

Introduction



Boris M. and Bruno G. were among the nearly quarter of a million foreign migrants who legally entered France with work contracts in 1923.¹ Boris came from Russia and had been evacuated from Sebastopol by French authorities after the Bolsheviks established their rule following several years of civil war. Bruno, an Italian, left his wife behind in Rome and departed for France to seek a more reliable source of income.

France had relied on foreigners to supplement its native workforce since the middle of the nineteenth century. But the tide of migration that brought Bruno and Boris to France was unprecedented in size. In 20 years, the country's foreign population almost tripled, from just over a million to nearly three million, surpassing the United States' rate of foreign population growth in 1931, a demographic shift unknown in other European nations before the Second World War.² Indeed, no modern European democracy has faced the challenges posed by mass immigration earlier or more persistently than has France. This book is about how French citizens and migrants confronted the conflicts arising from this encounter as they negotiated migrants' rights and their limits. It uncovers the hidden history of inequality that lay behind the official egalitarianism of the French Third Republic. In so doing, it exposes the origins of France's contemporary immigration policy.

Admitted legally in 1923, Boris M. and Bruno G. also figured among the more than 93,000 foreigners who were expelled by order of the Interior Ministry between 1919 and 1933.³ Bruno was expelled in 1924, Boris in 1932—both for the same reason: vagrancy. However, by the spring of 1936, neither had left. Authorities recognized Bruno G.'s continued residence in France, suspending his expulsion order several times before finally rescinding it for good in July 1936. In September of that same year, Boris M. was imprisoned for failing to honor his expulsion order; this was at least the seventh time since 1932 that he had been incarcerated for

that reason. In 1941, Boris began a year long sentence for this infraction; finally, later that same year, officials instead placed him under a form of house arrest, ordering him to live in the rural district outside of Arles. While Bruno G. remained in France through at least the 1950s, we have no trace of Boris M. after 1941.

These cases and thousands like them raise unaddressed historical questions. How could expelled migrants remain in France? Why, given that the two men were expelled for identical infractions of the French penal code, was Boris M. condemned to a life of insecurity and illegality while Bruno G. repeatedly earned legal recognition of his residency? What accounted for changes in their rights over time? How could such inequalities in treatment develop in a nation that officially eschewed discrimination as anathema to the values of its one and indivisible republic? Discovering the answers to such questions requires probing beneath the formal structure of immigration law to reconstruct how rights were put into practice. Doing so reveals that the republic was never monolithic in its incorporation of immigrants. It was neither wholly inclusive nor entirely exclusive, and it was certainly not egalitarian.

My purpose in entitling this book *The Boundaries of the Republic* is threefold. First, I wish to emphasize the ways in which the universalism of the republic was bounded. Second, the term “boundaries” calls attention to the many other divisions—diplomatic, political, administrative, or social—that helped to draw the borderline between inclusion and exclusion at any one time and for any particular migrant. Migrant rights turned not only on legal boundaries but also on a whole array of relationships that erected or broke down obstacles to exercising them. Together these factors could mean the difference between social security and destitution, personal freedom and imprisonment, or sustaining a life in France and being forced to leave. Third, in choosing to use the plural—“boundaries,” not “boundary”—I suggest that the republic’s limits were not fixed or stable but fungible. Migrants’ rights were not uniform; they expanded and contracted, fluctuating from person to person, migrant group to migrant group, city to city, and year to year. Indeed, drawing on Charles Tilly, one might say that migrants’ “citizenship” ranged from thin, “when it entail[ed] few transactions, rights and obligations,” to thick, “where it occupie[d] a significant share of all transactions, rights, and obligations sustained by state agents and between people living under their jurisdiction.”⁴ Moreover, the arrangements forming the bases of rights changed over time. Rights once regarded as thick could seem to disappear into thin air.

No single word in French captures the set of rights organized around the assumption of temporary migration the way that “guest worker” or

“*gastarbeiter*” does in English or German. Nonetheless, in the wake of the First World War, France established Europe’s first “guest-worker” regime in all but name. In the 1920s, France’s guest-worker system, like all subsequent ones, linked residency rights to labor contracts. During the depression, however, this rights regime was inverted, and the right to work came increasingly to depend on residency rights. A temporary migration policy had led to an immigration regime, premised on the selective incorporation of permanent settlers. Throughout this book, the terms “migration” or “migrant” and “immigration” or “immigrant” denote this change in status.

Because the shift from migration to immigration regime occurred in practice before it was recognized by policy, it has been disregarded by most historians. This book redresses that neglect. Although policy remained outwardly committed to the guest-worker model, in practice, France jettisoned its labor migration regime in the 1930s for a politics of population building. Instead of continuing to favor the temporary residency of single male migrants, authorities now gave special privileges to immigrants who had established families in France and could prove long-term ties there. As important as this transformation was, it was uneven and impermanent. Even those who emerged as the most protected of France’s immigrants discovered this to their dismay, as hysteria over national security once again transformed migrant rights on the eve of the Second World War. By reconstructing this history, I shed new light on the promise of the French Third Republic in its final two decades, the inequalities it engendered, and the legacies left by its uneven rights arrangements.

FRANCE, THE LIBERAL PARADOX, AND AN ILLIBERAL ERA

Among European countries, France was the first to experience a paradox most democratic capitalist societies now confront. If democratic culture and free-enterprise economies oblige liberal societies to maintain relatively open borders, states pursue openness only to the extent consistent with maintaining domestic political and economic stability.⁵ This generally requires a greater degree of what Max Weber called “social closure” than that allowed in a purely free market economy.⁶ France precociously developed forms of policing aimed to enforce that closure.⁷

France’s liberal paradox presented a particularly acute problem in the two decades following the First World War because it was precisely at this time that the question of migrant rights posed its greatest challenge yet to

French society. Although France survived the war with its political system intact, in many respects its victory was a Pyrrhic one. Fought to a great extent on French soil, the war devastated huge portions of the Northeast and dramatically reduced agricultural and industrial production. Proportionately, France lost more men than any of the other Western-front belligerents. As migrants flowed into France to fill the jobs left by some 1.5 million dead and at least another million disabled soldiers, they alternately served as unwelcome reminders of France's weaknesses as a nation and as beacons of hope for its future. How permanent a place they would occupy in that future, however, was a matter of great debate.

At a minimum, migrants proved essential to France's punctual postwar reconstruction needs. But other factors also encouraged immigration. The war and its settlements triggered the twentieth century's first refugee crisis, and France emerged from the war as the Western democracy with the fewest barriers to immigration.⁸ In continental Europe, France stood out as one of the few countries where immigration was more significant than emigration.

Even so, France's openness to migration was hardly unconditional. In the 1920s, the union movement aimed to prevent employers from using migrants to undercut domestic wages. During the depression, citizens placed new pressures on their democratic representatives to constrain migrant rights. Quotas reduced the percentage of foreigners allowed to work in most industries, restrictions were placed on foreigners practicing medicine and law, and eventually merchants and artisans also demanded protection of their professions from competition by migrants. As French citizens' demands engendered new constraints on economic liberalism, the dimming of political liberalism's prospects in Europe sent new waves of refugees toward France.⁹ As xenophobia in France mounted, authorities faced the dilemma of limiting immigration while defending a political culture based on liberal principles.

Two aspects of French political life rendered this task especially confounding. First, France had plenty of homegrown antiliberals. Fascist-style leagues questioned the legitimacy of parliamentary democracy and, in 1934, came as close as they ever would to bringing down the republic. Along with the emergence of the Communist Party on the Left, the advent of rightist leagues contributed to the polarization of politics. Migrants were often caught in their crossfire. Second was the question of whether or how colonialism and liberal democracy could be squared with each other. Although these two forces had always been in tension, the advent of migration from the empire brought these issues "home" in new ways.

The France that welcomed tens of thousands of foreign migrants each year after the war was in need of total reconstruction—physical, demo-

graphic, and moral. It was a republic whose liberalism was contested from within and without and a nation that clung desperately to its colonies even as it faced mounting resistance inside them. Immigration cut to the heart of each of the problems facing France: Reconstruction was impossible without importing labor; the use of police power vis-à-vis migrants often challenged liberal principles; and if rights were extended to migrants from the empire, the very basis of imperialism might be threatened. State officials, from the petty bureaucrats responsible for issuing identification cards in municipal offices to the heads of all the major ministries in Paris, juggled, in one way or another, these often conflicting interests, an endeavor rendered all the more difficult by the frequent shuffling of governments.¹⁰ Migrants, in turn, had to respond to—and find ways to exploit—these tensions in order to make lives for themselves in France.

BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

Invented piecemeal during and immediately following the First World War, French guest-worker regulations were crafted to ensure that migrants would work only where the labor market most needed them and that they would return home once their services were no longer required. If all had operated as planned, Bruno G. would have returned to Italy in 1924 rather than wander around Greater Lyon until he was arrested. And Boris M. would have returned home as well, even though he regarded himself as a political refugee. Should he have wanted to leave France, there were few if any countries, including the Soviet Union, that would have accepted him as a legal migrant.¹¹

In fact, however, very little in the lives of Bruno G. and Boris M. followed the bureaucratic plan for regulating immigration that had been drawn up by French authorities since the conclusion of the war. Official Labor Ministry policy held that foreign workers were “more easily ready for changes in region, and even in profession,” than were the French, who were “constrained by their families, their homes, or who, even if they are single, have a harder time leaving the environment where they have often lived for many years.”¹² Authorities prized foreign workers precisely because the former believed that they could “place them in other regions or professions or, if necessary, favor repatriation” when work became scarce.¹³ Yet the fact that neither Bruno nor Boris left the country after losing his job suggests that both men were incorporated, however imperfectly, into the society beyond the walls of the factories that employed them. Labor officials had called for workers, but, to invoke an oft-quoted aphorism, human beings had come instead.¹⁴

The trajectories of Bruno G. and Boris M. do not merely prove that the French state had imperfect control over immigration. They also illustrate the degree to which the impact of state control was felt differently across space, over time, and between migrants of different origins. To be sure, France developed the “largest, most sophisticated immigration service anywhere in the world”—in Paris.¹⁵ But in the provinces, police personnel numbered in the hundreds rather than the tens of thousands.¹⁶ Moreover, provincial archives offer a wealth of information not available in the capital. Thanks to the special access I was granted to look at closed records, I have been able to reconstruct, as well as compare, the quotidian decisions of individual migrants and state agents. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of France’s immigration history.

At first glance, nothing suggests that Bruno and Boris would encounter such different fates. They were about the same age upon arrival (31 and 34), were accompanied by no family, and had been legally admitted to work in France; the only feature distinguishing them was nationality. Officially, migrants of all nationalities faced identical controls: Even refugees were required to have valid labor contracts if they intended to work in France, and they were no more exempt from French laws on foreign-resident identification cards than were other foreigners. The fact that both men lost their jobs also first appears to explain little, since neither left the country as a result. If anything, one might think that Bruno G., who lost his job rather quickly, would have faced more troubles than did Boris M., who did not confront sustained unemployment until the depression. Already by mid-1924, Bruno was looking for work when he was stopped in Oullins, a suburb of Lyon, for vagrancy. He was expelled on 23 July 1924, barely seven months after his admission to the country had first been approved.

Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that losing a job in Lyon’s booming industrial suburbs in 1924 did not impinge on the residency rights of migrants in the same way that losing regular work on Marseille’s docks did in the 1930s. In the 1920s, as Chapter 1 shows, Lyon police were not particularly concerned by unemployment; instead, they were preoccupied with foreigners’ militancy in the workplace. Perhaps this was why they made little effort to find Bruno until the spring of 1926, when they first notified him of his expulsion, almost two years after it was ordered. By that time, however, Bruno had been working at the Union Mutuelle des Propriétaires Lyonnais (UM), most likely in construction, for a year and a half. Upon learning of Bruno’s expulsion, UM offered him an official contract for a year, and Bruno employed a lawyer, Jean Kreher, to intervene on his behalf to secure legal residency. Following the recommendation of Lyon’s chief of police, the Interior Ministry

approved a three-month suspension (*sursis*) of his expulsion; subsequently, Bruno succeeded in repeatedly renewing his *sursis*. Here, guest-worker regulations proved malleable. UM initially had disregarded them altogether by hiring Bruno without a contract, and then, at precisely the moment that Bruno's illegal residency in the country was discovered, it drew on guest-worker arrangements to help legalize Bruno's situation, offering him a valid contract.

Bruno was fortunate in his timing. He lost his job before the depression hit France and before the related attack on foreign employment. Later, when dramatic unemployment plagued Lyon's industries, Rhône officials spearheaded a crackdown on foreigners, and Bruno's case exemplified their shifting priorities. Authorities complained that he was still working at UM "while the number of French who are unemployed is still very high in Greater Lyon." Recommending reexpulsion, the prefect placed Bruno within the guest-worker model, calling attention to his lack of ties in France, exemplified by the fact that "his wife still resides in Italy." For the central government, however, Bruno's temporary status was not in itself a problem as long as he remained employed.¹⁷ Thanks in part to turf wars between the central ministry and its local representatives, Bruno continued to receive *sursis*, which placed him in the position to request the annulment of his expulsion order two years later.

By contrast, Boris M.'s timing was less propitious, since he lost his job as thousands of others did. Arrested between stints as a stevedore in Marseille in 1932, Boris was notified of his expulsion on 10 August, the very day the French parliament passed a new law establishing quotas on foreign employment. What was more, Boris' arrest had come on Marseille's docks, where police were particularly uncompromising toward foreigners they regarded as transients. Had he worked in a different profession, or lived in a different neighborhood, or even had an official address, he might have found police more accommodating, as they so often were to foreigners who could show that they were respected in their community or had set down lasting roots. Chapter 1 explains the stratification of rights between Marseille's seemingly settled immigrants and its more unsettled migrants. Boris fell into this latter category. He had no regular residence in Marseille, even though he had worked there on and off since 1931, when he had been laid off from an industrial job in nearby Salins-de-Giraud. Like many others down on their luck, he worked on the docks; this meant that he circulated in the city center, where police surveillance was intense. Unable to extricate himself from this precarious existence, Boris was repeatedly incarcerated for failing to obey the expulsion order.

Having few ties in Marseille, Boris had not established many elsewhere in France either. When Bruno G. lost his first job, he stayed in the Lyon

area and, apparently, was well-enough connected to know that Jean Kreher took on migrants' cases.¹⁸ When his expulsion was rescinded, he had been working at the same company for 12 years. Boris' work history, by contrast, had been much more varied. One account had him changing jobs five times in six years and living in four different parts of France, including Corsica, before returning to mainland France. What the French had once prized in migrants—mobility—was now a liability.

Not only social associations but also international relations affected Boris' plight. After serving several prison sentences for failing to leave the country, he wrote to the Bouches-du-Rhône prefect, pointing out that as a refugee without papers, he was welcome in no other country. Boris' status as a refugee had other important effects on his welfare. Until 1937, Russians were barred from receiving unemployment assistance in Marseille, on the basis that only foreigners whose countries had signed reciprocity treaties with France were eligible. Policies such as these were commonplace in France's decentralized welfare state and became increasingly so as the depression took its toll on local budgets. Because of this, a class of what I call most-favored foreigners—those whose countries of origin signed guest-worker arrangements with France—often gained access to social rights. It was only after 1936, when the Popular Front ratified the 1933 Geneva Convention, that Marseille and other cities reluctantly began including Russians and Armenians on their unemployment rolls. Still others continued to lack most-favored-nation status and thereby fell outside the boundaries of social rights.

The election of the Center-Left Popular Front coalition seemed at first to change Boris' fortune, as it relaxed enforcement of hard-line immigration policies put into place by the Center-Right governments that preceded it. Like Bruno G. had years earlier, Boris now benefited from a three-month suspension of his expulsion order. For almost two years, he managed to get the suspension renewed. By the time the Popular Front coalition collapsed in 1938, however, his unemployment was not just occasional but chronic, and he resorted to living in shelters and eking out a living as a ragpicker. Temporary approvals of his residency in France could neither guarantee him work nor find him a place to live. His administrative grace ran out, the prison sentences resumed, and the time he spent incarcerated grew longer, as the decree laws of May 1938 mandated a minimum sentence of six months to three years for any infraction of expulsion.

Bruno G. and Boris M. had arrived in France the same year, but thereafter their trajectories diverged. Where the two men lived and how often they moved, where they had come from and whom they knew, what companies they worked for and when they lost their jobs—all these factors

contributed to making Boris more of a stranger in France by the late 1930s than was Bruno. Except for a brief reprieve under the Popular Front, Boris became less—rather than more—secure over time. Bruno's trajectory was quite the opposite: He almost immediately lost his job and was expelled, but he then earned formal recognition of his residence after several years. This outcome, however, was not preordained: Police officials in Lyon clearly thought that Bruno did not belong in 1934, and Marseille officials were willing to give Boris a chance to prove he did in 1936, albeit after first incarcerating him at least seven times. Bruno and Boris encountered shifting boundaries to inclusion in the republic. Their rights ebbed and flowed.

Accounting for such divergences demands a different way of studying immigration. If some scholars of immigration have focused on the processes of "assimilation," "integration," or "adaptation" that migrants allegedly go through, others have turned their attention to cultural retention or even culture clashes.¹⁹ Still others have centered their inquiries on identification and control, using immigration as a lens into the nature of the modern state, the distinction between democracy and totalitarianism, and, more specifically, the connections between the Third Republic and Vichy France.²⁰ By focusing on rights, this book exposes a realm of experience and historical contingency left largely obscure by previous scholarship.

BETWEEN PARIS AND THE PROVINCES

Because immigration policy and everyday experience heretofore have been analyzed independently of each other, our understanding of the place that immigration occupies in French history remains incomplete. Scholars focusing on regulatory regimes have assumed a generally straightforward relationship between legal prescriptions and the functioning of society, albeit often reaching vastly different conclusions in so doing. These scholars sometimes acknowledge but rarely analyze the uneven application of immigration policy.²¹ Meanwhile, most work that considers the human drama of migration tends to focus either on a particular ethnic group or on a single region.²² Rather than isolate a single place or a particular national or ethnic group, or assume that Paris can stand in for France, I reconstruct the divergent life trajectories of diverse migrants in the two largest cities outside Paris, adopting an approach that is both locally focused and comparative in perspective.

Focusing on Marseille and Lyon provides illuminating detail on the everyday lives of migrants. Readers are transported to the very places

where migrants confronted and contested the limits of their rights, where employers hired and fired them, and where local officials struggled to maintain authority and social peace. Already large cosmopolitan cities before the First World War, Lyon and Marseille became urban metropolises during the period under study here. Home to many industries and commercial interests, cities such as Lyon and Marseille attracted migrants “like moths to light.”²³ Compared to their counterparts living in France’s agricultural regions, company towns, or mono-industrial areas, migrants in Lyon and Marseille encountered a wide range of employment opportunities. Each city also attracted similar groups of migrants: Italians, Spanish, Armenians, Russians, and North Africans in the 1920s, as well as Jewish migrants from Germany and other Central European countries in the 1930s.²⁴ These similarities make for a compelling comparison between the cities.

Yet the differences between the two cities also allow us to better discern the bases on which migrants claimed rights, as well as how these shifted across space and over time. Marseille and Lyon were two of only a handful of cities whose police forces fell under central state authority, but police centralization turned out to mean very different things in each place. Differences in urban geography and infrastructure also are brought into relief by virtue of comparison, as are contrasting patterns in labor, economic, and political relations. The postwar guest-worker system meant one thing in Lyon, where migrants staffed large-scale around-the-clock production floors in capital-intensive firms, and quite another in Marseille, where migrants facilitated the labor flexibility favored by the seasonal nature of the city’s commercial shipping and manufacturing cycle. In turn, the cities experienced economic crises at different times and in distinct ways.

Combining this local focus with a comparative approach illuminates two dimensions of the stratification of migrant rights. First, comparison demonstrates how national policies were modified locally in two cities of critical importance to French economic and political life. Second, it identifies the uneven effects of policy on three different types of migrants—labor migrants, stateless refugees, and colonial subjects—whose histories are often studied separately.

Moreover, the comparative approach reveals the relationship of the local to the national in the foundation of migrant rights. Indeed, France’s immigration policy was not simply implemented locally but in important respects constructed locally—through the interplay of national expectations and conditions on the ground. Often, migrant rights developed dialectically, as central authorities placed limits on migrants’ civil liberties and social rights, migrants tested these limits, local officials responded,

and national authorities in turn reacted to decisions made at the local level. Migrants' abilities to exploit this dynamic were uneven, not to mention ephemeral, as the late 1930s proved. The same factors that opened the doors of the republic in some circumstances helped close them in others.

Complementing the book's local focus and comparative approach is a broader perspective that places local communities within patterns of regional, national, and transnational exchange. After all, immigration history is never merely about where migrants arrive; it is also about the places from which they come. And while immigration policy is an expression of national sovereignty, state sovereignty is not exercised in a vacuum. This was especially the case in Europe in the aftermath of the Great War, when borders shifted, populations were displaced, new democracies and novel forms of dictatorship emerged, relations between metropolises and colonies were realigned, and alliances were brokered and broken. This book shows the effects of Europe's changing political landscape by situating local-level negotiations over migrant rights within these broader developments. Even the most locally based policy decisions regarding social rights often drew on inequalities engendered by the postwar world order. In this sense, as well, rights were contingent. As international and imperial relations shifted over the course of the interwar period, so too did their impact on migrant rights at the local level.

To show that migrant rights depended on local, national, imperial, and international relationships, I have drawn on a broad array of primary and secondary materials, ranging from local police, employment, and welfare records to parliamentary debates, central government memoranda, diplomatic correspondence, and more. Exploiting sources of such depth and breadth, I show that rights did not exist as stable abstractions; rather, they depended on the way economic conditions, social connections, political pressures, bureaucratic disputes, international affairs, and imperial relations combined to shape, and eventually alter, their form both within and beyond the law.

The materials contained in these archives were highly mediated. Migrants' letters to authorities, for instance, told stories, and sometimes their narratives were rather formulaic. Yet migrants were not the only ones crafting stories about their lives as they negotiated the extent or limit of their rights. State officials, too, shaped the way they told a migrant's life story in accordance with their own expectations—of what their job was, how their superiors might respond, or how they understood the “national interest.” In drawing on such sources, I have not seen my role as deciding which version is “true,” although I sometimes point out contradictions or differences in emphasis, and there are some matters that are

less open to interpretation than others. Rather, I am more interested in understanding the interactions that are revealed through such exchanges, since these produced, or in turn curtailed, migrant rights.²⁵

THE LIMITS OF UNIVERSALISM

By demonstrating that migrant rights depended on contingent relationships, this book mounts a double challenge to existing scholarship. First, historicizing the practice of migrant rights casts doubt on the French myth of republican citizenship and offers an alternative understanding of immigration's importance in twentieth-century French life. Second, it suggests the limits of more general social-scientific arguments regarding the relationship between immigration policy and national sovereignty.

Proponents of the French myth of republican citizenship generally contrast an "assimilationist" and "universalist" French system of immigrant integration to one of two alternative approaches characterized either as "Anglo-American" (or, sometimes, "Anglo-Saxon") pluralism or "restrictive" German "differentialism."²⁶ These contrasts often are more prescriptive than descriptive.

Frequently depicted as timeless, the republican model of citizenship in fact developed in response to recent historical events, especially the rising popularity in the 1980s of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of France's extreme-Right anti-immigrant party, the National Front.²⁷ In this context, French scholars and public officials tried to best Le Pen at his own game—defending French identity. Casting Le Pen's rhetoric as fundamentally un-French, they defined France as a "universal nation of equal and free citizens."²⁸ This rhetorical move not only emphasized citizens' equality before the law; it also insisted on the equal opportunity of immigrants to become French. If the French republic excludes foreigners, the argument goes, it does so by treating them uniformly.

As a powerful ideal, the republican model should not be discounted. It dates to the very foundations of French republicanism and concerns many aspects of life in France beyond the question of immigration. As the French sought to remake their polity following violent revolutionary upheaval in 1789, they set about eliminating the Old Regime's system of unequal rights and privileges. Provinces of enormous range in size were cut up and replaced by departments, uniform in dimension, each with equal standing vis-à-vis the capital. Feudal privileges were abolished, as were exemptions from taxation for the nobility. Jews were granted citizenship, in order that they might not constitute "an Order in the state."²⁹ Efforts were made to root out provincial languages, so that no barriers to understanding would

come between the nation's citizens. Eventually, under the First Republic, the Jacobins instituted a new form of measurement—metrics—hoping to forge a citizenry with a common understanding of space. Even slavery in the colonies was, briefly, abolished. Of course, efforts to make the republic one and indivisible sometimes became excessive, as under the Terror, when differences between citizens fed accusations of treason and “enemies of the republic” were exiled or executed.

Still, Jacobinism, as this centralizing and homogenizing tendency has since been known, has had a powerful impact on relations between the capital and the periphery, and between the nation and its citizens. It is the legacy of Jacobinism that best explains why a plan to devolve certain legislative rights to Corsica was declared unconstitutional in January 2002 by France's constitutional council. The same penchant for eschewing legal boundaries between citizens explains the furor that ensued when the demographer Michèle Tribalat suggested in the 1990s that some form of ethnicity be traced in the French census.³⁰ Traditions of universalism were also invoked repeatedly in parliamentary debates leading to the legislature's overwhelming support for a 2004 ban on the wearing of religious symbols in French public schools; their authorization, legislators argued, would be tantamount to officially recognizing ethnic or religious difference.³¹ And the Jacobin heritage also helps explain why the suggestion made by Nicolas Sarkozy, as leader of the majority party in parliament, that France consider reopening its borders to legal labor migration through a system of “quotas” for certain professions and nationalities, has raised hackles, including within his own party: The president of the National Assembly, Jean-Louis Debré, condemned quotas for foreigners as “divisive” in January 2005 and even suggested that the proposition risked provoking a “regime crisis.” Sarkozy has since ceased using the word “quota,” but his continued advocacy for selection remains controversial.³²

The Jacobin legacy also has had an enormous impact on scholarship. Ever since Alexis de Tocqueville observed that administrative centralization, absent in America but entrenched in France, “accustoms people to ignore their own wills completely and constantly and to obey, not a single order on a single occasion, but always and in every way,” scholars have analyzed French society through the operations of its central state.³³ In focusing on the ways state centralization has “blocked” French society, however, scholars have underestimated both the ability of society to influence policy and the extent to which society and the state have changed over time.³⁴

Scholarship in other domains of French history offers fruitful ways of rethinking state-society relations. Peter Sahlin argues that state and nation

alike were built on France's periphery as much as from its center. Caroline Ford examines the new forms of political mobilization that resulted from backlash against state-sponsored secularization efforts. Isser Woloch's study of the postrevolutionary civic order confirms the importance of administrative centralization to French political culture and social life, while showing that centralization emerged from improvisation and had unintended consequences. Philip Nord argues that civil society in mid-nineteenth-century France was republicanized before the state, and this explained how republicanism mounted a viable challenge to Napoléon III's empire, resulting in modern Europe's longest-lived republic.³⁵ A burgeoning field of scholarship also tests the republic's claims to universalism by examining the varying degrees of exception that prevailed in France's empire.³⁶ For all the centrality of immigration to contemporary republican rhetoric, its historical study remains oddly cut off from such insights regarding the nature and contradictions of French civic and political life.

I share with these historians a refusal to reify the state or the republic and an attention to the sources of incremental change. In so doing, I avoid the rather top-down outlook of the prevailing scholarship on immigration and argue for an important shift that cannot be discerned, let alone explained, in the standard state-centered approaches to immigration. Regulations developed by central state authorities to manage France's immigrant populations were altered in the face of local realities that differed considerably from expectations. As a result, through improvisation and negotiation, local authorities and immigrants established boundaries of inclusion and exclusion along quite different lines than those intended by state policy. Over time, this cycle of confrontation and accommodation led to policy changes at the center.

This dialectic brings me to the second challenge mounted by this book. Scholars now generally agree that controlling immigration is an exercise of sovereignty.³⁷ However, social scientists tend to reach one of two flawed conclusions by proceeding from this assumption. Either they assume that states largely succeed in exercising sovereignty by implementing immigration regulations, or they take the expansion of migrant rights to reflect the limits of state sovereignty in a globalizing world. In fact, policing migration never has amounted to a straightforward assertion of sovereignty directed evenly at all foreigners by authorities protecting a clearly identifiable national interest. Rather, that interest was defined and redefined in part through negotiations at many levels of social exchange—in diplomatic affairs, through the legislative process, within the state bureaucracy, at the workplace or union hall, and on the street.

Nor does the expansion of migrant rights mean, *ipso facto*, that state sovereignty is compromised. Recent work on immigration to and within

Europe has highlighted the way suprastate integration, globalization, and the development of international human rights law have allowed foreign residents of many Western European countries to acquire substantial civil, social, and sometimes even political rights despite their lack of formal citizenship.³⁸ Historically, migrant rights have not followed the linear progression suggested by these scholars. Furthermore, negotiations for transnational rights have just as often confirmed as they have called into question the power of the nation-state system.

THE INTERWAR ORIGINS OF MIGRANT RIGHTS

The Boundaries of the Republic is organized both chronologically and thematically. Chronologically, it follows migrant life from the immediate aftermath of the First World War, through the depression and the rise of the Popular Front government in 1936, to the domestic and international crises of the late 1930s. Thematically, it discusses the development of four “rights regimes”: the foundation of France’s guest-worker system, the challenge presented to it by claims made on social rights during the depression, its reconfiguration in the mid-1930s as family connections and rootedness in France formed new bases of rights, and finally the unraveling of this new rights regime in the face of a national security crisis.

Chapter 1 focuses on the arrival after the First World War of migrants from regions as varied as Italy, Spain, Armenia, Russia, and North Africa and explains their subsequently uneven success in securing labor rights, social entitlements, and civil liberties during the 1920s. Chapters 2 and 3 follow the lives of the same migrants as full employment gave way to mass unemployment in the 1930s, leading migrants to seek social security outside of work, thereby challenging the premises of the guest-worker system. Chapter 4 explains how the guest-worker model, strained by uneven implementation in the 1920s and early 1930s, collapsed in the mid-1930s as central authorities’ efforts to enforce it more strictly encountered practical impediments. Although guest-worker policy remained officially intact, authorities now recognized a growing number of exceptions to it, indirectly establishing new policies that selectively incorporated some migrants based on a new calculus of privilege and prejudice. Chapters 5 and 6 bring these developments into relief by considering the special cases of refugees and colonial subjects. The final chapter shows how this ever-changing balance between inclusion and exclusion contributed to the confusion that prevailed on the eve of war about what role immigrants should play in France, and therefore what rights they should have. As state agents desperately tried to balance xenophobic pressures against migrants’ utility

as soldiers, French immigration policy reached new levels of incoherence. Within these broad trends, migrants' rights remained contingent on a host of factors ranging from local social relations to national politics to international affairs, and dependent on the choices made by both state agents and migrants under the constraint of these shifting relationships.

Then as now, incorporation into French public life did not turn on the blind application of republican principles that abstracted individuals from their social particularities. Rather, it depended very much on social relationships that were mobilized to claim or defend rights. Interwar France was more inclusive of migrants than a simple glance at legal constructs would suggest. Migrants were not merely "guests" who could be asked to leave: Despite their legal vulnerability, they often succeeded in invoking rights that gave them some staying power. Yet at the same time, the rights migrants acquired were not only unevenly distributed but also fragile, for a combination of social and legal factors made them more difficult to acquire and sustain for some migrants than for others. Migrant rights were stratified in practice, if not always in the letter of the law. For some migrants, this fragility had always been obvious. For others, their very success in negotiating rights had given them a confidence that was rudely shaken only as the threat of war loomed. To understand this stratification in time and change over time, let us begin where Boris and Bruno did—at work.