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**Philippe Rygiel**, *Destins immigrés: Cher, 1920-1980, trajectoires d'immigrés d'Europe*. Besançon: Annales littéraires de l'Université de Franche Comté, 2001. 447 pp. Bibliography, notes, and index. 39.64 € (pb). ISBN 2-84627-014-7.

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Republican France's famous refusal to record religion, race, or ethnicity in official records has posed enormous problems for historians. Most of what we know about the social mobility of successive generations is at best based on anecdotal information, or at least it was until the publication of Philippe Rygiel's thesis. To the extent that historians have examined the subject, they have done so exclusively within the confines of studies of individual immigrant communities, usually defined by ethno-national origin. For all that monographs on individual communities have added to our understanding of the immigrant experience, they cannot by their very nature shed light on the relative importance of ethnic origins, social class, labor market openings, educational attainment, and a host of other variables in explaining immigrants' trajectories upon arrival. Only a painstaking quantitative study, Rygiel points out, can provide solid answers to these questions. In *Destin immigrés*, he has written a dense, demanding statistical study of immigrant assimilation, one of the most sophisticated and original pieces of social history I have read for a long time.

Hardly a leading center of immigration, the Department of the Cher might seem an incongruous setting for such a monograph, but it offers a number of advantages. Within the space of a single administrative department, the Cher was home to a range of industrial activity, from large steel plants in the Vierzon-Saint-Florent-Bourges triangle to smaller printing, handicraft, and textile concerns in Saint-Amandois; natural resource extraction—especially marl and limestone—in the Beffes basin; and a diverse agricultural sector. Unlike Paris, Marseilles, or the heavy industrial regions of the north and east typically studied by immigration specialists, the Cher experienced very little immigration before the Great War, which allows Rygiel to avoid confusing the newly arrived with long-settled migrants. Centrally located, the region attracted immigrants from an uncommonly wide range of countries—Poles (the majority in this case); Italians; Spaniards; Portuguese; and Czechoslovaks (primarily Slovaks)—but the totals remain low. That is, the Cher was home to several European immigrant groups engaged in a wide range of economic activities, with enough members to permit quantitative study, but whose numbers remained small enough to avoid the thorny issues of statistical sampling.

Instead of looking at one or two immigrant groups, Rygiel studies five of the most numerous groups to arrive between the world wars and compares their destinies and those of their children to those of a control group of native-born French men and women. Casting his net so widely enables him to weigh the relative importance of national origins against a wide range of other factors, to explore in detail the different avenues of social promotion open to citizens and foreigners, to women and men. Unable to rely on census data, as American historians have traditionally done, Rygiel was forced to rely primarily on

the records of the *état civil*, combing through birth records to find children born to foreign parents. Those records provide elementary information on the children's parents—notably their fathers' signature (or lack thereof), profession, residence, and place of birth; marginal notes provide access to marriage records which offer a crucial second snapshot of the family's condition later on, and thus to establish a trajectory.

The population thus constructed can hardly be considered representative. The Cher had fewer immigrants than the national norm, and relatively few who entered the department stayed, much less had children there. Families who arrived after their children were born, or who moved on for whatever reason, likewise do not figure in these statistics; nor do we learn anything about children born to foreign parents who remained single. The monumental difficulty of constructing a workable data-set from these records forces Rygiel to work with small sample sizes, and thus to put relatively simple questions to those sources, but those questions are no less powerful for being primitive. To understand how the foreigners who remained made their way in French society—atypical as they may have been—Rygiel's meticulously constructed database of some 30,000 individual cases and 2,599 family histories is an invaluable point of departure.

On a basic level, *Destins immigrés* shows that foreigners enjoyed upward social mobility, but that it remained narrowly circumscribed. Farm workers might become peasant proprietors, and factory workers might acquire a skill over the course of twenty or thirty years of labor. But only a tiny percentage of first-generation immigrants ever escaped the working class; those who did so arrived with industrial skills and hailed from urban settings, not the countryside. All other things being equal, native-born French workers had a much greater chance of acquiring a skill, of taking over a supervisory position, or of landing a job in the public sector. First-generation immigrants had to make due with more traditional and much less secure avenues of social promotion, primarily acquiring a piece of land or setting up shop on their own, and their gains remained much more precarious. Their greatest chances for upward social mobility (unlike their native-born counterparts), came from picking up and moving on. Many immigrants took the first job they could and managed to find work that suited their training, only after learning their way around the local environment.

The real interest of this book, however, lies in the level of detail it provides more than the general conclusions. Not only did social promotion and decline mean different things for foreigners and French citizens, the opportunities available for immigrants varied significantly by group. By using factor analysis, Rygiel provides a refined social-geographic portrait of each of his five immigrant communities, weighing the relative importance of some thirty variables to tease out hidden relationships and patterns among them. The largest immigrant community in inter-war France, Italians remain the most thoroughly studied to date, despite a recent outpouring of work on other groups.<sup>[1]</sup> Rygiel's research shows, however, that the Italian experience was anything but typical. Italians, unlike other immigrants, settled almost exclusively in large towns and cities. Despite official government efforts to send immigrants to the countryside, urban environments, it turns out, offered much greater potential to blend into the French community. Living in cities gave Italians a greater opportunity to live and work in a diverse ethnic environment. It also gave them a greater opportunity to acquire a valuable skill and to marry French women than their counterparts from other countries, both of which facilitated their integration into French society, and increased the opportunities they could provide their children. Spaniards, and especially Poles and Czechoslovaks, by contrast, were much more likely to live in isolated communities in the countryside or small industrial towns.

Apart from Italians, all of the immigrant communities in the Cher were made up of at least two distinct sub-populations. Spaniards, for example, were divided between those who came in the early 1920s to work in the fields in the east of the department, and another wave that came a decade later, fleeing Franco, and headed for urban areas. The Portuguese community, too, was made up of at least two migrant streams whose differences, in all likelihood, predated their arrival in France: a group of well-

integrated urban industrial workers lived in the northeast, especially in Vierzon, while another group of largely illiterate farm workers came to the countryside nearby. Divisions within the Slavic groups, apparently, emerged only after their arrival. Pursuing the story at this level of detail enables Rygiel to provide an unusually compelling account of the importance of nationality. Each group, it seems, had its own map, which determined where members could go, what sort of jobs they could hold, what sort of opportunities they could pursue. Immigrants moved around a great deal within small, clearly defined areas, determined by their origins. While most studies of migration emphasize the hyper-mobility of first generations, the limits on their mobility stand out here.

For as significant a role as nationality played in structuring the experience of the first generation, it mattered much less, if at all, for their children. The second generation was much more urban, and generally lived in much more diverse communities, than their forebears. The skills urban workers developed, and the connections they made during the inter-war years, gave them greater control over their destiny than their counterparts in the fields and small industrial towns, and as a result they were less likely to leave. Italians, for example, were much more likely to stay in the Cher and establish families there than Poles, and especially Czechoslovaks. In the early postwar years, moreover, the region's cities expanded dramatically, offering new possibilities for many immigrant families pushed off their farms by a declining rural economy. While a handful of fathers managed to hang on in the countryside, perhaps taking over a farm, or taking a skilled position, most remained unskilled workers even after the war. Their sons were much more likely to perform skilled work. They moved up a significant rung in the hierarchy of labor. But they nevertheless remained firmly anchored in the working-class, toiling primarily in construction and heavy industry. Second-generation immigrant daughters suffered a double disability compared to their brothers and to "French" women their age, especially those who entered the work force before *les trentes glorieuses*. Those women were more likely than 'françaises de souche' to hold down a job when they married, and much more likely to hold unskilled factory jobs. Whereas factory work at least held out the possibility of social promotion for men, it almost never did for women. Only a tiny minority landed office jobs, or went on to become nurses or school teachers.

Packed with detail, this book is not an easy read. Especially in Britain and the United States, where quantitative methods never won the acclaim they once enjoyed in France, some readers may question Rygiel's devotion to Marcel Mauss' famous declaration, "Au fond, tout problème social est un problème statistique. La fréquence du fait, le nombre des individus participants, la répétition au long du temps, l'importance absolue et relative des actes et de leurs effets par rapport au reste de la vie, etc., tout est mesurable et devrait être compté" (p. 380). They will wish Rygiel had developed supporting material more fully from police files, naturalization petitions, and business archives, using individual cases for more than the occasional illustrative detail (e.g. pp. 176, 184, 191, 211 fn., 224, 227, 342-43). In an eighty-page discussion of methodology, Rygiel explains his every assumption and addresses the various biases of his models throughout the text, but he does not explain any of the mathematical tools he used. Anyone, including this reviewer, without advanced training in cliometrics will need to look elsewhere to understand some of the more complicated statistical operations.[2] Those, however, interested in developing a post-ideological quantitative history, forthright in its assumptions and clear about its own limits, will find no better guide.

## NOTES

[1] For synthetic overviews of Italian immigration to France see Antonio Bechelloni, Michel Dreyfus, and Pierre Milza, *L'Intégration italienne en France (Brussels: Complexe, 1995)*; Pierre Milza, *Voyages en Ritalie* (Paris: Plon, 1993); *ibid.*, *L'Immigration italienne en France dans les années vingt* (Paris: CEDEI, 1988); and Milza, ed., *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1986).

[2] See, for example, Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 9th ed. (New York: Wadsworth, 2001); and Michael Lewis-Back, *Factor Analysis and Related Techniques* (London: Sage, 1994).

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