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Mediterranean Migrations

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Demographics of Migration to France from mid-19th century to Present Day

France has been a main destination of immigrants since the 19th century.¹ The ethnic and demographic makeup of migrants has changed over time due to various political and economic factors. Major periods of change include pre-World War I, Post-World War II, the mid-1970s economic crisis, and present day. When examined at a larger scale, the different waves of immigration to France in the past century begin to follow a similar cycle. The processes that migrants from North African countries such as Algeria and Morocco are currently going through are mirroring the processes that Italian migrants went through earlier. If North African migrants continue to follow the path of assimilation that Italians traveled on, they will be able to achieve integration and abate the xenophobic climate that currently exists.

Italians were the largest immigrant group in France beginning from 1901 to 1968.² Much of this was the result of Italy's geographic location, as its Northwestern border aligns with France. The period between the mid-19th century and the start of World War I saw a diverse mixture of reasons and types of Italians immigrating to France. Migrants were made up of merchants and farmers, but mostly *contadini*, the farmworkers who were now proletarians and

¹ Marie-Claude Blanc-Cheleard. "Old and New Migrants in France: Italians and Algerians." In *Paths of Integration: Migrants in Western Europe (1880-2004)*, edited by Leo Lucassen, David Feldman and Jochen Oltmer, 46-62. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.

² *Ibid.*, 46

sought work in France.³ These were the poorest of the immigrants, and made a living doing the hardest, most dangerous work, much like the new arrivals in today's France. The French public hated these newcomers and considered them "dirty, dangerous, knife-welding enemies of the Republic".⁴

The period between the World Wars saw immigrants from a wider geographic area of Italy entering France as migrants from Northeast and Central Italy joined those from the Northwest who crossed the border. In 1931, one third of the foreigners in France were from Italy.⁵ Many of the immigrants in this wave of migration were seeking refugee from fascist regimes. This period differed from previous waves because of laws that encouraged permanent settlement of immigrant families in France, rather than single men seeking work. Examples included a 1932 law putting a quota on foreign workers, and a 1927 law that facilitated naturalization.⁶ This growth in families witnessed a change beginning to take place in French society.

While the 1930s was filled with violent acts against foreigners, especially against the Italians who were associated with Mussolini and fascism, the hostilities began to calm around the end of the 50s. With the number of the Italian families settling in France permanently increasing, Italians were beginning to be seen by the French public as possible of assimilation. Eventually, "the Italians had become *transparent* inside French society."⁷ Even in the second half of the century, no community groups or ethnic enclaves were found attached to Italian immigration.⁸

³ Ibid., 47

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 48

⁸ Ibid.

With Italians becoming fully integrated in French society, and rates of Italian migrants seeking jobs in France declining, room for migrants from different regions opened up. In the years prior and during World War I, France was in need of workers for factory and mining jobs. This began formal recruitment for workers and soldiers that started a wave of emigration. In the French army, 40,000 Moroccans and 150,000 Algerians served.⁹ *Serivce d'Emigration*, established in 1938, controlled recruitment of workers before and during World War II, which saw more immigration for the purpose of labor. The Moroccans recruitment through the government often came from rural areas such as The Rif, Oriental, and Souss.¹⁰ However, irregular migration that occurred with no recruiting and transaction costs were financially beneficial for employers as they were able to pay these workers lower wages.¹¹

Post-World War II saw the emergence of North Africa, specifically Algeria, as the country of origin for immigrants. Many Algerian men sought work in French urban areas to combat the increasing poverty in Algeria.¹² Like the Italian immigrants before them, Algerian workers in France worked the worst jobs as manual laborers. As non-Europeans, Algerians faced different kinds of racism. Algeria as a French colony created a complex view of paternalistic responsibility over the country mixed with a view of savageness.¹³ Additionally, Anti-Arab racism created a rise in murders, forcing the Algerian government to suspend emigration in

⁹ Axel Kreienbrink. "Country of Emigratoin and New Country of Immigration? Challenges for Moroccan Migration Policy between Africa and Europe." P 195.

¹⁰ Ibid., 196

¹¹ Ibid., 196

¹² Marie-Claude Blanc-Cheleard. "Old and New Migrants in France: Italians and Algerians." P. 52

¹³ Marie-Claude Blanc-Cheleard. "Old and New Migrants in France: Italians and Algerians." P 52.

September 1973. The following year, France suspended worker immigration, forcing a policy of stabilization, which renewed xenophobia.

The main demographic shift in non-European migration to France in the 1970s was from temporary migrant workers prior to the mid-1970s, to permanent family settlement post mid-1970s. Physically, the city landscape began to change as well. Immigrant communities began to shift into settler communities and the use of the word ghetto became more prominent, even before World War II.¹⁴ These permanent settler communities can be attributed to earlier recruitment programs. Workers were recruited from the same areas and then worked in the same area of France, creating a trans-national community that remained intact in the destination country.¹⁵ Algerians, as well as Portuguese and other foreign families descended from immigrants, were moved from shantytowns to public housing projects (HLM).¹⁶ These communities facilitated permanent settlement and communities, but slowed the process of assimilation in French society.

1974 saw the first of the 1970s oil crises. The resulting economic crisis crippled Europe, halting immigration. However, once the suspension of family unification was reversed, the number of women and children immigrants grew immensely post-1974. For example, in

¹⁴ Martin A. Schain. *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States: A Comparative Study*. 2nd Edition ed. Palgrave Macmillan,. P 46.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marie-Claude Blanc-Cheleard. "Old and New Migrants in France: Italians and Algerians." In *Paths of Integration: Migrants in Western Europe (1880-2004)*, edited by Leo Lucassen, David Feldman and Jochen Oltmer, 46-62. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006. P 53.

1984, 77% of immigration was for Family Unification.¹⁷ For a short time, women actually made up the majority of immigrants to France. The main reason for immigration to France was now to unite families rather than for work or economic gain. The return rate of Moroccan workers became one of the lowest in history.¹⁸ Today, the numbers of male and female immigrants have balanced out and are at similar levels.¹⁹ This resulted in a new generation of minorities being born in France to immigrant parents and grandparents.²⁰ However, the 1980s saw a violent rise of xenophobia as the influx of Maghreb families in the nation were seen as inassimilable²¹ This was a striking contrast from the Italian immigrants of the first half of the century, whose European status and similarities made assimilation attainable. However, that assimilation took time, and there is hope that racism against Arab and Muslim immigrants will become less widespread as migrations continue and these newcomers become more engrained with French culture. As immigrants are migrating to France more frequently with the intention of remaining there, they have shifted their focus less on their countries of origins, and more on the wellbeing of the family households in their new country of residence. “[Moroccan] Immigrants adapted themselves to the conditions of their host countries and also became more similar to host populations in their social characteristics.”²² Migrants from North Africa do face larger hurdles than Italians, however, since their general appearance, culture, and religion, differs more visibly

¹⁷ Martin A. Schain. *The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain, and the United States: A Comparative Study*. 2nd Edition ed. Palgrave Macmillan,. P 51.

¹⁸ Axel Kreienbrink. "Country of Emigratoin and New Country of Immigration? Challenges for Moroccan Migration Policy between Africa and Europe." P 197.

¹⁹ Focus on Migration

²⁰ Alec Hargreaves. "Veiled Truths: Discourses of Ethnicity in Contemporary France."P 84.

²¹ Marie-Claude Blanc-Cheleard. "Old and New Migrants in France: Italians and Algerians." P 46.

²² Axel Kreienbrink. "Country of Emigratoin and New Country of Immigration? Challenges for Moroccan Migration Policy between Africa and Europe." P 197.

from the French status quo than that of migrants from Italy and other Southern European countries.

Currently, with 5 million Muslims, France is home to the European Union's largest Muslim population.²³ The exact number of French citizens who are Muslims is not accurately known, as it's against the law for census takers to record a citizen's race, religion, or ethnicity, due to laws made in accordance with France's "republican values"²⁴ and their strong belief in the concept of *laïcité*.²⁵ However, Muslims in France have received much national and international attention in recent years. This large minority has been victim to racism and xenophobia from the French public, especially after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

From the mid-19th century to present day, a cycle has emerged that shows the similarities between the different waves of immigration to France. Regardless of the country of origin, the first arrivals were males who came to France to find work. The World Wars of the first half of the century drove the demand for labor and even necessitated recruitment of foreign workers. While Italians dominated the first wave, later migration was dominated by North Africans, specifically Algerians and Moroccans. Both of these groups saw the same shift in demographics, from temporary male workers to families of women and children settling permanently. Whenever there is a major change in the demographics of immigration, xenophobia occurs. When policies were enacted that made permanent settlement of foreign families possible, periods

²³ *focus on Migration: France*

²⁴ Dickey, Christopher. "Marseille's Melting Pot." *National Geographic* 221, no. 3 (2012).

²⁵ Tom Cahill "An Immigrant in France: Trying to Understand the Headscarff." *Anarchist Studies* 14, no. 1 (2006). P, 52.

of high racism followed. For example, the 1927 law that eased naturalization saw more Italian families settling in France, but was followed by strong anti-Italian sentiment in the 1930s, as these newcomers were labeled as fascists. However, Italians eventually were able to assimilate and are now transparent in French society. The more recent North African migrants are currently in the discrimination and societal separation phase of the immigration cycle. After family unification in the 1970s saw permanent settlement of Muslim families in France, acts of violence increased. Northern Africans and Muslims are seen as terrorists, just as the Italians before them were associated with fascism. However, just as Italians were able to overcome this phase of the cycle, North African migrants can also move towards assimilation. One of the major steps can be to leave public housing and ethnic enclaves and physically integrate into French society.

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