

## Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France. The Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799

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Paul Lawrence

To contemporary observers looking back, official French attitudes towards immigrants and resident foreigners at times appear more than a little ambiguous. While officially espousing a rhetoric of 'inclusiveness', selection and stereotype have nonetheless been common. Although demographic and economic considerations have often resulted in a willingness to benefit from foreigners (particularly during the interwar period), at the same time suspicion of difference and a fear of cultural dilution have led to police surveillance and identity card regimes. However, despite this intriguing tension, studies of French attitudes towards immigrants have been sparse, for all historical periods. Michael Rapport's excellent new book is thus doubly welcome. In the first instance, it will undoubtedly be of great interest to scholars of the Revolution. As well as providing useful insights into the treatment of foreigners in France during the period 1789-1790, it also sheds light on the evolution and process of policy making during this turbulent period. However, the book also contains much of value to those seeking to examine issues of immigration, national identity, naturalisation and citizenship in later periods. While the author does not seek to claim that the Revolution determined subsequent attitudes to foreigners, he does argue (convincingly) that it helped to begin their construction.

The work under review began life as a doctoral thesis, and as such is meticulously researched from a wide range of sources. However, unlike many published theses, it is also eminently readable. In a manner reminiscent of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, the book opens dramatically with a description of an execution, that of the German Anarcharsis Cloots, in March 1794. Thus did the revolutionary government kill off that 'motley group of extremists' known as the Hébertists, in a move that typified the accelerating exclusion of foreigners from 'key centres of French social and economic life and, above all, from involvement in every level of French politics' (p.2). The author then uses a survey of competing theories to frame the main issue under consideration, namely, how could a Revolution which had 'opened with such liberating promise' scarcely four years earlier, espousing the virtues of 'cosmopolitanism' and mankind's

common humanity, have become so fixed upon the exclusive primacy of national identity. Among others, he considers Hannah Arendt's ideas of an inherent tension between the Revolution's promise of universal rights and its demand for the sovereignty of the nation, and Sophie Wahnich's recent work which argues that, during the Terror, the revolutionaries actually explained the exclusion of foreigners with reference to the universality of their principles. The interests of humanity were bound up with the fate of France, and hence anyone who could not be readily identified as French was, by implication, 'suspect'.

However, this is not, primarily, a theoretical work but an empirical study. Rapport seeks to show not only that there were contradictions inherent within revolutionary ideology, but that 'there was also a gap between what the revolutionaries said and what they actually did' (p.15). He sets out to consider exactly how new the political structures and practices of the Revolution were, and also to offer some 'tentative remarks [...] on the Revolution's impact on French identity' (p.16). After a brief survey of 'The French Idea of the Nation in the Eighteenth Century', the book comprises of five main chronological chapters, (with a much shorter sixth chapter dealing with the treatment of foreigners under Napoleon Bonaparte). As with the introduction, each chapter opens with an interesting descriptive vignette (for example, Chapter Four 'The Terror' opens with the arrest of Thomas Paine at 3 o'clock in the morning). The chapters are then further subdivided into sections, the first dealing with the general treatment of foreigners during the period in question, and the others consisting of in-depth surveys of the treatment of (respectively) foreigners in the armed forces, foreign clergy, foreign political radicals and exiles, and foreign financiers/merchants. This somewhat rigid structure has the advantage that information relating to particularly topics can be easily identified, but does occasionally trammel the free flow of argument and lead to slight repetition, as each sub-section has a summary, which is then often re-summarised at the end of the chapter.

Chapter One provides an assessment of the treatment of foreigners in Ancien Régime France, contending that 'what mattered was not their nationality, but rather the personal ties of service and loyalty between monarch and servant' (p.33). While the revolution 'presented an ideological challenge to this corporate society', the author argues convincingly that 'the fundamental pressures which had faced the Ancien Régime remained the same' and that, for this reason, 'the Revolution witnessed a good deal of continuity from the absolute monarchy in dealing with foreigners' (p.82). Chapter Two shows how, even under the optimistic Constituent Assembly, the cosmopolitan implications of the Rights of Man were often tempered by diplomatic and military considerations. The revolutionaries were not insincere about cosmopolitanism, but they were also patriots. Chapter Three details the way in which the threat, and then reality, of war contributed to changing attitudes. Rapport notes that 'Revolutionary cosmopolitanism became more militant between October 1791 and March 1793, because of the war' but further claims that 'the period also saw the emergence of the more exclusive implications of patriotism (p.186) and describes how it was during this period that 'the structures of surveillance and control associated with the Terror were [...] beginning to take shape' (p.144). Chapter Four deals with the Terror itself, and notes that the way in which the 'unprecedented intensity and adversity of the war, combined with internal political and civil strife' (p.207) led to the progressive exclusion and persecution of foreigners, with some important exceptions (particularly in the economic sphere). Chapter Five asserts that, although the period following the Terror has been described as one in which restrictions on foreigners eased, in fact, Thermidorians 'proved more willing to speak cosmopolitan language than to act on it' (p.260). The author claims that 'the driving force between this practical approach, in which inclusion and encouragement was interspersed with surveillance and persecution, was the ebb and flow of political instability and war' p.314). He concludes that 'For as long as France was at war and was dogged by domestic instability, the Revolution would not - and could not - return to its earlier, universal promise' (p.315).

Throughout the book, the author thus stresses the way in which the ideology of the Revolution was continually tempered by practical considerations. In the conclusion he notes that 'the revolutionaries were pragmatic, restraining, even denying, the implications of their principles as circumstances dictated' (p.336). While at times this approach leaves little room for the role of genuinely held ideological beliefs, such a pragmatic approach to the evolution of policy certainly offers extremely useful insights for historians studying issues of immigration in all eras. Another theme which resonates strongly throughout this work,

and which will also be of great interest to historians of later periods, is that of the gradual development of state surveillance and control of foreigners. Rapport notes that 'while the Napoleonic regime retreated from some of the original revolutionary deeds regarding foreigners, it retained and developed the apparatus of surveillance and control' (p.320/1), although he makes the point elsewhere that, even during the Terror, 'the authorities responsible for executing the law were not always as efficient or as sweeping as the decrees themselves demanded' (p.255).

Given the depth of scholarship of this engaging work, any criticism advanced can only be minor. However, a couple of issues can, perhaps, be raised. In the first instance, readers should note that the book only really deals with what might be termed 'high society'. The groups of foreigners surveyed, and the attitudes analysed, primarily relate to the upper echelons of politics, religious life and the economic sphere. Of course this, in itself, is not necessarily a problem. However, in the early stages of the book, the author does, promisingly, extend some analysis to the migrant/labouring poor (e.g.: p.79, p.88). This type of analysis is then notably absent from the later stages of the book. It may well be, as the author notes, that 'For the poorest foreigners, the Revolution meant little more than business as usual' (p.130), but might be argued that the weight of the conclusion, which attempts to make general arguments about national identity - e.g. 'The evolution of French national identity was [...] as much the result of long-term political, social and cultural conditioning as it was of the ideology and experience of the Revolution' (p.330) - is slightly lessened by this imbalance. In addition to this (and perhaps as concomitant factor), it might be noted that while the author has assessed an impressive array of primary sources, these are almost all Parisian. While events outside of the capital are occasionally mentioned, they are investigated via the prism of Parisian archives. Again, this focus may perhaps lessen the force of the more general conclusions the author seeks to make.

These minor points aside, Michael Rapport has produced an interesting, concise and nuanced work which will be of interest to a wide range of historians. While there is much research still to be done before the complex evolution of French attitudes towards immigrants and foreigners is fully appreciated, this book should prove a major stepping-stone along the way.

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