

## COLONIAL POLICY AND THE EMERGENCE OF MIGRATION FLOWS (LATE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES)

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the migration processes that emerged under the influence of colonial policy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries from historical, political, and socio-economic perspectives. It highlights the intensification of population movement resulting from the colonial expansion of European states, the formation of labor migration, and demographic shifts between metropolises and colonial territories. Furthermore, industrialization, economic necessities, political pressure, and social factors are examined as the primary drivers of migration flows. The study scientifically evaluates the impact of migration processes on cultural integration, national identity, and inter-societal relations.

**Keywords:** Colonial policy, migration flows, late 19th century, early 20th century, labor migration, demographic processes, industrialization, colonial territories.

### Introduction

At the beginning of the 19th century, the population of France stood at approximately 30 million, making it one of the states with the largest demographic potential in Europe. However, by the end of the century, the growth rate of the population slowed down due to a decline in birth rates. Consequently, compared to England and Germany, where populations grew rapidly, France began to lose its demographic superiority. By the beginning of the 20th century, Germany's population reached 60 million, which caused serious concern within French society regarding national security and economic competition<sup>1</sup>.

In order to address these demographic challenges, the government conducted propaganda efforts aimed at increasing birth rates. The slogan "Faire des enfants!" ("Have children!") became a state policy targeted at all segments of society. Simultaneously, particular attention was paid to immigration as a means to compensate for the shortage of labor resources. In the mid-19th century, the number of foreigners in France was not yet significant. According to the 1851 census results, only about 1 percent of the country's population consisted of foreigners. The majority of them were workers from Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland. These migrants mostly came from neighboring border regions and engaged in seasonal or temporary labor activities; thus, it was difficult to evaluate them as full-fledged immigration flows<sup>2</sup>.

By 1872, the proportion of immigrants reached 2 percent of the population. In particular, Belgian workers employed in the industrial regions of northern France—mines, metallurgical enterprises, and agriculture—constituted the bulk of the migration process. The development of industrial capitalism and the expansion of the colonial economic system increased production volumes, which intensified the demand for cheap and physically capable labor. By the end of the 19th

<sup>1</sup> L'Immigration dans l'histoire nationale // Hommes et migrations, 1988, № 1114. P.9.

<sup>2</sup> L'Immigration dans l'histoire nationale // Hommes et migrations, 1988, № 1114. P.9.



century, the French economy entered a phase of rapid industrialization, leading to a labor shortage in the country. As a result, the first mass wave of immigration formed between 1885 and 1895. Approximately one million migrants, mostly from Europe, moved to France in search of work. Henceforth, migrants began to settle not only in border areas but also in the central provinces of France<sup>3</sup>.

During this period, the number of Italian workers increased sharply, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the workforce in industrial enterprises in the southeast of the country. They were primarily engaged in low-paid, unskilled, and heavy physical labor, making them a highly profitable labor force for local entrepreneurs from an economic standpoint. Thus, the formation of migration flows in France during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is explained by three main factors: demographic decline, the development of the industrial economy, and global labor mobility resulting from colonial policy. This process created an important foundation for France's transformation into a multi-ethnic society and the formation of its modern migration policy in subsequent periods.

Algerian merchants trading in textiles and handicrafts are considered the first migrants from North Africa. They appeared in the 1870s, and the French referred to them as "turkos". The geographic distance, as well as differences in religion, tradition, and language, led to the formation of unfounded negative perceptions in society, where they were interpreted as people with "barbaric customs" ("moeurs barbares"). This situation largely explains the early colonial policy toward Algeria, which was conducted through classic methods of exploitation: the violent seizure of land property caused the population to flee rural areas; the disintegration of traditional economic structures and ties on a national scale led to the emergence of a "surplus" labor force ready for use in the metropolitan labor market. By a decree dated May 16, 1874, regulations permitting the migration of Algerians to France were approved. The first Algerian workers settled on the southern coast of France, around Marseille, and primarily worked in oil mills. While their number was only a few hundred in 1905, by 1912 this figure increased to 3.5 thousand; they subsequently began working in soap factories. Additionally, 1,500 Algerians were employed in the mines and factories of Nord-Pas-de-Calais<sup>4</sup>. In the Paris region, migrants worked in construction and raw material processing plants. On the eve of World War I, the first Moroccan migrants also appeared in France, having crossed the metropolitan borders mostly through illegal means. In 1909, a portion of them worked at a metallurgical plant in Nantes, while about 700 people were employed in Bordeaux<sup>5</sup>. It is worth noting that the recruitment of workers into industry was mainly carried out among the Kabyles, one of the Berber peoples of Northern Algeria. This choice in colonial policy was explained by the belief that they would assimilate more easily in France than other Arabs. By 1913, the number of Maghrebis reached 30,000 (while the total number of immigrants accounted for 3 percent of the population). The next major influx of migrants to the metropolis was linked to World War I, during which a large number of Algerians were mobilized for the front and for the restoration of the national economy. However, this situation caused resentment among French colonists in Algeria, who were not interested in the departure of the labor force. As Georges Mauco wrote: "At the beginning of the

<sup>3</sup> Бродель Ф. Что такое Франция? Люди и вещи. Т.1. М., 1995. С.184.

<sup>4</sup> Кукушкин П.В. Положение эмигрантов из стран Магриба во Франции: социально-политическая проблема в человеческом измерении // В кн.: Гуманитарные аспекты международных отношений. М., 1992. С.47.

<sup>5</sup> L'immigration maghrebine // Hommes et migrations, 1988, №1114. P.65



war, as it was impossible to find the necessary human resources in Europe, our government decided to turn to the colonies. In North Africa, this was a particularly delicate task because, on one hand, volunteers had to be gathered for the front, while on the other hand, the labor force necessary for the colony had to be preserved."

Between 1914 and 1918, a total of approximately 170,000 North Africans were involved in military mobilization, while 250,000 people were directed to industrial facilities. As a result of military actions, 40,000 people died directly on the battlefields, and the total number of those who "died for France" reached approximately 60,000. These soldiers and workers, called from the African savannas and tropical regions, were primarily used as "cannon fodder" on the front lines.

By the end of World War I, the migration process changed qualitatively and took on a "traditional" character in connection with capitalist development. After the war, French capital sought primarily to develop labor immigration, which created a radical shift in the social composition of immigration. The state, choosing a strategy of controlled labor importation, prioritized supplying industrial and agricultural sectors that required low-skilled and unskilled labor. Such labor resources were in high demand, particularly for heavy and dangerous types of work in construction, mining, ferrous metallurgy, and other industrial sectors.

During the war years, a system of organized collective recruitment of labor was established in the French colonies, coordinated by the specially formed "Colonial Workers' Service." It should be noted that the contract-based recruitment system led to a significant decrease in wages compared to free employment. Between 1914 and 1928, Algerian immigration totaled 471,390 people, of whom 365,024 returned to their homeland, indicating that approximately 100,000 people remained permanently. Although Ministry of Foreign Affairs data recorded 70,000 Algerian migrants in 1926 and 80,000 in 1928, these figures do not fully reflect the real situation; indeed, on the eve of World War II, 200,000 North Africans resided in France<sup>6</sup>.

The established system of recruiting Maghrebi labor from the poorest regions created a foundation for the formation of specific traditions regarding their utilization and territorial placement within France. The distribution of immigrants was inextricably linked to the economic conjuncture in France and was carried out directly in accordance with the demand for labor in specific regions. Starting from the 1930s, foreign workers labored in the Paris agglomeration, in the mines and industrial enterprises of the northern and eastern parts of the country, as well as in the regions along the Alpine range—from Menton to Bordeaux—and in Upper Provence, Languedoc, and the southeastern parts of the Massif Central. The agricultural labor force was primarily directed toward agrarian regions such as Picardy, Champagne, Artois, Alpes-Maritimes, Provence, Languedoc, and Roussillon. According to 1931 statistics, the total number of foreign residents in the country reached 2.7 million, accounting for 6.6 percent of the total population. It is noteworthy that this percentage corresponds to the demographic data from the early 1990s.

During the period under analysis, the fundamental causes and characteristics of migration flows directed toward France were decisively formed: the decline in natural population growth rates

<sup>6</sup> Павлуцкая Э.В. Формирование североафриканской трудовой иммиграции во Франции. В сборнике: Арабские страны Западной Азии и Северной Африки (новейшая история, экономика и политика). М., 1997. С.96



and the labor shortage arising under conditions of economic growth necessitated the attraction of foreign resources. At this stage, the government made its first institutional attempts to regulate migration processes at the state level. As a result, specialized structures serving to coordinate migration flows were established, such as the Federation of Agricultural Enterprises of the North-East, the Committee of Italian Ironworkers of Meurthe-et-Moselle, and the General Association of Immigrants.

The migration processes that took place in France in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries developed in close connection with the country's demographic crisis and economic modernization. The sharp decline in natural population growth rates and the resulting demographic vacuum compared to neighboring European states turned immigration into a strategic tool—not only to compensate for labor shortages but also to maintain the state's geopolitical and economic stability. While the flow of cross-border workers from European countries predominated in the initial stage, world wars and the intensification of industrialization led to the formation of mass migration flows from the North Africa (Maghreb) region. As a result of the pragmatic policy pursued by the metropolis, human resources from colonial territories were extensively utilized not only as cheap labor in heavy industry and agriculture but also as a strategic reserve ("cannon fodder") in military conflicts.

Although the establishment of institutional structures such as the National Immigration Office (ONI) in the post-war period was an attempt to bring migration processes under centralized state control, bureaucratic obstacles, the lack of a social adaptation strategy, and housing problems led to systemic crises. Consequently, the emergence of informal employment in the labor market and the rise of negative public stereotypes toward migrants laid the historical foundation for modern French migration problems in the following decades. Thus, the immigration processes of this period served as a unique transformational stage based on France's extensive use of the resource potential of its colonies for capitalist development and demographic survival.

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