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# Immigration and National Identity: Historiographical Perspectives in France

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## ABSTRACT

France emerged as a country of destination for a large number of immigrants from about the middle of the 19th century. Historiographical perspectives reveal what is at stake in such a history and permit the exploration of significant aspects of national identity. Presenting a synthesis of the bibliographical sources, books, studies and pamphlets, both scientific and otherwise, since 1900, this study highlights the main developments in the various analyses and narratives about this phenomenon. Successive waves of migration have transformed the manner in which this topic is presented and described, but this transformation relates also to the inner changes within French society itself. Like a mirror, the figure of the migrant unmask the collective identities and symbolic boundaries of each community. Thus, the categories used point towards new models which are intrinsically related to the social and cultural process.

*En Europe, la France présente la particularité d'être depuis plus d'un siècle un pays d'immigration de masse. L'historiographie sur le sujet dévoile les enjeux identitaires que recouvre un tel fait saisi dans la durée. L'immigration est en effet un révélateur pour l'identité nationale et les frontières symboliques qui la définissent. En présentant un panorama de synthèse des sources bibliographiques, des publications de l'entre-deux-guerres aux ouvrages scientifiques les plus récents, l'étude souligne les principaux tournants dans la manière d'appréhender le phénomène. Différents facteurs ont en effet transformé la façon d'en écrire l'histoire et de l'insérer dans le récit national: les vagues migratoires successives, les mutations de la société française elle-même et bien sûr l'évolution générale des sciences humaines et de la discipline historique. Aux premiers travaux partagés entre l'idée d'assimilation et les craintes xénophobes succède après la Seconde Guerre mondiale une approche démographique et économique visant à accompagner les politiques publiques de recrutement. Les contestations des années 1970 ouvrent de nouvelles explorations, alors qu'une première génération d'historiens se met au travail. L'immigration s'est depuis constitué comme un champs propre de la recherche historique, foisonnant et diversifié, dont les résultats croisent les débats et polémiques d'actualité sur la place des étrangers au sein de la société française.*

The historiography of immigration in France covers quite a long period because France emerged as a country of destination for a large number of immigrants from about the middle of the 19th century. Contemporary understandings of ‘immigration’ and ‘immigrants’ developed during this period, in particular with the passage of the nationality law of 1889. A prolific literary output has accompanied the continuous development of this long-lasting phenomenon since the beginning of the century. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the aim of this article is to provide some reference points from a selected corpus. It presents a synthesis of the bibliographical sources, studies and even pamphlets from the early period of the interwar years, then scientific works in later years, in order to highlight the main trends and orientations. It is, of course, a means of focusing on what is at issue in the history of immigration in France and of exploring its most significant facets. The different steps of the analyses and narratives are indeed highly revealing. Successive waves of migration have transformed the issue, and the manner of describing it, but this development also reflects changes in French society itself. Thus, the categories used move towards new models, related to social and cultural processes. All countries use history for their own ends. The image of the migrant mirrors the collective identity and symbolic boundaries of each community. One fundamental question is how to refer to the nation, viz. the manner in which immigration challenges common representations of French identity and/or national awareness.

#### THE INTER-WAR YEARS: ASSIMILATING MIGRANTS

Until the Second World War, all analyses were based on a national model and a firmly unitary conception of its identity and culture. France was considered to be a perfect nation-state. Since the Third Republic and its educational creed spread by the school system, the representation of an eternal France has included various myths about the French people. Resulting from a felicitous fusion between Gaul, Franks and Latin peoples, the destiny of the indigenous population became thus to absorb any foreign group with which it came into contact. This “republican faith in assimilation”<sup>1</sup> was reinforced by the role of public institutions and social structures, such as school or the armed services which created national homogenization. Indeed, such a Jacobin and centralist State worked towards dismissing differences and instead favoured common references. This had extremely profound consequences, marginalizing, for instance, all regional languages and cultures. Its assimilative vocation tended above all towards the naturalization of foreigners. The access to citizenship, by the right of kinship (*jus sanguinis*) and also of birthplace (*jus soli*), was extended in 1927, with the aim of increasing the number of French people. Therefore, the only question considered was how to deeply acculturate the best migrants, in order to merge them as quickly as possible into a common culture, the French one. In other words, the objective was to make all differences vanish.

There are two categories of publications during this period. Firstly, some essays. Many of them use a polemical style and must be classified as lampoons. Being short on docu-

mentation and data, they present an ideological view of the question. Immigration is in general considered as a threat to the country and/or the civilization, an “infiltration” or an “invasion”<sup>2</sup>. Migrant people are perceived generally as strangers, and some of them are even qualified in particular as “undesirable”<sup>3</sup>. It is a fact that the use of this term has created a typical segregated category. While these authors do not completely reject immigration, their purpose is to demonstrate that a very severe ‘selection’ is essential before authorizing any entrance. New arrivals are regarded with suspicion on principle. The selection criteria combine economic, demographic and racial precautions in different proportions. Thus, this sort of publication reveals above all the prevailing xenophobia of the inter-war years.

A medical viewpoint must be mentioned. The contemporary preoccupation with hygiene spread a biological notion of demography. While mentalities were steeped in fear of hereditary diseases or mental disorders, this preoccupation with hygiene was directly related to population exchanges. A relatively common idea was that descendants could present hereditary defects. Foreigners were believed to be potential vectors for pathologies, sometimes including social ones such as criminality or immorality, where these problems are understood in an ethno-biological way. The nation was considered as a genetic inheritance and immigration was therefore a high-risk process, as it would change this internal configuration. Here, as well, more than a trace of ‘scientific’ racist doctrines can be found. This current persisted from the 19th century and Gobineau’s obsessions about a hierarchy of human ‘races’. Certain professors and doctors thus developed dogmatic theories about national characters and moral, mental or physical ‘ethnic features’. They tried to represent the way populations mix as ‘racial interbreeding’ (*métissage*). For them, the worst scenario would be to allow the nation to transform into a mixed-race people<sup>4</sup>.

Other studies highlight demographic issues, comparing immigration and French fertility rates, or the economy, examining potential employment problems. Most of them deal with legal issues, especially the status of foreigners<sup>5</sup>. But the basis always remains the same. One table of contents<sup>6</sup> gives a good indication of the argumentation as a whole: firstly, “the [French] demographic problem” is mentioned; secondly, “problems resulting from immigration”; then “a policy of immigration”, namely “selection” and “hygienic control”; and finally, “a policy of naturalization” as the natural end of the process. The logic is purely nationally orientated and, thereby, the idea of ‘assimilation’ appears as a narrow-minded perspective. At the same time, the defence of France as a host country was closely associated with the question of its own capacity to transform foreigners into ‘real French people’. In those days, moreover, it seemed a matter of common sense that rural areas were the best place for them to take root and to integrate into a sort of “spirit of the land”<sup>7</sup>.

All things considered, there are only a few reliably informed studies. Georges Mauco produced the main books and articles concerning the economic role of migrants<sup>8</sup>. At the end of the thirties, in association with Albert Demangeon, he managed an important social survey with investigators going out into the field<sup>9</sup>. Their questionnaires and

detailed monographs explore migrants' adaptation conditions, their sociability, the young people's attitudes, etc. It was the first attempt to develop a scientific approach to the question. But even the most objective of these books betrays a deep ideological framework. They reveal the attitudes of the time and, for this reason, must be treated only as sources by historians. Certain representations, shared by all of these authors, explain their prejudices: the intellectual aftermath of colonialism, especially paternalistic attitudes towards 'exotic' ethnic groups, an unshakeable faith in the superiority of the French host society and its traditions, a denial of minorities, the refusal of communities, etc. A related theme is the underlying fear of France's decline, in a country shocked by its own 'depopulation', in comparison with neighbouring countries, e.g. Germany or Italy, and tormented by active pro-birth lobbies. In such circumstances, immigration undoubtedly strikes at the heart of the national birth-rate problem, the very keystone of an awareness of national integrity.

#### "A DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC NEED" FOR THE AFTER-WAR PERIOD

After the Second World War, the panorama was very different. Although the intellectual context was not magically transformed, racist or anti-Semitic views were, for the time being, in disrepute. The tone of the discourses was therefore very different. Unemployment was no longer a problem. With a considerable lack of workers, reconstruction and then economic growth caused other migratory influxes during the three decades (1945-1974) known as The Thirty Glorious Years (*Trente glorieuses*). The time had come to plan and organize population movements. As the State developed further activities, new government bodies appeared, such as the National Immigration Office (ONI), created in 1946, in charge of all operations instead of the various private agencies which had done so before, or the National Demographic Studies Institute (INED), directed by Alfred Sauvy, which was established to enable the government to have a real policy concerning French demography.

Consequently, the INED publications, notably its review *Population*, expressed the mainstream view during the fifties and the sixties. Since immigration was now considered as "a demographic and economic need" for France<sup>10</sup>, it became an incontestable necessity, indeed even a sort of natural phenomenon. But only economic and, occasionally, demographic aspects were taken into account, regardless of social, ethnic or cultural questions. Migrants were perceived as masculine guest-workers, in other words the labour force, while the role of women was underestimated and the place of the family was forgotten. Moreover, all these studies took a prospective and operational approach. With the aim of providing data for governmental policies in the framework of public planning, they attempted to determine the optimum number of migrants to accept and the various parameters to be taken into account. The intention is summed up in a few words: "Considering the reconstruction task and the lack of a French labour force, it was a matter of determining the possibility, the methods and the quantity of the required immigration"<sup>11</sup>. Statistics also began to be in general use, so this way of thinking

based on a quantitative approach became wide-spread. As an indirect consequence, all of these factors contributed to the transformation of this field of study.

The corpus of writing thus demonstrates that immigration took place within the scope of national power seen from an economic perspective. But conceptualization was still lacking. An insight from the human sciences was a precondition for analysing this subject from a new perspective, over and above the usual vague interpretations. Nevertheless, two works written during the fifties are noteworthy as precursors. The first one deals with the settling of migrants<sup>12</sup>. It explored the long-term consequences of immigration, on both social and cultural levels, in accordance with a diachronic perspective. As a result, it contributed to the clarification of the multi-faceted issue of 'assimilation': its conception as a progressive phenomenon, and above all its elaboration as an interpretative model. The second work dealt with the adaptation of foreigners and their relationship with the French people<sup>13</sup>. It took account of the influence of social psychology which was in its early stages, for the first time demonstrating an interest in the inter-ethnic question. Also innovative was the use of the concept of 'adaptation' in place of 'assimilation'. This is a faint sign that immigrants were beginning to be seen as subjects. It was the first step towards a field of enquiry exclusively focusing on French concerns.

Even so, in relation to what follows, obstacles remained. A number of prejudices continued to prevent an intelligible understanding of the history of immigration. As the sociologist Dominique Schnapper explained<sup>14</sup>, the notion of cultural unity in France was an integral part of political unity, and the two were often even totally confused. Such a lack of differentiation is a strong specificity of French society. The tendency to analyse the social dimension through the national thus represents a real obstacle. This explains the continuing concealment of an issue which constitutes a disruptive factor for the national consciousness. It was ignored, as are all phenomena which question the dominant conception of France's history too closely. Nancy Green demonstrated that every historiography on the subject reveals a lot about the different collective representations of identity<sup>15</sup>. While the 'melting-pot' and 'cultural pluralism' are fundamental, if conflicting, notions in the United States, France's only vision of itself is as a country of political asylum. The role of mass migration in its own right has never really been recognized. This point of view has had long-lasting consequences. The only perception was that the host country would take over the non-native people, and the immigrants' story would fade out. As long as France refused to accept itself as a society of immigrants, the history of immigration remained unknown.

## THE NEW TURN RESULTING OF THE SEVENTIES AND THE EIGHTIES

Things began to change during the seventies. A favourable climate arose for contesting traditions and generally accepted beliefs, enabling the exploration, among other aspects, of unknown parts of the nation's past. It seemed thus logical to try to break the silence for those who had never been allowed to have a say. Groups perceived to be on the fringes of society gave new insights into dominant cultures and structures.

It was time to discover minorities, segregated groups, regional identities, women, etc, sometimes in a rather muddled way. Although it may seem very anecdotal, it is worth noting the publication of a historical collection for the general public entitled “The Everyday Life of...”, about immigrants<sup>16</sup>. Its various monographs drew the portraits of ‘anonymous heroes’, providing a concrete view of their real life. In general, with the influence of Marx’s theories, the question of economic domination was essential during this period and migrants were presented mainly as the victims of exploitation. Many articles and journalistic surveys were oriented in this way.

The time came to actually break certain historical taboos and to reconsider some myths, especially those concerning the Vichy government period. Prior to this, the French collective memory about the Vichy period was characterized by a sort of easy conscience and a deceptive ideological consensus<sup>17</sup>. Then, for the first time, original works brought the dark side out of oblivion<sup>18</sup>. One of the most outrageous episodes was the persecution of the Jewish people, most of them refugees from central Europe, not only by the Nazis, but with the participation of the French authorities themselves. This was a recurring theme as can be seen from the revelations concerning the French internment camps, where many foreigners, including Spanish republican exiles and stateless persons, were interned during the Second World War<sup>19</sup>. Migrants also began to appear as partisans in the *Resistance* against the German occupation. Some autobiographical memoirs and testimonies are particularly revealing of that period<sup>20</sup>. They all insist on the rejection suffered by clandestine non-native fighters, treated as ‘pariahs’ and terrorists, especially those who were communists as well<sup>21</sup>. In any case, such points contributed in a small way to the reappraisal of the place of foreigners in national contemporary history, which could be included in or alongside its most glorious chapters and feats of arms. Even though immigration as such was still not the principal subject of these works, they all had the effect of breaking down certain unconscious barriers.

In the late seventies, immigration gradually became a new subject of interest to historians. Rolande Treppe must be mentioned for showing the migrants’ role in the miner’s world and in the *Resistance* in south-west France<sup>22</sup>, as must Gilbert Badia whose work concerned the refugees from Germanic countries during the Nazi period<sup>23</sup>. But the most important development was that a number of theses began to take this theme in account. Amongst the first was that of Pierre Milza who integrated it as a specific element into the framework of a history of international relations, with the migrant communities in some cases representing a real political issue for countries and their diplomacy<sup>24</sup>. Ralph Schor broached the subject in his study of ideological trends and public opinion during the inter-war years<sup>25</sup>. Many such precursors were working on social history, considering foreigners as people in the labour class, and evaluating their role in, for example, the French industrialization process<sup>26</sup>.

At this stage, the issue must be put into context because, obviously history as a scientific discipline is not isolated from the social environment as a whole. The question of immigration had at that time definitely reached the level of public debate, becoming a controversial issue, and possibly the main subject of polemics in French society. The far-

right party, namely the *Front-National* [The National Front], which began to invade the political scene in the early eighties, brazenly exploited it. At the same time, the young descendants of migrants, generally known as ‘the second generation’, began to claim rights, real citizenship and above all, recognition. A famous symbolic act was the ‘National March for Equality’ – commonly known as ‘March of the *Beurs*’ (viz. youth with North-African origins), in 1983 and 1984. At this time immigration received a lot of media attention, becoming a sort of editorial phenomenon, with articles in plenty and books devoted to the issue. With Arab immigration as the focal point, the main contemporary discourses reflected French society’s doubts and fears. The common themes of that period concern the foreseeable failure of France’s capacity for integration, the state of uncertainty about republican secularity (*Laïcité*) and its future, especially in regard to the Islamic community, and the threat of social fragmentation as a result of leaving the door wide open, etc.

Consequently, the deficiencies of historiography appear clearly, while present research seeks knowledge, comparisons and maybe even lessons. Have historians now realized that the lack of historical references have contributed to the expression of every possible fantasy about the present? Indeed, where there is no scholarly base, the issue is inevitably misrepresented. On 1986, in an article which marks a milestone in the discipline, Gérard Noiriel concludes that immigration history is so sketchy in France because it is still neglected, like a ‘fallow’ field of studies<sup>27</sup>. As indicated previously, some works were in fact in progress, but were too scattered and unknown. The fact remains that the historiography of immigration only made significant progress during the next decade.

When considering the part played by the State, it is revealing that some initial studies were realized within the framework of an interdepartmental research mission and its specific program entitled “France and immigration”<sup>28</sup>. Another study, for instance, was commissioned by the ethnological heritage mission of the Department of Culture and concerned the *scaldini*, viz. the original migratory network of Italians working as heating specialists in Paris<sup>29</sup>. Different waves of migration began to be explored piecemeal. Some monographs stand out in the corpus: the Polish workers, initially needed for the mines, are examined in Jeanine Ponty’s thesis<sup>30</sup>; the Jewish workers who had escaped to Paris from eastern European pogroms were described by Nancy Green<sup>31</sup>. Regarding Algerian immigration, Benjamin Stora started to cast new light on its specificity, which is due to the legacy of colonialism and decolonization<sup>32</sup>. Another notable tendency was the focus on political issues in many works, initially by researchers in the political sciences whose objective was the analysis of immigrants as subjects of debate and actors in the public sphere<sup>33</sup>. At this juncture, such works constituted the most popular area in the study of the history of immigration. Frequently recurring themes are refugees fleeing persecution, the antifascist parties in exile, and the communist organizations for foreigners, such as the specific ethnic groups of the French Communist Party during the inter-war years<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, a number of major synthesizing works appeared in the late eighties which clearly demonstrate the advances in the subject and which exemplify, by their titles, a new

vision of France itself and a renewed approach to French identity, shaped by immigration. In a collection for quite a wide readership, one book reconstructs the long history of foreigners in “the French mosaic” from very ancient times<sup>35</sup>. Gérard Noiriel himself analyses the “French crucible”<sup>36</sup>, the result of continuous immigration since the 19th century, exploring various important aspects of it. In particular, Emile Témime presents the Mediterranean city port of Marseille, its establishment in social terms as a perpetual settlement of successive migratory waves, from its ancient Greek origins until today<sup>37</sup>. Subsequent works followed the same trend, such as “All of France”<sup>38</sup>, an exhibition catalogue by the Museum of Contemporary History at the *Hôtel des Invalides* in Paris, the series for the general public “A century of immigration in France”<sup>39</sup> or an illustrated volume entitled “The People from here who come from elsewhere: immigration in France from 1900 onwards”<sup>40</sup>.

## A PLURAL FIELD OF STUDIES

A great number of scientific works have been published since then. The research has been diversified to document the place of foreigners in French society and their role in the making of contemporary France, stressing the demographic, economic or political consequences as well as their contribution to everyday life, culture, arts or sports. Although this article’s references present only the general ones, there are, of course, many specific studies about a given migratory wave or nationality. Some are based on regional territories or on a local scale, focused on specific social or professional groups, up to very recent works about the countryside and agriculture where immigrants have also had a major impact<sup>41</sup>, while some concern specific subjects such as French public opinion<sup>42</sup>, French xenophobia<sup>43</sup>, discourses and linguistic issues, when “one names to exclude”<sup>44</sup>. The research framework itself favours such an extensive production, with various university laboratories, groups of researchers or centres of study specialized in the subject.

Furthermore, an additional factor has speeded up the development of the issue. Migrants or their descendants themselves have started to grasp the importance of their specific destinies, and are increasingly investigating their own collective memory. Confronted with the deafening silence of French history, some of them have tried to bring to light vanishing episodes, disruptive events and, generally speaking, their unrecognized condition. Various associations are working in this direction. *Au nom de la mémoire* [In the Name of Remembrance], which was created with the specific intention of re-establishing the whole truth about the October 1961 Algerian demonstration in Paris, initiates works and publications. Another association, *Génériques*, has become a specialized documentation centre which has published the review *Migrance* since 1992, and has inventoried a monumental and useful record of sources on the subject under the scientific supervision of the French National Management of Archives<sup>45</sup>.

Advances in the social sciences have also had repercussions on the way the subject is treated. Abdelmalek Sayad’s sociological works<sup>46</sup>, for instance, have certainly contrib-

uted to changing the current way of thinking out 'emigration-immigration', taking account of the phenomenon as a whole in order to grasp individuals and groups in movement. This involves a trans-national approach which corresponds with the migratory experience itself. Nevertheless, in relation to the consequences of a nationally centred historiography, there is a patent lack of studies which cover the regions of origin and the settlement areas, regardless of state frontiers. Since the nineties, the matter has also been discussed in terms of the concepts and models of integration in the nation-making process<sup>47</sup>, acculturation, adaptation, cultural differences and multiculturalism, etc. As a result, all these notions have shaken up the 'French model' of integration and challenged the traditional vision of France.

Since the late nineties, these results have been disseminated to the general public piecemeal with a book collection called *Français d'ailleurs, peuples d'ici* [French from elsewhere, peoples from here] launched in 1992 or by way of illustrated paperbacks. The most important result is perhaps their impact beyond the circle of historians. Concerning the didactic aspect, one must note that things have moved slowly. While there are at present some university manuals dedicated to the history of immigration<sup>49</sup> or compilations of texts<sup>50</sup>, school programs and handbooks do not yet reflect this sufficiently. But changes are in process. For instance, the History and Geography Teachers Association dedicated three numbers of its review *Historiens & Géographes* [Historians and Geographers] to the subject in 2003-2004.

What main lines can be roughly sketched in the current historical output? Firstly, the subject of immigration challenges the vision of a national past and the issue of nationhood itself, to some extent. The way the French state has managed its influxes of population and has kept watch on migrants is particularly revealing. In other words, how the Republic has treated its foreigners provides an indication of the political situation in general. Historians have thus investigated the policies of immigration in this light, not only from a legal viewpoint but also in their practical application by public institutions, from the first attempt during World War I, via the creation of a state administration in 1946 – the National Office of Immigration – up to the current situation<sup>51</sup>. Recent works examine that phenomenon in order to construct a history of power in its own right<sup>52</sup> or a history of the concept of nationality, in the context of the achievement of nation-states from the 19th century onwards<sup>53</sup>. This point of view generates some pertinent observations about how populations have been gradually identified (using identity cards), classified, traced (by means of passports) and thereby controlled. It is also a way of questioning the exercise of State power and the extension of its sphere of activity. The consideration of the case of the 'foreigner', 'refugee' or 'immigrant' also results in an elaboration of social categories and in an examination of the social boundaries that they create. When, why and how did these very notions begin to have their current sense? What is at issue when one defines and categorizes a population<sup>54</sup>? Likewise such an issue brings to light the elements needed for a social history of public institutions, as does a recent publication about how the police have dealt with migrants<sup>55</sup>. According to the authors, migrations provide an observation post from which to understand

better the emergence of various civil service practices and administrative structures. It is thus a revealing phenomenon in French contemporary history.

The issue of immigration obviously still disturbs the French historical memory. Xenophobic periods show the state of tension in the host society itself, allowing one to assess the hidden tendencies which announce a crisis, such as the warning signs leading up to the Vichy regime. The treatment of foreigners also reveals murky chapters in France's history. The internment camps have already been mentioned, as has the role of foreigners during the French wars and especially their part in the Resistance<sup>56</sup>. The Spanish community and refugee associations have busied themselves recalling the facts of the past, above all the way France treated the republican exiles in 1939 and then forgot until recently the role they had played in the Liberation from German occupation<sup>57</sup>. But other events need to be re-examined and judged. During the past few years, for instance, the 17 October 1961 has been widely criticized<sup>58</sup>. This Algerian demonstration in Paris was brutally suppressed by the police and was then completely forgotten about until the last decade. Such a cover-up, which has implications for the legitimacy of the State, brings to the fore a different vision of the Gaullist period. Such facts have triggered the process of a wider reappraisal.

Generally speaking, a study of the dialectical inter-play between national issues and immigration allows new insights into recent history. Far from the naïve fables and mythologies, some historians argue for a "pluralist history" of France<sup>59</sup>, which allows room for the migrant communities' memories, based on pluralist approaches and possibly ethnic interpretations. The most important aspect concerns the reassessment of the colonial and postcolonial framework; how, for instance, the consequences of the colonialist project and ideology in 'French Algeria' and its failure in 1962, have interfered with North-African immigration since then. Indeed, this situation is undoubtedly the aftermath of the war of independence and is the direct consequence of the vehemence of its specific recollection<sup>60</sup>. Such critical work is just beginning. Many investigations still need to be carried out with regard to colonial, and particularly African, history. This is why Claude Liauzu has appealed for an interlinked history between immigration, colonisation and racism<sup>61</sup>. The traces of the imperialist way of thinking and European-centrist stereotypes are now commonly analyzed, that is to say, how colonial mentalities still persist up to the present and affect the collective representations about immigration<sup>62</sup>. Some books highlight the specificity of colonial and postcolonial migrations, questioning the "colonial fracture" in French contemporary society<sup>63</sup>. The current trend also favours ethnic concerns and the singularity of various paths and identities. In brief, after more than twenty years of intensive research, one could say that the issue has shifted from a 'national paradigm' to an 'ethnic paradigm'<sup>64</sup>.

Such a history actually transcends the usual boundaries as well as the problematic solely seen in national terms. Many current works are indeed largely written above or below national narratives. This should be the subject of another paper and here it is only possible to indicate certain directions. The case of internal migrations during the 19th century has updated the model of nation-making, for example. Provincial workers who

move to Paris or other industrial centres can be considered as primary migrants, whose history is understandable within the same scope as that of foreign migrants. Traditional rural society as a whole is moreover structured by population movements inside the French territory itself<sup>65</sup>. Analysis based on such a continuum could be insightful. This speaks in favour of studying movements and migrations in general, with a history of mobility and exchange. The issue is no longer 'France and the foreigners', but shifts to a history of subtle and interactive social processes, varying according to the different groups involved. Studying Italians established in eastern Paris<sup>66</sup>, researchers analyse a history of integration, but in terms of a local urban space and the transformations of the community's territories. This proves the necessity of combining different scales – local, national, trans-national – paying attention to the social networks and/or professional milieu<sup>67</sup>. The notion of the diaspora, commonly used in the case of the Jewish, Armenian or Chinese communities, may partially renew the vision of immigration, even in France, transcending the scope of national narratives.

## QUESTIONING FRENCH NATIONAL IDENTITY

How might one conclude such a sketchy outline? It sums up a very long period of time, probably too long, presenting therefore just an oversimplified view of the issue. Moreover, the corpus considered is quite disparate. The first type of studies includes solely marginally historical concerns, with an old-fashioned way of thinking it out. On the other hand, I have ended with some of the most recent works of historians, elaborated in an academic and scientific framework, and specialized in what is now a specific field of studies. Regarding a diachronic perspective, the different stages of historiography have followed the development of different way of understanding the nation and have partially contributed to its redefinition. Considering the current reappraisals of the subject, this history in the making is undoubtedly still questioning French national identity and is contributing bit by bit to changes in national awareness.

It is now a matter of exploring and preserving the traces left by immigrants. One should note, for instance, that the inventory of public sources concerning foreigners, previously mentioned, has been achieved with the official support of the national archive administration. What is truly at stake here is recognition. Immigration is still a very controversial issue. But during the political crisis resulting from the vote for French President in May 2002 and the election score of the far-right leader, more than a million French people demonstrated in the streets with the slogan: "First, second, third generation, we are all the children of immigration!". This is a symbolic way of attesting that immigration is definitely a constitutive and founding element of France's history. In this respect, the development of historiography results is, to a certain extent, altering a part of France's national collective memory. Moreover various exhibitions celebrating immigration have been mounted over the last few years. And such a strong preoccupation became so public that the possibility of a national 'museum' was raised; a place for conserving archives and documents, for doing historical research and for presenting

the issue of immigration to the public<sup>68</sup>. Subsequently, a National Centre (*Cité*) of Immigration History was created in Paris in the beginning of 2005 and will open to the public in spring 2007, at the *Palais de la Porte Dorée*.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> R. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, Cambridge 1992.
- <sup>2</sup> J. Saint-Germain, *La grande invasion*, Paris 1939.
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