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Title: “Citizenship, Culture, and the Ethnicization of Politics: The Case of North Africans in Postwar Paris”

This paper will seek to interrogate the notion of citizenship in the French context during the mid-twentieth century. As French republican theory would have it, the granting of citizenship to colonial populations living and working in the metropole makes immigrants into Frenchmen, with all the concomitant rights and duties. However, as recent research has shown, the graduated bequeathal of full citizenship to the Algerian population in France was mitigated by state mechanisms – most notably, policing – that positioned North Africans and particularly Algerians as a distinct population. The peculiar articulation of this citizenship (“French Muslims of Algeria”) itself suggests that despite putative legal parity with indigenous French citizens, these citizens are of a different order. In other words, a cultural difference is registered in the legal language itself that creates the paradoxical situation in which Algerians are the same yet different.

The actual social and political force of citizenship can be approximated through the dual study of its “formal” aspects (legal and policy history) and its “substantive” aspects (access to rights, privileges, etc.). By providing a historical analysis of the paradoxical legal status of “French Muslims of Algeria” coupled with that of the particularism in police methods, this paper will show that the North African population in postwar Paris was systematically denied substantive citizenship, thus making their formal parity moot. The result of this social and political exclusion from French public life resulted in the creation of immigrant associations that embraced their real and imagined ethno-cultural difference, the accentuation of anti-colonial/nationalist sentiment amongst

the immigrant community, and the increasing penetration and surveillance of and by the French state into immigrant associational life.

The paper is essentially divided into two sections; the first dealing with the pressures shaping immigrant access to citizenship in the metropole and the second treating the resulting effects of these pressures.

Section I: Pressures

The principal pressures contouring North African immigrants' access to citizenship in postwar Paris were the particular legislation regarding them and the particularism of policing methods. Taking the case of Algerians, we can briefly note that the instability of their legal designation had both spatial and temporal dimensions: rules often applying in Algeria but not in France, or in France but only after a certain point in time. However, after 1947, "French Muslims from Algeria" were allegedly equal to French citizens in the metropole, but they often found themselves automatically at the end of the line for social assistance and discriminated against by employers and landlords. Not only did the particular terminology of their legal identity set them apart from ordinary French citizens, the actions of the state—especially, the Ministry of the Interior and the Paris Police Prefecture—made for what can be termed an imperial governmentality that, in fact, outlived the French imperial era. In this section, I will present some of my research from the Paris police archives, the archives of the Paris region, and the Administrative Library of the City of Paris to describe how this particular governance worked.

Section II: Results

In response to formal and informal discrimination in France, North African immigrants created various associations in order to provide services as diverse as social assistance to literacy classes to political education. Interestingly, while a discourse of irreducible civilizational and ethno-cultural difference underpinned the particularist approach in policing methods, North Africans embraced this putative difference in order to build their associational life. Here while we should hesitate in assuming that an ethnic endogamy was purely reactive, it can also be read as playing into a larger discourse that conflates ethnique with the political. It thus makes sense that given the circumstances—socio-political exclusion and the increasing embrace of ethno-cultural difference by North African immigrants—that the North African population in France was particularly active and ready to participate in nationalist/anti-colonial movements. A final result, one that we may note was in continual symbiosis with particularist policing practices, was the extension rather than the relaxation of police methods vis-à-vis immigrants. In this section, I will present examples of immigrant associations from the interwar to the postwar period, Algerian nationalist propaganda in the metropole, and research from the Paris police archives to show the expansion of police surveillance of immigrants.

Conclusions/Questions

Presently, it would be interesting for sociologists and anthropologists to gauge the extent of particularist police surveillance amongst immigrant communities in France. The French literature treating the 1970s-1990s shows that rather than a rapprochement between the police and immigrants in France, things might actually have gotten worse.

Thus, with a large immigrant population and with ever-growing second and third generations, to what extent can one say the republican model of citizenship is still operational in France? Though it may have a lively rhetorical life, in practice, is it time to speak of French universalism in the past tense?