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Leslie Page Moch, *The Pariahs of Yesterday: Breton Migrations in Paris*. Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2012. xi + 255 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$84.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8223-5169-6; \$23.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8223-5183-2.

Review by Amelia H. Lyons, University of Central Florida.

In her new book, *The Pariahs of Yesterday*, migration historian Leslie Moch examines the arrival and settlement of Bretons to Paris during the Third Republic. Her goal is to study both the exclusionary policies and practices these outcasts faced and the inclusionary processes by which they eventually integrated into Paris. In telling the story of Bretons' migration to the capital, Moch ultimately connects "migration with its implications for national integration and identity in France" (p. 1). The narrative she develops also makes an important contribution to labor history and provides a reexamination of the changing portrayal of Bretons as part of the history of the people of Paris. Her exploration of these interconnected narratives allows Moch to trace the changes that took place in the growing Breton communities of two Parisian neighborhoods over five decades.

She begins in the 1890s when the first significant migration from both upper and lower Brittany, and particularly from the departments of Finistère and Côtés-d'Armor, began to Paris's fourteenth arrondissement and the northern suburb of Saint Denis. It was during this first generation, when women came to Paris to work as domestic servants, that Bretons "became objects of ridicule" (p. 31). Some of Moch's most fascinating analysis appears in her discussion of the development and widespread popularity of the familiar stereotype. Certainly, the image of the country bumpkin applied to both men and women fresh from the farm and ignorant of life in the big city. But the core of the stereotype, embodied in Célestine and Bécassine, was the young Breton maid. Portrayed as "a blundering goodhearted girl with no sense" (p. 73)—the French equivalent of Amelia Bedelia—the young Breton girl became a sensation in popular consumer culture in the first part of the twentieth century.[1]

Moch taps into a wealth of sources, from the earliest formulations of the archetypal figure in Emile Zola's *Pot Bouille* in 1882, to the explosion in consumer products emblazoned with the little Bretonne's face before World War I, in order to paint a vivid picture of the image and its pervasiveness in French society. From storybooks that depicted Bécassine using a whip to make whipped cream to a mechanical doll that dropped the dishes she carried, Moch shows us how the girl from Brittany had "lodged herself in the public mind" (p. 117). Moreover, her analysis provides a multi-dimensional view, emphasizing how the common depictions often captured these women's innocence but never their suffering and examining how leaders in Brittany, like François Cadic, used the national stereotype. Cadic employed the stereotype to criticize the root causes of emigration and Bretons' treatment in Paris, to call on fellow Bretons to curb and control emigration, and to improve Brittany's reputation as a loyal part of France. Moch also examines how Cadic's organization sought to improve Breton migrants' moral and material conditions by operating a range of welfare services, including employment aid, savings accounts, and clothing banks.

In addition, Moch marshals a vast array of more traditional social history archival sources to provide as detailed a picture as possible of the nature of the Breton community. Using rare memoirs, contemporary

publications, census and especially marriage records, Moch is able to tell us a great deal about where migrants came from, where they settled, what jobs they did, who they married and how they lived. In addition to working as domestics, Breton women commonly worked in the needle trades and in hospitals while some Breton men took the dirtiest jobs, cleaning the streets and sewers, and collecting garbage. Other men found employment in the burgeoning transportation network, working above ground constructing railroads and below ground tunneling out the new metropolitan. Still others worked as skilled laborers.

Moch's extensive use of marriage records is essential to her analysis of the similarities and differences between the communities in the fourteenth arrondissement and Saint Denis, as well as to her examination of the ways in which migration patterns influenced migrant experiences. In the early years of settlement, in Saint Denis, more men migrated and more families maintained generational connections, as evidenced by the frequency with which relatives served as witnesses at weddings. As a result of this measure of stability, Moch found that Bretons married about five years later than average Parisians and had higher than average intermarriage rates than other migrant groups. These findings were in sharp contrast to the significant migration of young, single women to the fourteenth arrondissement. Without relatives, these women were more vulnerable to poverty and terrible working conditions. About one quarter of Breton domestic servants had a child out of wedlock (a rarity in Brittany where families could more easily ensure that children conceived out of wedlock were born to married parents). In some cases, Bretonnes regularized their child's birth when they eventually married a working-class partner, but in other cases these women gave birth in maternity hospitals, with the children often entering the foundling system that developed in the nineteenth century.

These same marriage records also facilitated Moch's analysis of the ways the communities changed and adapted to life in Paris in the first decades of the twentieth century. By the 1910s, intermarriage with French citizens from other parts of the country facilitated integration, the number of women having children out of wedlock decreased, and both education levels and job prospects improved. This process of integration continued, with Moch pointing out that the existing scholarly literature credits World War I with linking "Brittany to France" (p. 122). Without denying this claim, Moch points out that Breton integration in France continued in uneven ways in the decades after the Great War. In some respects, the stereotypes about Bretonnes continued—with Bécassine reaching the zenith of her popularity during the interwar years. As well, the Breton communities in the two neighborhoods she examines remained strong, with higher rates of intermarriage continuing among Bretons than among other migrant communities from other parts of France.

More than anything else, better educational and professional opportunities improved Bretons' material conditions and helped them to emphasize their Frenchness. With more Breton men and women, especially in the fourteenth arrondissement, working in skilled labor and white collar jobs—including office and retail work for women—they adapted well to the urban environment. Moch's subtle analysis demonstrates how Bretons integrated without ever shaking their country bumpkin stereotype. The image, though, as it became commodified and incorporated into French culture, was no longer foreign or strange. Instead, the archetype became an endearing, national figure—with the toys sold everywhere and storybooks highlighting the adventures of the well-meaning, if naive patriot, Bécassine. In the end, the change over time that Moch traces takes us from the 1890s until the eventual "lifting of the label of pariahs from the Breton" (p. 14) and their integration into French national identity by the second half of the twentieth century.

Moch is also keenly aware that her book is part of the growing literature on migration history. She draws on some of this scholarship in a variety of ways, including pointing out how policing and expert concerns about Bretons as a source of disorder brought special scrutiny in the interwar era. Reports pointed to child abuse and other episodes of violence, vagrancy, theft, alcoholism, and prostitution. Yet,

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even if Bretons received some special scrutiny, they never received the kind of targeted racial profiling and intense surveillance that colonial migrants endured during the same period.<sup>[2]</sup>

In her introduction, Moch calls for more engagement between traditional migration studies and the recent explosion in immigration history. In fact, one of her goals is to contribute to a new historiography that does not separate “migrants depending on whether or not they cross an international border” (p. 5). I certainly agree and commend her for making this point. We certainly need more dialogue between histories of internal and external migration, and more work that brings together research. I think, however, that Moch could have done more engage with this literature in a number of ways.

To begin, Moch’s analysis treats colonial migrants as foreigners, as an external migration, and fails to compare Breton migration to these other internal migrations of the early twentieth century. In the period she studies, migrants from the empire were “French and crossed no international borders” (p. 14)—at least not officially. They moved from the DOM and TOM—French overseas departments and territories—to metropolitan France. They moved from one peripheral part of France, to the center, from a part of France considered backward and other, to the capital. In some respects the colonial migrants’ experience paralleled that of provincial migrants from the hexagon. Certainly, migrants from the empire differed from Bretons and other migrants; they were not white, metropolitan citizens. Nevertheless, most colonial migrants possessed a particular form of French nationality and migrated from one part of Greater France to another without the kinds of protections foreign immigrants received when their governments’ established agreements with France. Moreover, the rhetoric of colonialism, including the vision of the empire as *la plus grande France*, meant that imperial migration was understood as an internal migration. This concept was essential to visions of France’s place on the world stage and to arguments about national demographic strength before, during and after World War I.

With this in mind, Moch’s framework, to explore an internal migrant community’s changing experience in France, would be stronger if she included comparisons, on occasion, between the Breton experience and the experience of other ostracized, internal migrants during the early twentieth century. Given that Moch points to the racialization of Bretons in the early twentieth century—with contemporary sources referring to Bretons as “*le peuple noir*” and as “the Negro of France” (p. 90)—how did their otherness, along with that of other marginalized internal migrants, change over time? Instead, we are left wondering if these kinds of characterizations stopped appearing in the final decades of the Third Republic. I wanted to know more about the racialization of Bretons and what role, if any, this played in their slow and incomplete integration into French national identity (especially as some Bretonnes married colonial migrants). Did references to Bretons as black begin to disappear in the interwar era just as they became better integrated and as new non-white migrant groups arrived in the capital in growing numbers? I thought David Roediger’s well-known argument about race and working-class integration in the United States might have proved useful in thinking about Bretons’ journey.<sup>[3]</sup> Did Bretons shift from pariah to integrated citizen because they accumulated a French version of “the wages of whiteness”? Did they begin to appear less foreign than other newer migrant communities—who came from further away and could be more easily depicted as racially different and more foreign than the country bumpkin?

Some of Moch’s evidence suggests Bretons both sought to earn and to spend these wages. Her sources demonstrate the interconnectedness of internal migrations from/to different parts of Greater France and the ways in which Bretons’ Frenchness depended on the othering of migrants from the empire. Bretons’ participation in the civilizing mission—as missionaries in China or settlers in Algeria—seemed to be at least partly motivated by a desire to prove they were French and not exotic pariahs living in the metropole’s periphery. Breton women, as Moch points out, worked side by side with men from the colonies during the First World War. After the war, even though the state tried to send colonial workers home, these internal migrant populations—Breton and colonial—grew in Paris. It seems

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possible that the presence of North Africans and other French colonial migrants may have made it easier for Bretons to move out of some of the worst, lowest paying jobs. As Moch puts it, Breton integration and their employment opportunities in the interwar era rested on their “privileged...status as French nationals” (p. 126). Bretons came to be viewed as white and French just as colonial migrants, who also possessed French identity papers, became the new, even more backward pariahs who had traveled from an even more peripheral part of France to live and work in Paris.

These issues in no way diminish the Moch’s analysis of Bretons’ experience in Paris over five decades. Her work paints a vivid picture of their experiences and the changing nature of their place in France and she rightly calls on French historians to better integrate external and internal migration into their scholarship. Given this call, Moch’s work would be richer had she not perpetuated the divide between the “real” French—that is white French from the hexagon—and those from other parts of the French empire. Comparing internal migrant communities to the Breton experience during this period would allow an even more satisfying explanation of why and how Bretons shook the pariah label and upon whom this label became attached by the middle of the twentieth century.

#### NOTES

[1] Amelia Bedelia is the main character in the beloved American children’s book series by Peggy Parish, first published in 1963.

[2] Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[3] David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

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