French citizenship and 110,000 Algerian Jews deprived of their status of citizen and returned to the condition of subject¹⁶.

This brutal change was considered vital by the new regime since according to the government French defeat and military collapse were the consequence of the facilities given to the foreign population in past decades to acquire the French nationality. Marshall Pétain's supporters and ministers were convinced that the perverted Republic was responsible for national "decadence", especially following the 1905 Act, which enforced institutional separation between Church and State. They argued that this law, giving almost complete

freedom to the Churches, was particularly negative as regarded the Jewish community, which had no longer had any reason to integrate or assimilate under the growing influence of foreign Jews.

One can easily understand that the new French policy was directly inspired by the traditional racist, i.e. anti-Semitic thinking developed within the French right-wing since the beginning of the 20th century, and more particularly during the inter-war period. Jews were considered poorly, or rather non-assimilated by French authorities, and therefore victims of a large denaturalization process that was initiated immediately after the seizure of power by Marshall Pétain thanks to legislative procedure. The government's general aim was to examine all naturalization acts enacted by the former Republican authorities since the 1927 Act. The main concern was clearly directed toward the Jewish population, but this procedure included all French citizens of foreign origins (Italians, Spaniards, Poles, Germans, etc.).

A denaturalization Commission was created in the summer of 1940 under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice, which was entitled to accept or refuse French citizenship. However, it was no easy task to examine hundreds of thousands of personal files in such a difficult and uncertain political situation owing to the transfer of French administration and government from Paris to Vichy. Moreover, there was a clear ideological division between 'restrictionist' and 'racist' approaches within the French administration. Restrictionists favoured a stricter, tougher selection of applicants to French nationality and held that criminals, delinquents and poor assimilated people should be excluded and not even allowed to enter French territory. On the other hand, racists (or racialists) had a clear regeneration project for the nation, which supposed a distinctive status for Jews and their complete separation from the French population in legal terms, similar to Nazi Germany post 1933-1935.

As a result, the Denaturalization Commission started to examine some 500,000 personal files, dedicating several sessions each week over several months to this task. But even the creation of three sub-commissions was not enough to allow these files to be thoroughly examined judging by their own estimation that theoretically aimed at some 830 files per session or 30,000 files per month! In fact, the results of the Denaturalization Commission were rather poor. When the first statistics were published in 1942 only 9,608 individuals had actually been deprived of French citizenship, of which 3,479 were Jews (about 36% of the total)¹⁷.

Of probably greater importance was that the struggle between restrictionists and racialists became more and more acute over the following years. As Andre Mornet, the Commission's president, stated after the Second World War, he became ever more aware that the anti-Semitic campaign widely covered in the French press had deep consequences on their common work. If "the members of the commission were absolutely honest, trying to judge in all objectivity and independence" and reluctant "in their major part" to accept the "collaboration policy with Germany", they were "in their majority blinded by their confidence toward Pétain" and became therefore "the auxiliary of his racist policy", giving way to hundreds of denaturalizations¹⁸.

Depriving new Frenchmen of their citizenship was not the only aim of the French government. Probably more vital was to initiate a new nationality policy, i.e. to prepare a new

regulation or code in order to prevent similar mistakes as in the recent past or exaggerated benevolence toward foreign applicants. It would take too long to describe the complete legal process, but it is possible and also necessary to outline its main features. As Patrick Weil pointed out, “the setting of a new nationality legislation is undeniably an absolute priority for the new regime”¹⁹. But again divergences of opinion within the Ministry of Justice and parallel state institutions linked to the anti-Semitic right-wing emerged very quickly, especially on the new legal standards that were to be enforced. While Darlan, the government’s Vice-president, in February 1941 advocated adopting ethnic quotas similar to the American immigration contingents, two months later the ministry of Justice (*Garde des Sceaux*) considered whether the establishment of quotas according to race or national origins would create new difficulties and in no way help to regulate the high number of foreigners living in France, especially if the government wanted to avoid “the creation of real foreign colonies on our soil”²⁰.

It took two more years to finalize the new nationality code, but again resistance inside the ministry produced deep discontent particularly within the Jewish Question Board (“Commissariat aux Questions Juives”) directed by Darquier de Pellepoix, a keen apologist of French-German collaboration and a supporter of Nazi Jewish policy. The Gestapo Office in France, directed by Lieutenant-Colonel Heinz Röthke, reacted very energetically when he realized that several French Jews obtained a lenient sentence because of outstanding military duty in the First World War or special services paid to the nation, and kept their French nationality. With regard to the new nationality code, which was considered too weak by many admirers of Nazi politics, and evidently by the occupying forces too, no significant change would follow despite Laval’s genuine sympathy for Franco-German collaboration in view of the new strategic situation created firstly by the Anglo-American landing in North Africa in November 1942 and secondly by the Russian victory in Stalingrad in January 1943. In short, it was high time to postpone any official decision that might induce additional tension with the Allied forces, taking into account the growing influence of the Free French Forces in London under General De Gaulle’s command.

In this respect, the nationality question was a major issue for the French Resistance since all the leaders, both political and military, who joined De Gaulle in London in June 1940 and later – some 500 persons including the general himself – were condemned as traitors by a special law issued on 23 July 1940 that deprived them all of their French citizenship. As a consequence, the Free French authorities logically tended to think of themselves as being upholders of the former Republican government and emphasized the need for retaining the traditionally generous principles of hospitality defended by the Third Republic. In that sense, they not only abolished virtually all the Vichy regime institutional regulations but also enforced special decisions granting French citizenship to any French volunteer, fighting for freedom in the Free French Forces or ‘resistant’ on French soil, who wanted to apply for it in the future.

Nevertheless there was one exception with regard to French Jews. When the American high command installed General Giraud in Algiers as representative of the provisional French government, he believed that the abolition of the Crémieux decree in October

1940, contrary to other laws, should be maintained. As Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton pointed out, Giraud shared common widespread anti-Semitic prejudice, believing in March 1943 that Jews were “responsible for the defeat” and that racial laws should be “one of the essential conditions for the armistice”²¹. The general reaction to this statement and the final victory of De Gaulle over Giraud led to the abolition of all Vichy regime regulations and therefore reintegrated all of the 15,154 people who had been deprived of their French citizenship.

However, the struggle initiated by racialists in favour of ethnic selection was not completely over since some of the protagonists escaped the ‘épuration’ process, that is their separation from the administration and further prosecution thanks to a belated commitment in the Resistance. Georges Mauco, who profoundly influenced the national debate on this issue during the inter-war period and again during the Vichy period, remained very influential after the Liberation of France and until the end of the 1940s. In spite of all his efforts, in the end he failed to impose his ethnic views and the re-established Republic preserved untouched the old tradition of openness. Moreover, the Fourth Republic (1946-1958) showed a very generous face toward foreign immigration due to French demographic weakness and the need to encourage the reconstruction of the country. Were the integration of foreign communities living in France and the establishment of Republican principles not the best proof of confidence in the future in the long term?

Indeed, the naturalization process was considerably amplified during the postwar era, way above the prewar annual figures. No fewer than 17,351 adults acquired French nationality in 1946, 83,317 in 1947 and again 58,823 in 1948. In all, if we include children automatically taking French nationality at the age of 18 without restriction, the total number of new acquisitions reached 38,869, 111,736 and 70,925 respectively²². The period 1946-1962 therefore can be considered a ‘golden age’ for the French melting pot, particularly because it corresponds to a time of great economical development – the ‘Trente Glorieuses’ or ‘Glorious Thirty Years’ – between 1944 and 1974, which allowed a fast integration of foreign communities. The French Republican educational system also proved to be an efficient instrument of personal promotion among ‘newcomers’ – the French expression is *social elevator* – as for instance among the children of Spanish Republicans who achieved better social positions within the middle, and sometimes upper-middle classes, from one generation to another.

This almost harmonious tendency was soon interrupted by the repatriation to France of hundreds of thousands of *pièds-noirs*, that is, the French community that had been settled in Algeria since its colonization in 1830. This tragic situation originated in 1954 with the Algerian uprising against French occupation and the subsequent official peace settlement in 1962, and aggravated the troubled relationship with North African migrants in France (Moroccans, Tunisians and above all Algerians). A fierce debate quickly arose concerning the relevance of the liberal naturalization process with regard to the Muslim population, a community that could be assimilated according to Republican principles in some people’s view.

However, this question only became really acute in 1973-74 in face of the economic crisis and its social effects that is, increasing and enduring unemployment. Whilst there were

'only' 600,000 unemployed workers in 1974, the figures literally exploded in the following years to reach two million in 1981, proving that the crisis would not be easily overcome. Consequently, the nationality issue became of vital importance in the French political debate. Was it not indeed time to proceed to a deep reappraisal and sound changes in effective regulation in order to restrict the allocation of French citizenship while the French economy was not ready to take on an additional labour force, and not even able to integrate its unemployed poorly qualified workers? It is not therefore surprising if the government parties – the UDF (*Union pour la Démocratie française*) inspired by the president of the Republic in charge, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and the RPR formed in 1977 (*Rassemblement pour la République*) led by the mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac – entered into a lively debate, arguing that foreign workers, and in particular Algerian citizens, should return to their homeland, possibly some 100,000 the first year, and in total 500,000 over a 5 year period.

It must be stressed that xenophobic views gained new ground within French society, including the Communist Party, which locally initiated specific action against foreign workers, due to the revival of the right-wing movement in the early 1980s under the growing influence of Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National*, whose positions were the direct result of the 'Algerian syndrome' and traditional racist prejudices in France at least since the Dreyfus affair.

However, the left-wing electoral successes of 1981 and long presidency represented by François Mitterrand continuing until 1995 countered a constant refusal for any significant change in French regulations, in spite of 'cohabitation' with several conservative majorities, until 1993 when a new nationality code was issued and enforced following Charles Pasqua and Jean-Louis Debré's views. Naturalization became more difficult to acquire and absurd situations arose with French citizens of the second and even third generation being forced on many occasions to prove their citizenship, as for instance individuals belonging to old French families who were born in the colonies before 1958 or 1960. In the same way, husbands or wives of French citizens were increasingly subjected to strict and constant administrative control in order to avoid false marriage (*mariage blanc*).

Finally, the children of foreign citizens born in France are undoubtedly French under present legislation, which does not do anything to ease the problem while their parents are still, for example, Algerian or Moroccan, and while the economic and social context is anything but stable. High unemployment among the second and third generations, xenophobic feelings, intolerable segregation on the labour market, geographic segregation in the outskirts of the larger towns, poor academic success due in part to the failure of the Republican educational system are a few of the numerous reasons that explain the unrest and growing violence in the 'cités', that is the densely populated suburban areas.

As can be seen, the question "what is a Frenchman?" is not easy to answer. Over the years, from the French Revolution to the present day, the legal and official response wavered considerably from the most open and liberal views to the extreme harshness of the Vichy regime during the Second World War. What is most striking however is that the Republic – the most representative regime over the years – maintained as far as possible the basic

principles on which it was built, i.e. liberty, equality, fraternity, and one could also add, hospitality. The specific situation of France, similar to the United States and different from almost all European countries, was, starting in the 19th century, very soon to become a land of immigration where a multicultural society would eventually emerge, creating the conditions of a melting pot *à la française*.

In spite of highly controversial debates in the late 19th century due to the first major international crisis, the different foreign communities – Belgians, Germans, Swiss, Italians, and later Poles, Spaniards, Portuguese, etc. – were successfully integrated thanks to the Second Industrial Revolution and Republican values, which considered all members of the community as equal and allowed individual upward mobility. The First World War and its dramatic human consequences reinforced this trend while the reconstruction needed more and more arms. The following profound changes to French legislation in 1924 and 1927 are clearly the consequence of this unprecedented situation and a response to the constant German threat. It is only in the 1930's when the international crisis reveals the fragility of the French consensus on the national issue that Republican principles are submitted to growing criticism and questioning. These are the basic fundamentals of the brutal change that our country experienced during the 'Black Years' from 1940 to 1944.

The Liberation of France and the restoration of Republican values led to the re-establishment of the traditional open and liberal regulation thanks to a positive and favorable economic situation, but again in 1962, as a consequence of the Algerian crisis, nationality and citizenship became major political issues as the negative effects of the social crisis and xenophobic ideas emerge as key factors of national French politics. But the question of how to integrate the foreign population into the French nation remains a fundamental topic which conditions the success or failure of the French melting pot, that is the Republican model of integration.

NOTES

¹ P. Weil, *Qu'est-ce qu'un Français? Histoire de la nationalité française depuis la Révolution*, Paris 2002.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

³ See G. Noiriél, *Population, immigration et identité nationale en France, XIXe-Xxe siècle*, Paris 1992, pp. 88-94.

⁴ Weil, *Histoire cit.*, pp. 29-35.

⁵ G. Noiriél, *Le creuset français. Histoire de l'immigration, XIXe-Xxe siècle*, Paris 1988, pp. 74-75.

⁶ About the political debate on the French nation see Noiriél, *Population cit.*, pp. 20-23.

⁷ Weil, *Histoire cit.*, p. 47.

⁸ See for example in the Jewish case M.R. Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation. A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair*, Oxford-London 1971.

⁹ Weil, *Histoire cit.*, pp. 72-76

¹⁰ Concerning the application of the right of asylum see G. Noiriél, *Réfugiés et sans-papiers. La République face au droit d'asile, XIXe-Xxe siècle*, Paris 1991, 1998, pp. 106-117.

¹¹ Noiriél, *Population cit.*, p. 70.

¹² See P.-J. Deschodt - F. Huguenin, *La république xénophobe, 1917-1939. De la machine d'État au «crime de bureau»: les révélations des archives*, Paris 2002, pp. 121-157.

¹³ See among others G. Dreyfus-Armand, *L'exil des républicains espagnols en France. De la guerre civile à la mort de Franco*, Paris 1999; L. Stein, *Beyond Death and Exile. The Spanish Republicans in France, 1939-1955*, Cambridge

- London, 1979; J. Rubio, *La emigración de la guerra civil de 1936-1939. Historia del éxodo que se produce con el fin de la II República española*, 3 vols., Madrid 1977.

¹⁴ See G. Dreyfus-Armand - É. Témime, *Les Camps sur la plage, un exil espagnol*, Paris 1995; A. Grynberg, *Les camps de la honte. Les internés juifs des camps français, 1939-1944*, Paris 1999.

¹⁵ See M.-L. Cohen - É. Malo (eds.), *Les camps du Sud-Ouest de la France. Exclusion, internement et déportation*, Toulouse 1994.

¹⁶ Weil, *Histoire cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124

¹⁸ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁰ Quoted *ibid.* p. 103.

²¹ M.R. Marrus - R.O. Paxton, *Vichy ert les juifs*, Paris 1981, pp. 275-277 (translated from the American edition).

²² According to the figures quoted in Weil, *Histoire cit.*, p. 124.

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