A man has all his moral value, according to us, only in the middle of his fellow citizens, in the city where he has always lived under the eyes of those citizens, watched, judged, and appreciated by them ... but in general the displaced person, whom we call a vagabond, no longer has his moral value.

– Adolphe Thiers

In April 1924, Stefan X., a young man born in Marseille to Italian immigrants, was imprisoned for failing to honor an expulsion order dating from 1920. Protesting his imprisonment, Stefan invoked the French nationality law of 1889, which held that children born in France to foreign parents became French nationals upon reaching adulthood, provided that they remained residents of France at that time and did not repudiate their right to French nationality before a justice of the peace. Stefan, who had just passed his twenty-first birthday, argued that he was a citizen and that, as such, he could not be expelled from the country.

Local officials argued quite the contrary. They pointed out that the original expulsion order, which had been triggered by Stefan’s theft of charcoal briquettes from a barge, was issued when Stefan was still a minor and could not
yet exercise his birthright citizenship. Since he was supposed to have left France three years earlier, they argued, he could hardly claim to have legal residency there upon turning age twenty-one. He had not, therefore, become a citizen. The expulsion, the Marseille police contended, remained legitimate and binding.

By refusing to recognize Stefan as a French national, Marseille officials were suggesting that nationality had a social content. Petty theft may have been a common survival strategy within working-class subculture, but for police officials it represented a rejection of society. Emphasizing that Stefan “did not work” and that he frequented “suspect individuals,” police and prefectoral officials suggested that his behavior was neither natural nor national. Because he acted strangely, police made Stefan a stranger.

This article explores the relationship between two kinds of étrangeté—strangeness and, for lack of a better word, foreignness. The first is a social or cultural appellation, the second a technical and legalistic one. Someone from the next town could be an étranger in the first sense, while a juridical foreigner who had lived a long time as a local resident might have ceased to be a stranger. The article focuses on Marseille and on two crisis-ridden decades of its history stretching from the end of the First World War to the beginning of the Second. In this city famous (some might say infamous) for its long history of immigration, some foreigners were, I argue, stranger than others. What was more, strangers became more vulnerable to legal exclusion than were their less strange foreign counterparts. In other words, even if one were to concede, following Rogers Brubaker, that citizenship, once acquired, is a “general, abstract, enduring, and context-independent” status, one must recognize that “foreignness” in interwar Marseille remained profoundly context-dependent. And thus so did the rights of foreigners.

Although there are perhaps many ways to alienate a foreigner, this article focuses on expulsion because it purported to make foreigners quite literally “alien.” Indeed, there was perhaps no more direct a way in which officials drew a line between who belonged and who did not. Yet the practice of expulsion is also revealing because it demonstrates the degree to which immigrants’ right to residency depended on complex relationships that often belied neat oppositions between French and foreign nationals.

In invoking the dual meaning of the French word “étranger,” I am not simply engaging in word play. Rather, I am suggesting that there was, in interwar France and in Marseille most particularly, a deeper connection between the social being of immigrants and the legal rights they acquired. At the same time that French officials eschewed explicit race bias as contrary to the republican system, they applied republican standards according to discriminatory criteria; these criteria overlapped with existing racial ideologies while never being determined by them in a straightforward fashion. Rather than exclude individuals on the basis of overtly racist criteria, police divided foreigners into two classes: immigrants who could claim residency rights in France and thus a
“droit de cité” in Marseille, and permanent strangers whom authorities rendered only more foreign by removing residency rights from them. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Marseille authorities discriminated among foreigners in an effort to ensure social peace on the local level; over the course of the 1930s, however, their objective shifted from achieving local stability to defending national security. As a new war became increasingly likely, the social criteria employed by police to judge foreigners lost their local mooring, and police action against migrants increasingly reflected mounting national hysteria.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, therefore, the adjudication of foreigners’ rights depended largely on authorities’ evaluations of the place immigrants occupied within a local context that was profoundly stratified socially. This stratification established the basis for including some immigrants in Marseille life at the same time that it provided the rationale for excluding those deemed too “strange.” Although the social geography of Marseille had changed little by the late 1930s, the conceptual space left open for immigrant inclusion narrowed as the French prepared for war. Decisions to expel no longer turned on local social belonging; rather, foreign nationality came to signify proof of foreigners’ strangeness, unchanged by whatever social position they occupied.

* * *

The power to expel was established during the Second Republic by an 1849 law granting the Interior Ministry the right to remove from French territory any foreigner deemed to pose a threat to public safety or national security. Maintained during the Third Republic, the law also stipulated that the prefects of land and maritime border departments could unilaterally and summarily expel any foreigner in order to ensure public tranquillity. Expelled persons were to leave the country within a fixed period of time and would be subject to imprisonment if apprehended in French territory after that date. Since many expellees did not, in fact, depart France, the practice of expulsion sometimes had the perverse effect of increasing the number of illegal aliens living within French borders.

Prior to the Second World War, the vast majority of expulsions were initiated when foreigners were found to have broken French laws. Yet while breaking the law usually was a necessary condition for expulsion, it was rarely a sufficient one. Expulsion decisions relied not only on facts that were presumed to be objective but also on subjective judgments regarding the danger that individuals posed.

Although themselves impermanent, factors such as marital and family status, living standards, permanence of housing, regularity of work, and length of residency in France functioned together to fix a person’s identity in much the way that a racial classification might have. What was more, many of the characteristics contributing to this social alchemy already were invested with what might be called racial significance. As scientific racism and popular criminology dovetailed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, persons
with few geographic roots—transients, vagrants, beggars, and so forth—increasingly were regarded not only as a separate class but as an evolving, or even devolving, criminal race. The notion that their “anti-social” behavior was literally embodied left little room for reform; instead pressure increased to remove such persons from French society altogether by placing them in penal colonies. Failing that, their identities were to be fixed through body measurements recorded on identification cards that, beginning in 1912, all so-called “nomads” would be required to carry; neglecting to carry such a card would itself constitute a misdemeanor. By the turn of the twentieth century, French police thus had developed a set of entrenched practices and regulations by virtue of which so-called rootless persons were classified as inherently dangerous to society. That basic approach to policing carried over to the treatment of immigrants, some of whom were bound to be regarded as more uprooted than others.

Although the expulsion of foreigners was not the same thing as forced relocation to colonies, the policing of foreigners belongs to the same history of mentalités. Most expulsions followed convictions for infractions of French civil or criminal law that did not engage national security in any direct way. Indeed, judging from the thousands of expulsion files I have examined in the Rhône and Bouches-du-Rhône archives, every arrest of a foreigner between 1918 and 1939 provoked an inquiry by police into the merits of ordering an expulsion. The judgment of local police officials thus intervened at two key points in the process leading to expulsion: first, local police made the arrests that triggered the inquiry into the merits of expelling any particular foreigner; second, police inspectors and commissioners were asked to write reports and to make recommendations regarding the desirability of expelling the foreigner in question following conviction or acquittal. Even in those departments that were not land or sea borders, therefore, the process of expelling foreigners was initiated on the most local of administrative levels and began with police inspectors making recommendations to their commissioners, recommendations that, after several levels of review, often made it intact to the Ministry of Interior’s Direction de la Sûreté for final approval. The very structure of police practices allowed local social problems to be addressed by way of national exclusion.

Expulsion practices engaged in by Marseille officials during the 1920s and early 1930s proved that foreignness as a legal status became more relevant when it was coupled with social strangeness. As local police sought to combat or control the scourges for which Marseille was well known—overcrowded and unhygienic housing, prostitution, illicit drug use and trade, and organized crime—they targeted foreigners who fit into their preconceived ideas of social instability and danger. That is why foreigners were several times more likely to be expelled if they lived directly behind the port in Marseille's central districts than if they lived in its peripheral villages.
Figure 1: Map of Marseille by arrondissements Arrondissements 1-7 represent the “center,” arrondissements 8-16 the “periphery.”

Source: Cogito Technologies

The configuration of Marseille’s city limits to allow for municipal control of twenty-three kilometers of docks and fifty-seven kilometers of coastline meant that some 22,800 hectares, more than twice the size of Paris intra muros, fell within city limits. Urban life in interwar Marseille was organized around “villages” spreading out from the Old Port to the north, east, and south—St. Henri, St. Louis, Les Aygalades, Le Canet, La Capelette, Endoume, and so on. Though today these villages run together in one urban agglomeration, until the last third of the twentieth century Marseille was a “deformed body” with its succession of disconnected villages, separated from one another and isolated from the center by terrains vagues of semi-rural space. As the port grew, the imbalance of urban development in Marseille was only exacerbated: members of the working class who could afford to do so built maisonettes of two to six rooms in the villages that followed the expansion of the port and its related industries to the north and east; Marseille’s bourgeois, meanwhile, tended to settle along the southern hills of the city. In between, the central
port districts were left primarily to floating populations. There one found the thousands of casual laborers upon whom the Marseille economy depended: stevedores, sailors, migrants for whom Marseille was simply a way-station en route to a final destination, or anyone whose earnings were uncertain enough to make staying in a "furnished room"—where one paid rent by the day, week, or month—preferable to acquiring furniture of one's own and paying the trimestrial or annual rent that prevailed in the rest of the city.

The "lopsided" development of Marseille's urban geography thus reflected its social and employment structure, which included a core of workers who had more or less permanent employment, complemented by an even larger number of casual laborers: "journaliers" (day workers) employed by the week, day, or even half-day, as needed. This "Marseille system" allowed local industrialists and businessmen to tailor their personnel to the flow of international trade. Casual laborers were crucial to the production of soap, vegetable oil, refined sugar, pasta, or other products dependent on raw materials imported from the colonies and abroad. Their employment fluctuated with the season, the supply of raw materials, international prices, and the demand for finished products.

With dramatic fluctuations in production and export cycles, companies had little incentive to invest in modern technology; instead, they became increasingly dependent on cheap, dispensable, and often immigrant, labor. By 1932, foreigners—the vast majority of whom were Italian—reportedly comprised more than one-third of Marseille's population, nearly five times the percentage represented by foreigners in the national census. Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that, when the state tried to place limits on foreigners' employment, Marseille industrialists cried foul. Complaining about the proposed measures, employer groups gathered comments from their members, all of whom emphasized the lack of "native" labor willing to perform the dirty and dangerous work that their industries required. If industries that employed anywhere from 20 to 80 percent foreign labor were forced to change their employment practices, the Marseille Chamber of Commerce wrote,

It would be first of all an injustice, because this labor is indispensable in a large number of industries, and particularly in border areas as well as ports. Second, the measure would have the immediate effect of increasing the cost of production at the same time that, by all possible means, it behooves [us] to decrease costs so as to decrease prices and balance them with consumer purchasing power.

For Marseille employers it was, in other words, indispensable to retain the right to employ labor that was, in fact, dispensable. Disposable workers, however, had little disposable income to spend on housing or other comforts, and so the Marseille economy helped to make transience a permanent factor of city life.

Just as economic life in Marseille revolved around the port, so too did much of Marseille's social and cultural life. Bars, music halls and brothels were
concentrated in the narrow streets behind the original port basin, known as the Vieux Port. Between the Old Port and the Gare Saint Charles, one found a plethora of rooming houses where an ever-changing port population slept at night: often these served as the first stop for many of those transients who became, by virtue of staying, immigrants.

By the end of the First World War, the majority of Marseille's population lived in its peripheral “villages.” Yet police attention nevertheless remained focused on the port districts. In many respects, the port district’s history of vice had required this focus. Marseille’s reputation as a city where armed thugs ruled the Old Port neighborhood while ineffectual police failed to pursue cases had prompted the nationalization of the municipal police force in 1908. Prostitution, although not illegal in France, also drew the attention of authorities to this area. What was more, there was a structural rationale for the intensive focus on the port. As the largest port in France and one of the largest in continental Europe, Marseille required a different kind of policing than did most other French cities. Police functions included counter-espionage, passport control, abating drug and contraband traffic, and preventing theft of merchandise from the docks, not to mention remaining aware of what was going on despite a constantly rotating population of sailors, dock workers, and passengers.

In contrast to port-district transients, migrants who moved out to peripheral districts tended to live in the same place, or at least in the same neighborhood, for the rest of their years in Marseille. If they were able to find work away from the docks, they gladly ceased coming into the center. The French entertainer Robert Ripa claims, for example, that it was only in order to register his birth that his father finally went, in 1920, “to the city, I mean to the center of Marseille” for the first time since he had arrived from Italy in 1911. After that, according to Ripa, his father only went into “the city” two or three times prior to his death in 1942. “They didn’t go into town, those folks,” he explained, “they stayed at home, in the neighborhood.” Even if Ripa undoubtedly exaggerates, his recollection suggests that the lifestyle of residents in the periphery was antithetical to that of the constantly shifting “dangerous classes” of the port district.

Although the port district had few streets where foreigners in fact outnumbered the French, journalists often wrote about central Marseille as they might have some exotic land in a travel log. Yet even in the most densely populated sector of the city, foreigners comprised just over a quarter of the population. While their representation was somewhat higher in some peripheral parts of the city, it was nonetheless primarily the narrow streets of the city center that were associated with such strangers. The communist daily L’Humanité was one of the rare papers acknowledging that the “shameful leprosy of these slums-with-no-name, where the unemployed are ‘housed’ in anguish,” extended to a “proletariat as much French as immigrant.” French or foreign, residents of the central port area seemed to correspond to every available
stereotype about pathological behavior: they were disproportionately male, with uncertain or unstable residence, an irregular means of existence, and no apparent family connections—all of which were particularly worrisome in a country with a declining birth rate and deficit of young men. Although police officials might have recognized the connection between the residential instability of central-district dwellers and the casual structure of the Marseille labor market, they instead evaluated irregular work, impermanent housing and (presumed) celibacy as indelible markers of a person's anti-social constitution. The fact that colonial migrants were also overwhelmingly male, detached from their families, living in overcrowded and unstable housing conditions, and extremely vulnerable to the vicissitudes of Marseille's labor market further colored these districts as unstable even though colonials never made up more than four percent of the population of even the most densely populated districts. In contrast, the peripheral districts emerged as semi-rural, family-oriented villages together with presumably more rooted, stable, and "integrated" populations. In this way, the social map of Marseille followed a decidedly different pattern than that of many other cities, where marginals lived quite literally on the city's margins.

Although social stigma was not a simple effect of Marseille's geography, there were nonetheless important correlations between one's social capital and where one lived in Marseille's urban landscape. Broadly speaking, a foreigner living in Marseille's central districts, or one who was deemed to be "without a fixed domicile," was almost five times more likely to be expelled from the country than one who was living in the peripheral districts. In other words, foreigners who had no official residence, or whose residence was in the overcrowded "dangerous" center, were more likely than others to be considered too foreign to be permitted to continue residing in France. Larbi Z., for example, was a typical resident of Marseille's city center. He was a Moroccan immigrant who risked expulsion after he was sentenced by Marseille's Correctional Tribunal to a twenty-five franc fine for illegal arm possession—in this case, the arm in question was a razor. Police files indicate that this was Larbi's first known offense since he had arrived in France, according to his testimony, two years earlier. Larbi claimed to have stable work at a factory run by R.. Although Larbi's court file indicates nothing out of the ordinary, and while his sentence fell well within the normal range of sentences given others found guilty of the same offense, the Bouches-du-Rhône prefect, when evaluating the case for expulsion, emphasized his transience. The prefect's description of Larbi as "without work and without a regular means of existence," could have applied, in fact, to any number of immigrants living at 7 rue des Chapeliers, the address where Larbi rented a room over a Moroccan restaurant. This address in the Pressentines neighborhood, "named for its prison but known for its Arabs," had not yet become infamous for the illegal
immigration ring that would be uncovered there eight years later, when some eighty clandestine immigrants all claimed to be living at Number 7 simultaneously. However, the street that the popular journalist Albert Londres later likened to the native sections of Sfax, Rabat, Oran and Algiers was known, even in 1919, as one of Marseille's most notoriously overcrowded streets; it also was already associated with a largely unattached, presumed to be transient, male population coming from France's overseas possessions. No doubt it was this relatively new population that led Ludovic Naudou to comment in L'Illustration that no one wore a chapeau anymore in the street named for them; fezes had replaced hats on Hatmakers' Street.

In any case, the prefect argued for Larbi's expulsion, claiming that he actually had lived in France a mere three days. Since nothing in police reports corroborated the prefect's assertion, the Interior Ministry sent the case back to Marseille demanding an explanation. The same police commissioner who had previously presented Larbi's claims as fact now corroborated the prefect's point of view, confirming that Larbi had resided in Marseille only three days prior to his arrest and that he had, during that time, worked for more than one employer. On the basis of this confirmation, Larbi was expelled on 23 October 1919.

It is worth observing that in the reports and recommendations leading to Larbi's expulsion, police did not emphasize the misdemeanor for which Larbi had been convicted. Rather than provide specific evidence of how Larbi had posed a public danger, his arrest served as a way of discovering his broader instability, which was apparently revealed by where he lived, how often he changed employers, and how long he had been in France. Instead of focusing on the crime, which, as indicated by his sentence, was considered reasonably minor, the prefect and his subordinates focused on the criminal; this explains why seemingly ancillary information was used to justify his expulsion.

The social dynamics that informed Larbi's treatment become all the more apparent when one considers experiences of immigrants living in Marseille's peripheral districts. The example of Hector W. is instructive. Hector was a Spanish immigrant who was convicted for the same misdemeanor as Larbi. Instead of twenty-five francs in fines, he was given a similarly lax two-week suspended sentence. Like Larbi, he was a day laborer, but unlike Larbi, his assertion that he worked regularly for the Electrical Company of Cap Pinède was not questioned, nor was his claim that he had lived in France since 1906. The original police report evaluating his case for expulsion showed, significantly, that Hector was married, had two children, and lived with his family in a working-class village north of the port known as La Madrague—on the same street, it turns out, where the immigrant Ivo Livi, later known as Yves Montand, would soon grow up. As was common among residents of the periphery, Hector's arrest led to a warning rather than to an expulsion.

The importance played by such social factors becomes clearest when members of the same immigrant group are compared across the social space
of Marseille, as the cases pertaining to Armenians will show. The arrival in Marseille of Armenian refugees in the early 1920s had elicited both pathos and condemnation. Housed in ramshackle barracks on a site loaned to the city by the military, Armenians quickly became associated with destitution and overcrowding. In 1923, the Prefect, Louis Thibon, lamented the “continual arrival of these orientals.” Only about 500 of the 857 men living in the make-shift “Camp Oddo” were working, Thibon complained, while there were as many as 400 “unfortunates” — widows and orphans with no support. He concluded that Armenians willingly accepted to live “without worrying about the next day.” Those who found no place in the “sordid” camp took up residence in the rooming houses of central Marseille. Many later pooled their resources and joined the exodus to the periphery, constructing small houses there.

Despite the fact that Armenians were widely regarded as indolent “orientals,” expulsion records from Marseille indicate that their residency rights, too, were influenced by the circumstances in which they lived. Garabed G., for example, was a day worker, 24 years old and still single. He had been living in a rented room on the rue Torte in central Marseille, but when police found him without proper identification in 1932 and referred him to the courts for prosecution, he was deemed to have “no known domicile.” His means of existence came from working “au hasard de l’embauche.” The Chef de la Sûreté and the General Secretary for Police at the Prefecture initially only recommended the refoulement (the denial of residency with no penal implications) of this “individual [who] has no fixed domicile and has no regular work.” When Garabed failed to leave France immediately, however, officials quickly replaced the refoulement with an expulsion order. Although authorities had concluded that Garabed had no known domicile, they had no trouble finding him in another rented room on the rue Torte when it came time to serve him with the order to leave France. Meanwhile, Haroutioum T. was condemned to a fifteen-day suspended sentence for a fight with another Armenian. Owner of a house near the Vallon des Tuves in a semi-rural sector of northern Marseille known as Campagne Isidore, Haroutioum earned the approbation of the Chef de la Sûreté and a representative at the Prefecture, both of whom recommended that he be warned rather than expelled. The fact that the Interior Ministry saw fit to expel him and grant an immediate suspension of the order was a compromise: on paper, ministerial officials insisted on a more severe punishment, but by granting an immediate suspension they also acknowledged the argument made by local Marseille officials that Haroutioum deserved to stay on. Similarly, Hagop Z. was warned rather than expelled on breach-of-promise charges. He also was married, had four children of whom three had been declared French, and lived in the periphery — on the Chemin de Saint Loup in the Campagne Ripert sector of Sainte Marguerite, a village in southeastern Marseille. Previously owner of a clothing store in central Marseille, he had retired for health reasons and now earned his living from rents paid to him.
Despite the fact that Hagop had several previous infractions for various misdemeanors, the Chef de la Sûreté recommended that he be warned rather than expelled. That recommendation was honored; several years later Hagop requested naturalization.52

While the social relations of immigrants living in the periphery allowed them to provide affidavits testifying, for example, that they had been “settled in the community for approximately 12 years,” or that they had “never given rise to any complaints from the population,”53 population turnover was so frequent in central Marseille that the immigrants living there had little means for establishing a reputation. Indeed, when in doubt, police emphasized the lack of verifiable information they could collect on such foreigners. Corrections to oral testimony recorded in police records reflect this problem. Assertions such as “in France for five years” were crossed out and replaced with “unknown;” addresses like “17 rue St Lazare” were replaced with “no fixed domicile.”54 In contrast to inhabitants of the periphery, where a person’s domicile could be verified with relative ease, the presumed or real transience of central-district residents made it difficult for police not only to account for them but to hold them accountable. Like the vagabonds studied by Matt Matsuda, their social status was troubling in itself, for, to quote Matsuda, it “allowed no fixed point of identification.”55 Operating on the assumption that any equivocation would allow transient foreigners to slip from their grasp, police and local officials meted out harsher punishments to those who lived in social surroundings that did not correspond to those of the presumed norm. Consequently, and perhaps ironically, police only exacerbated the marginality of the persons in question by turning them into illegal aliens overnight.

The norms informing police behavior were not clear cut, nor did they reflect any explicit racial hierarchy. Rather, a peculiar alchemy of class, marital status, gender, and social deviance marked the port-area population as quintessential outsiders. To be sure, these markers of social deviance targeted some migrant groups more than others. The fact that migration from North Africa tended to be seasonal and that less than four percent of the North African population in the Marseille area was female, for example, lent support to the notion that migrants like Larbi lacked roots and were antisocial.56 Then too there was the notion that mainland French society offered more freedom than colonial migrants could handle, making their uprooting both more pronounced and more destabilizing than that faced by other migrants.57 No doubt racial stereotyping permeated the assumptions that informed how police weighed expulsion versus clemency, but, as I have suggested elsewhere, such assumptions were filtered through local experience.58

In Marseille, racial ideologies only made sense inasmuch as they corresponded to an equally profound social division between the center of town and the periphery, “two distinct worlds, foreign to one another,” as Ludovic Naudeau put it.59 Stefan, the young central-district resident of Italian descent whose citizenship was challenged by Marseille officials, could not help but be
colored by this social dynamic. Indeed, he had more in common with the Moroccan Larbi than he did with Europeans living in the periphery. Like the Armenian Garabed, Stefan and Larbi were relatively young, single, male, thought to work only irregularly, and presumed to be transient. Although Stefan was born in Marseille and Larbi in French Morocco, the Spanish-born Hector and the Armenians Haroutium and Hagop were arguably more “French”—at least in the eyes of Marseille officials—than was either of the former. Together, social and cultural factors functioned to create national, if not entirely racial, boundaries between people living in the same city.

Expulsion patterns between 1919 and 1932 reflected the association of central Marseille with transience, criminality and social instability. The combination of these elements helps to explain why all but five among a sampling of 166 summary expulsions ordered unilaterally by the Bouches-du-Rhone prefect between 1919 and 1932 concerned persons who were deemed not to have a fixed residence. Even when we take into account the much higher number of cases referred to the Interior Ministry, a bifurcation of rights and opportunities emerges between foreigners who circulated in the infamous city center and those who lived on the periphery. Less than sixteen percent of expulsions sampled in Marseille concerned persons living in the peripheral districts; this was despite the fact that the majority of Marseille's population lived in the periphery, not the center. Indeed, in over 66 percent of the cases concerning residents of the periphery, the individuals concerned were spared expulsion. Meanwhile, almost 74 percent of the cases involving residents of the center and persons deemed to have no fixed domicile triggered an immediate recommendation for expulsion. Local authorities drew on existing social divisions as they made legal distinctions among foreigners living in Marseille. Once they identified who was “stranger,” they effectively made them more foreign by removing their legal rights to continued residency in France.

* * *

By making local social stability a major aim of how they policed foreigners, Marseille authorities exacerbated the city's social stratification, giving it legal weight. Thus the city center not only teemed with strangers but also with illegal aliens and refractory expellees whose very illegality made them that much more difficult to trace. This apparent lack of control over Marseille's foreign population had emerged, in part, from the very efforts police had made to exert control.

On 9 October 1934, the world learned how out of control Marseille was. Minutes after King Alexander of Yugoslavia had disembarked for a state visit, a foreigner had shot him dead in his motorcade, along with French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou, who had been sitting next to the king. For a few days, the world watched in trepidation, wondering whether the murder of this Balkan king might precipitate another war just twenty years after the last. No European war broke out, but this strike at the legitimacy of France's southern Euro-

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pean ally did alter the balance of power in Europe away from France. For one thing, Barthou, a strong opponent of Germany, was replaced by Pierre Laval. But just as important, the assassination, while probably not conspired to directly by either Mussolini or Hitler, served both their interests by weakening the Yugoslav dictatorship and nourishing the country’s existing divisions.

The assassination briefly drew attention away from the place that migrants occupied in Marseille’s social geography to focus it instead on where they fit into international power politics. It was first reported that the assassin was a Croatian nationalist, working for the Croatia-based terrorist group the Ustashi. It was later learned that the assassin was from Macedonia and had committed other assassinations under the leadership of Ivan Mihailov and the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. Regardless of the precise identity of the assassin, the notion that foreigners would use France as a staging ground for violent political battles was particularly alarming to French public opinion. Although political activity had always been an element in the surveillance of foreigners, the assassination now made this concern primary. The policing of foreigners did not change overnight, but it nevertheless seemed clear that something had to be done to prevent foreigners from dragging a still healing France into another war. Nor was anxiety limited to migrants from the Balkans. Within days of the assassination—perhaps triggered by a call from Jean Cristofol, the recently elected Communist Conseiller d’arrondissement, for a Comité de soutien aux antifascistes espagnols to aid insurgents in the Asturian province—authorities clamped down on political migration into Marseille. The events in Asturia added to concerns that had mounted in France since the beginning of Spain’s Civil War that Marseille might serve as a way station for both arms and combatants; as a result, Spanish refugees were banned from residing in Marseille. In practice, it was of course difficult to distinguish a Spanish insurgent from a labor migrant, but this ruling—and a similar one targeting German refugees in Alsace-Lorraine from the summer of 1933—announced a shift in French policy by introducing categorical exclusions from certain border regions.

Just as important, the assassination brought a shake-up in both local and national administration. Interior Minister Albert Sarraut demanded the removal of the Bouches-du-Rhône Prefect as well as the Director of the Sûreté Nationale in Paris; Sarraut then handed in his own resignation. The Justice Minister soon followed. The fact that the assassination had been captured on motion picture film and broadcast internationally as newsreel before being banned in France and many other countries added urgency to French authorities’ response to the incident. The newsreel drew attention, among other things, to the disorder and incompetence of the Marseille police, whose inefficiency had been, according to one international observer, “far greater even than [that of] the Bosnian police in June 1914.” It was hardly surprising, then, that three weeks after the incident this same observer reported that “an acrimonious quarrel between the Sûreté Générale and the local Marseilles police is still raging.”
The incident focused attention not only on the Marseille police but also on the control of its foreign residents. "Had one thought," wrote M. de Kerillis in L’Œuvre, “that in a city like Marseille, where the worst types neighbor the best, strict precautions should have been taken?"73 "Many were those who, before the tragedy, were surprised that Marseille would be chosen as the port of disembarkation," added Philippe Henriot in France d’abord. “Marseille, city of hoodlums [nervis] and untrustworthy foreigners. ... The entire world knows that no police is less reliable [sûre] than that of this oriental port. Its floating population prevents any serious surveillance.”74 Terrorism thus served as a rationale for attacking immigrant populations more generally.

Responding to renewed concerns regarding the surveillance of foreigners, Interior Minister Paul Marchandeau announced that “it will be, from now on, inadmissible that [foreigners] take advantage of their presence in France to commit unsavory acts or to create agitation here [that is] profoundly prejudicial to our national life.”75 How to go about ensuring this was less obvious. Marseille police refrained, for example, from expelling a known Italian socialist who took active part in local anti-fascist meetings, even though he was reported to have stated publicly that the deaths of Barthou and the Yugoslav king were no loss for the proletariat. One local official argued that this former member of the Italian parliament ought to be expelled since he "seems to singularly ignore the obligations incumbent upon him to respect the rules of French hospitality."76 But the Commissioner of Special Police, Jean Baptistin Dhubert, offered a different analysis. Concerned about the extent to which the assassination fueled animosity between the Left and the Right, Dhubert suggested that expulsion would only grant the foreigner in question “an importance that he surely does not merit,” from which he might not hesitate to garner a “moral advantage” in his political battles, only making him more dangerous.77 Meanwhile, expulsions for petty economic crimes continued apace.

Although police officials like Dhubert clearly believed that there could be no rigid formula for the political policing of foreigners, the government in Paris now looked precisely for such a thing. After the fall of the Doumergue government, the Flandin government called for a review of all existing foreigner identification cards. Flandin, who had been among those responsible for proposing the 1912 law on nomads, now instructed local offices to reject renewals of short-term cards for persons having lived in France less than two years and to approve them for those having lived there five years or more, leaving the local officials to decide what constituted sufficient proof of residence. Aimed at excluding foreigners who had no intention of staying, the measures also targeted recent arrivals, like Jewish refugees, seasonal migrants, and those whose very mobility made it difficult to prove how long they had lived in France. As of 8 February 1935, the Flandin government had added another restriction: from that point forward, in an effort to secure better surveillance, the validity of identification cards would be limited to a single department. Any foreigner caught outside his or her authorized department
could be arrested. Thanks to the Marseille incident, ironically, the same sort of discriminatory practices that the (now chastised) Marseille police had long practiced in order to achieve local security were now to be applied to foreigners across the country in the interests of national security.

No record remains of the precise decisions Bouches-du-Rhône officials made in the Flandin review, but if they applied the expected standard—two years’ proven residency—then surely they would have rejected renewals for virtually all but the most stable of the foreigners living in central Marseille. In practice, the Flandin measures made day-to-day policing more difficult in a number of ways. Almost a year after the assassination, the Bouches-du-Rhône Prefect reported that at least another six months would be required to finish reviewing all the identification card files being reevaluated under the Flandin directive. By that time, even officials in Paris acknowledged that those foreigners who “only received a six-month renewal ... will soon file new requests for renewals which will only add to the ones currently being processed.” In the interim, the review process left thousands of people in limbo, neither legal nor really illegal, as they awaited an official response.

Those rejected, meanwhile, did not necessarily depart Marseille; instead they often swelled the numbers of illegal aliens living in the city undetected, and thereby only exacerbated the problems that the Flandin government had aimed to address. A report on police operations in 1936, in fact, confirmed that the policing of foreigners remained focused on the Old Port neighborhood. Over the course of 1936, port police arrested 87 foreigners for failing to honor an expulsion order; this “excellent and unprecedented record” was due, the Special Port Police Commissioner reported, “almost exclusively to the automatic identification of all individuals found on the docks outside of work hours and who were not working. This serves port security in the same way that repressing theft and vagrancy does, for the recalcitrant expellees quickly become vagrants and thieves.” Although the arrest of 87 expellees may have represented a port-police record, the increase in expulsions and rejections of identification cards that had followed the assassinations probably meant that this number represented a mere fraction of the refractory expellees residing in Marseille.

Increasing the work expected of local police, the Flandin reforms did not address the infrastructure problems that had so come under fire in the wake of the assassination. By 1936, there were only twelve more police inspectors and twenty more beat policemen assigned to the Marseille force than there had been in 1931. As a per-capita figure, their numbers still paled when compared to the force in Paris, or even Lyon. Tens of thousands of identification card reviews, meanwhile, were being conducted by a team that had little expertise and that fluctuated in size from five to eleven. Police personnel in Marseille continued to increase under the Popular Front, while some of the Flandin measures were scaled back. But it would take the combination of renewed international threats, further local crises, and increased police means for Mar-
At the onset of 1938, crises brewed both at home and abroad. The Popular Front government, although still intact under the leadership of the Radical Camille Chautemps, was divided from within and attacked from without. In January, Chautemps had resigned and reformed his government, following a conflict with the communist and socialist parties. Chautemps' new government now leaned slightly more to the right, but it nonetheless was still incapable of responding effectively to continued economic crisis. On 10 March, the Chautemps government again resigned, after recognizing that its austerity plan would not be supported by the socialists. Taking advantage of the moment, Hitler invaded Austria two days later. Absorbed by domestic affairs, France did not respond. The Socialist leader Léon Blum, whose government had fallen the previous June, returned to Popular Front's helm but was unable to gain the support in parliament that he needed in order to govern effectively. In April, the Czech government, anticipating a German advance, called up its army reserves, a move that worried its allies in France and Britain; that month, on the home front, the Popular Front government moved more definitively to the right. Heading the new government following Blum's final fall was the Radical Party leader, Édouard Daladier.

Daladier had formed his first government five years earlier, the day after Hitler had come to power. This time, he arrived on the scene a month after Germany had annexed Austria, and in the wake of newly anti-Semitic legislation promulgated in Hungary, Poland, and Romania. What was more, the month he became Premier, a new round of boycotts against Jews began in Germany, and a new Nazi decree required Jews to submit inventories of all property valued over 5,000 marks.85 By May, one also could no longer ignore the mounting tension on the Czech-German border. All of these factors helped to trigger new waves of refugees in the direction of France while increasing the resolve of those already there not to return to their native countries. Rumors mounted that the refugees were nothing but a fifth column, destined to drag France into another war, and the Right's attack on the previous premier, Léon Blum, as a socialist and a Jew had only fueled this fire. Daladier responded to the growing sense of crisis by issuing a set of Decree-Laws; their purpose was to distinguish, as Albert Sarraut, now back at the helm of the Interior Ministry, put it, “foreigner[s] of good faith” from “‘clandestine’ foreigners, irregular guests [...] unworthy of living on our soil.”86

The May Decrees, as they came to be called, gave legal recognition to some of the social considerations that had long been a factor in the interactions between police and foreigners. Foreigners who could prove that they had lived in France for fifteen uninterrupted years (or for five years if they had French children or had been married for at least two years to a French
woman became eligible thanks to the May 1938 decrees for special identification cards allowing them to avoid most of the restrictions that applied to other foreigners. French-born women who had lost their nationality through marriage also gained access to this privileged foreign status, as did honorably discharged legionnaires. The May Decrees therefore formalized the distinction between settled and recently uprooted foreigners. In this way, they lent legitimacy to stereotyping without explicitly mentioning race or nationality. The rootless targeted by these measures were not only the sub-proletarian “strangers” who had absorbed the concern of Marseille officials a decade earlier; clearly, they also included thousands of other homeless persons—the predominantly Jewish refugees who continued to arrive in large numbers each day. By the end of 1938, the “individual notices” that made up every arrest record seemed to confirm this, for they contained a new rubric to be completed: “what is his/her religion?”

At the same time, however, the May Decrees gave police wider latitude to arrest and prosecute the many foreigners whose very stability had heretofore made them invisible. The decrees stepped up surveillance of foreigners and stiffened penalties for non-compliance. The first decree, dated 2 May, required that foreigners carry their identification cards on them at all times and specified that sentences of one month to one year in prison and fines of 100 to 1,000 francs would be meted out to foreigners who entered France illegally, those who failed to request identification cards, and all persons who provided direct or indirect aid to someone illegally entering or living in France. It further specified that all persons lodging foreigners as employees, tenants, or even as guests were required to declare this to the local police commissioner within 48 hours of their arrival or face fines. Foreigners also had to notify authorities if they changed addresses, even if they moved within the same city. Finally, in an attempt to make expulsions more effective, the decree also required a minimum sentence of six months to three years for failure to heed an expulsion order.

Although Daladier had sidestepped parliamentary power by issuing the decrees, parliament signaled its assent by voting, within days, to supply the Interior Ministry with the budgetary means to carry out the new provisions. In Marseille, police used their newly buttressed powers as a license to begin raids. It was no longer enough to expel the overtly transient, as authorities had characterized Larbi in 1919; one also had to unearth the so-called “undesirable elements” whom, as the prefect put it, “only surprise police operations will allow us to detect.” Marseille police were now in a better position to undertake such “surprise police operations” than they had been in the 1920s and early 1930s, when understaffing, labor disputes, and absenteeism encouraged them to be more discriminating in how they wielded their power.

With the Radical Party’s condemnation at its October 1938 Congress of any future coalition with the Communists, Daladier abandoned what pretense remained of a left-wing ruling coalition. Daladier also used this platform to
attack refugees for their alleged interference in French politics.96 Events occurring during the same meeting also curtailed much of the local control that the Bouches-du-Rhône prefecture had over its security forces. Although Marseille police showed signs of considerable zeal in the wake of the May Decrees, their reputation was tarnished in an attack on Marseille’s public administration by the Daladier government after the former proved incapable of responding adequately to a fire in the Nouvelles Galeries Department store. That fire had spread to the Hôtel Noailles, where delegates to the Radical Party Congress were staying. The uncontrollable blaze, which had required assistance from as far away as Toulon and Lyon in order to be controlled, seemed to confirm, four years to the month after the murders of King Alexander and Louis Barthou, that Marseille still lacked an appropriate level of security and safety services. In the wake of the October 1938 blaze and the inquiry that followed, an Administrateur Extraordinaire with the rank of prefect took over most of the duties that had previously fallen to Marseille’s Socialist Mayor, the son of Italian immigrants, Henri Tasso. The police came under the control of a new Directeur des Services de Police, who reported to the new administrator; the latter reported not to the Interior Minister, as did most prefects, but to Daladier himself.97

By the time that this administrative reorganization took place, the Marseille police had already been zealously applying the May Decrees for some months. The first foreigners caught in the 1938 dragnet came from the social groups that had always proved the most vulnerable to police power: ragpickers, vagrants, sailors, stevedores, traveling salesmen, or anyone whose instability of residence or profession qualified him or her as a social stranger. As if to avenge its lax reputation, however, the newly enlarged Marseille police force cast its net more widely, and its raids began to drag in those whose presence the police had long ignored: the residents of the periphery. A Spaniard who had lived in Marseille’s peripheral Les Caillols neighborhood for 24 years suddenly found himself imprisoned for never having had a valid identification card. Another who had lived in France since 1909 was imprisoned for failing to renew his card. Still another who was born in France in 1918 was imprisoned for not having a card.98 Even an Italian man who had lived in the Montrédon neighborhood for 53 years received a one-month prison sentence and a one-hundred franc fine.99 Refractory expellees, including many who claimed not to remember being expelled, turned up with expulsions dating back to the end of the nineteenth century.100 Perhaps it was not accidental that Hagop Z., the Armenian who had been spared expulsion in 1931, chose the fall of 1938 to file for naturalization.101

The May Decrees had been aimed at rooting out—or imprisoning—illegal aliens, especially the newly arrived. No doubt the new requirement of having to report changes in address to local authorities would have made those who were unable to prove an address or who tried to escape the strictures of such requirements more vulnerable than were those with fixed residences. No doubt, too, the new policies depended on the willingness of native French res-
idents to report their tenants and perhaps inform on their neighbors. Perhaps this too would have mitigated against long-term foreign residents becoming victim to the new policies, just as affidavits on behalf of residents of the periphery had done in years before.

At the same time, however, Marseille officials often ordered punishments of foreigners that exceeded the legal standards established by the May Decrees. The right that the Bouches-du-Rhône prefect retained as the head of a border department to summarily expel foreigners without recourse to the Interior Ministry facilitated this escalation. A typical procès-verbal issued “in execution of the instructions of the Central Commissioner [regarding] the decree of 2 May 1938,” for example, reported an individual for “having been surprised in the course of working on the docks although his identification card does not mention ‘docker’ or ‘day worker/docker’.” Although the 2 May Decree had specified that invalid identification cards were punishable by sentences of one to twelve months in prison and fines of 100 to 1,000 francs, the police commissioner filing this report instead indicated that “[a]ny foreigner who disobeys these provisions will be the object of an expulsion order.” The foreigner in question, a native of Yugoslavia, had lived in France for nine years, of which five had been spent in Marseille. Illiterate, he signed the procès-verbal with a thumbprint; he was subsequently expelled by prefectoral order. While the May Decrees were themselves intended to separate long-term immigrants who had settled in France from the newly arrived who had no permanent home, the evidence from Marseille suggests that the practices unleashed by the decrees permitted a more generalized attack on foreigners in the context of impending war.

When Ludovic Naudeau remarked in 1929 that fezes had replaced hats on Hatmakers’ Street, in effect he suggested that there was something about the rue des Chapeliers in Marseille’s city center that was no longer fully French. By the late 1930s, the focus had shifted. Now it was not the center of Marseille but France writ large—and on the brink of war—that risked being “overrun” by immigrants. Faced with this new concern, the Daladier government tried to codify many of the subjective considerations upon which local police had long relied. Formally distinguishing the settled from the unsettling, the May Decrees unleashed a crackdown that took on its own life in Marseille—there was no time for prolonged deliberations between local and national security figures, and there was, therefore, little room for nuance. Were, for example, three years’ residency in France, economic self-sufficiency, recommendations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Consul in Sarrebruck, as well as pro-French sentiments at the moment of the Saar plebiscite in 1935 sufficient guarantees for naturalization? Perhaps not, responded the Third Division of the Bouches-du-Rhône prefecture in November 1938, because the adult son of the Saarlanders in question had not signed on to the naturaliza-
tion request and the family, if the parents were naturalized, would thus have loyalties divided between France and Germany.\textsuperscript{106}

Indeed, by the middle of 1938, concern for protecting national security had begun to displace the local divisions that had heretofore informed the port city’s patterns of policing. Even before the Munich crisis, but especially in its immediate wake, rooting out the foreign element from Marseille became a major focus of police and judicial attention, so much so that following the May Decrees, the same Marseille court that tried every accusation of petty theft, vagrancy, mendicancy, illegal work stoppage, or other misdemeanor, also devoted over 40 percent of its caseload to delinquencies emerging solely from laws on foreign residency and employment.\textsuperscript{107} This activity peaked in the month following the Munich crisis and the Marseille fire: in October, some 78.5 percent of the Marseille Correctional Tribunal’s docket pertained to such infractions.\textsuperscript{108} Trying to avert war, government officials in Paris issued decree after decree fine-tuning their definition of “undesirable” foreign elements; in response, local officials facing this conundrum erred, as they once had only with respect to central district residents, on the side of repression.

That earlier repression of migrants living in central Marseille was not a matter of simple geography. Rather, Marseille and Bouches-du-Rhône authorities used geographical markers as a code for a more complex alchemy of factors—including but not limited to one’s marital status, age, sex, and profession—that were taken into account as they judged whether someone deserved to participate in Marseille society. As geography came to stand in for overlapping social characteristics, something resembling—albeit more complicated than—ethnic stereotyping emerged to delimit the rights of immigrants residing in Marseille. Because some foreigners emerged as “stranger” than others, they were made “more foreign”—through removal of their residency rights—as well.

In the latter part of the 1930s, however, the way in which authorities adjudicated the rights of Marseille’s migrants changed due to a combination of local, national, and international crises. First, the Marseille police, whose leadership already had been shifted from the mairie to the préfecture in 1908 in order that it might be placed under greater central control from Paris, came under increasing attack following the assassinations of King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in 1934. In fact, the critique that ensued from the assassinations specifically targeted police surveillance of migrants living in and traveling through Marseille.

Only when Marseille and Bouches-du-Rhône officials began worrying about where immigrants fit into French life rather than into Marseille’s social map, however, did the distinction between city-center and periphery migrants begin to fade. Although the events of 1934 might have shaken local authorities of some of their assumptions, it was not until the French state once again adopted a defensive and exclusionary posture in 1938—and the Bouches-du-Rhône department was itself on the defensive vis-à-vis the national administration—that local authorities launched an all-out attack on
Marseille's immigrant population. With Marseille's social boundaries less relevant in the context of impending war, legal standards also lost anchor. Instead of judging immigrants first then incarcerating or expelling them, officials operated in reverse order. By the fall of 1938, Marseille and Bouches-du-Rhône authorities had, even before the start of war, abandoned a central principle of the liberal republic.

Thus a defensive posture shared by local and national authorities replaced locally grounded social criteria as the basis for adjudicating immigrants' rights. That shared vision emerged not only from the growing sense, nation-wide, that the public blamed foreigners for the nation's ills, including an increasingly likely war. Nor was it a simple execution of Daladier's hard-line policies with respect to the continued influx of refugees and other foreigners into France. Rather, it also emerged from the sense harbored among Marseille and Bouches-du-Rhône authorities that if they did not prove themselves capable of responding to the new demands of the national administration, their autonomy vis-à-vis the central government might be further threatened. Paradoxically, then, officials in Marseille adopted an explicitly nationalist perspective as part of their strategy to maintain some local administrative autonomy. Within a year, they lost much of their independent room for maneuver anyway, but in the process of trying to prove themselves, they not only implemented but also went beyond Daladier's demands for a crackdown on undocumented foreigners living in France. Repression of immigrants reached its highest pre-war level in the month during which national and local crises dovetailed: from the time of the Munich crisis in September 1938 to the ineffectively-managed fire in Marseille during the Radical Party Congress the following month.

With the outbreak of war, the port city attracted only more foreigners—especially refugees who hoped to set sail from there and flee the continent altogether. The city center's rooming houses and hotels became crowded with migrants whose legal right to stay in Marseille became, ironically enough, contingent upon their ability to prove to local authorities that they intended to leave. Of course, the fact that many immigrants were, after war's outbreak, trying to leave rather than to stay says a great deal about how much the stakes had changed with the war.

The war ushered in a wave of repression that, while similar to that studied here in its targeting of foreigners and other “strangers,” was otherwise of a different order. My aim here has not been to describe a prelude to France's so-called “dark years.” Rather, I have sought to expose, first, the dynamics that allowed for discrimination and exclusion to coexist with republican inclusive-ness, second, the circumstances in which that room for inclusion was foreclosed while, third, negative discrimination was extended. The Third Republic had rules and principles that would have allowed Stefan X., born in France, to become a French citizen upon reaching adulthood. But it was also a republic whose very liberalism left plenty of room for social dynamics and bureaucratic
power struggles to raise obstacles to that process. The republic, in this way, opened a space for many to settle and ostracized others as unsettling. By understanding the "exclusionary effects of liberal practices," as Uday Mehta has called them, we shed light not so much on the dark years that were yet to come but on a side of democracy that has all too often appeared obscure. The policing of migration and nation, even—or perhaps especially—under the democratic republic, never amounted to a straightforward assertion of sovereignty directed evenly at all foreigners by police protecting a clearly identifiable national interest. Rather, such policing was affected by local conditions, nationally set priorities and, perhaps most importantly, the interaction between the two.

Notes

1. This article draws from papers given at the Society for French Historical Studies Annual Meeting and at the Institute of French Studies Luncheon Seminar, New York University, both in March 2001. I would like to thank the commentator at the first event, Tessie Liu, and the attendees at both events for their valuable feedback. I would also like to thank Herrick Chapman, Laura Frader, Clifford Rosenberg, Yaël Simpson Fletcher, and the anonymous reader for their comments on drafts of the article. Research for this article was made possible by funding from the Fulbright program and from Smith College's Committee on Faculty Compensation and Development. Support for writing was provided through a Woodrow Wilson Post-Doctoral Fellowship in the Humanities in residence at the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute (Smith College).


3. Expulsion file. Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône (hereinafter ADBDR) 4 M 1467. To protect the privacy of the families involved, all immigrants' names in this article have been altered. I would like to thank Mme Arlette Playoust, Director of the ADBDR, and M. Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, Former Director of the Archives de France, for granting special authorization to view a sampling of the closed expulsion and naturalization archives for the Bouches-du-Rhône department.

nationalité française depuis la Révolution (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2002). The basic provisions of the 1889 law remain in place to this day, despite some modifications.

5. Commissaire Chef de la Sûreté, 23 juin 1920, report to Commissaire Central. Stefan’s expulsion was only rescinded later so that he could be required to serve in the army. ADBDR 4 M 1467.

6. One’s status as a citizen, as Rogers Brubaker has put it, is based on “general, abstract, and context-independent” membership in a state. Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood, p. 29.


8. Although most expulsions were followed by violations of French civil or criminal law, expulsions were police measures that could be ordered independent of any court decision and could be used to drive out foreigners deemed politically dangerous even if they had violated no law.


11. Wright, ch. 6. As Wright shows, vagrancy was not, in the end, included among the crimes that could trigger relegation, despite the fact that fears of vagrants had been in large part responsible for the development of the relegation laws.


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17. The weight of development on Marseille’s periphery can be seen in the percentage increases in population there between 1926 and 1931. While the population of the Marseille periphery as a whole gained 78 percent during these five years, the population of the northeastern “suburbs” increased by 109 percent. In some districts, increases were over 200 percent. See Lambert, Marseille, p. 118.

18. Called “meublés” or “garnis” in France and comparable to what are known in the United States as SROs. Migrants in particular often shared these tiny spaces, which sometimes lodged several persons in a room intended for one or two.


22. Surveys conducted by the prefecture in 1932 showed, for Marseille, a total of 206,647 foreigners, of whom there were 128,495 Italians; 22,780 Spanish; 20,275 Armenians; 5,011 Turks (some of whom may have, in fact, been Armenian); 3,286 Russians; and so forth. Most North Africans went unrecorded since Algerians were not technically considered “foreigners.” Moroccans and Tunisians totaled 164 and 312 respectively. ADBDR 4 M 946. Data used to compile these statistics were gleaned from applications for foreign resident identification cards, and thus are a very imperfect statistic, particularly as Marseille was believed to have a high number of foreign residents who had never applied for identification cards. The statistics also do not register the foreign-born who became French through naturalization. On Marseille’s foreign population in proportion to the foreign population
nation-wide, see Commissaire de Police Spéciale, Dhubert, au Directeur de la Sûreté Générale, dated 5 March 1932, where Dhubert notes that 2,890,923 foreigners lived in France (population 41,834,923) as a whole. ADBDR 4 M 11.


24. The most extreme case of this was the Compagnie des Docks itself, which hired stevedores by the half day.


27. Ibid., p. 67.

28. Here, I am deliberately invoking Louis Chevalier’s term, originally used with reference to 19th-century migrants from the French provinces to Paris whom Chevalier characterized as the “dangerous classes”—“biologically” distinct from the rest of the Parisian population thanks largely in part to the deleterious effects of the urban environment in which they lived (Chevalier, Laboring Classes.) In invoking this term here, however, I modify Chevalier’s meaning. Whereas Chevalier described the development of a permanent underclass with migrant origins, I am referring to a class of persons regarded as a underclass precisely because of their lack of permanence. In so doing, I take into account the critique of Chevalier advanced in William H. Sewell, Jr., Structure and Mobility: The Men and Women of Marseille, 1820-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), esp. p. 231. I would argue, however, that Sewell counters Chevalier’s pessimism with what might be termed excessive optimism, for while it is true that the underclass in Marseille was a “temporary” one in many respects, changing as the population moved to new neighborhoods or grew older, it is also the case that some so-called transients became stuck in a cycle of poverty that relegated them to a state of permanent impermanence. To be sure, this did not necessarily make them “criminal,” but it did nothing to remove their stigma as “dangerous.” For a thoughtful discussion on how impermanence becomes permanent, albeit in different circumstances, see Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), passim and esp. pp. 25-29 and pp. 169-79.

29. In the 1931 census, for example, foreigners comprised 26.8 percent of the inhabitants of the fourth canton of Marseille, an area that roughly corresponds to the second arrondissement in Figure 1 and where population density was figured at 28.5 persons per building. Henri Bontoux (adjoint au maire), Le Problème du Logement à Marseille. Résumé des Travaux de la Commission Municipale de l’Habitation (Marseille: Imprimerie Municipale, 1932), p. 147. In that same canton, the native French constituted the majority of unskilled workers and the unemployed. See Paul Jankowski, Communism and Collaboration: Simon Sabiani and Politics in Marseille, 1919-1944 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), Appendix 1, pp. 153-59.

30. For example, the seventh canton (15th, 16th, and part of 14th arrondissements), with a density of 9.5 persons per building, had a population that was 27.5 percent foreign in 1931. Bontoux, Le Problème du logement, p. 147.


32. See Elisa Camiscioli, “Intermarriage, Independent Nationality”; Kristen E. Stromberg, “Fathers, Families and the State in France 1914-1945” (Ph.D. Diss., University of

33. Jankowski, Communism and Collaboration, p. 5.

34. On the relationship between “rootedness” and national identity as well as the dangers posed to the latter by “rootlessness,” see Stoler, “Sexual Affronts.” On the association of Marseille's central districts with both transience and crime, see Émile Temime, Marseille transit: Les passagers de Belsunce (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 1995); and Fletcher, “City, Nation and Empire.” On contemporary associations between rootedness and national identity, see Pierre-André Taguieff, “The Doctrine of the National Front in France (1972-1989)” New Political Science 16/17 (Fall/Winter 1989): 29-70.

35. Merriman, Margins, passim. Today, a considerably different social geography prevails in Marseille, as many of the peripheral districts are no longer associated with small houses but more spectacularly with huge housing projects and apartment complexes, home mostly to immigrants and their children.

36. It is worth noting that this, along with “failure to declare possession of an arm,” was one of the most common offenses adjudicated by the Correctional Tribunal during this period. Arm possession was considered a minor offense, punishable by a few days (often even a suspended sentence) in prison or a fine. While the fine in this case was not insignificant—it was probably about what Larbi could have earned in a couple of days—it remains the case that this was a misdemeanor that was not deemed to require punishment by incarceration.

37. For court proceedings, see Jugements Correctionnels, ADBDR 403 U 838. For Prefect's opinion, see communication dated 16 September 1919, Préfet (Bouches-du-Rhône) au Ministère de l'Intérieur. ADBDR 4 M 1389. Population density on the rue des Chapeliers, where Larbi claimed to live, increased by twenty percent between 1911 and 1931 despite the fact that the central districts were losing population to the periphery during the same time. For data on population density in this neighborhood, see Les étrangers à Marseille (1880-1939) (Marseille: Conseil Général des Bouches-du-Rhône, 1988), pp. 82-89.


39. In November 1927, some eighty clandestine Arab immigrants all claimed to be living at Number 7 rue des Chapeliers, and the restaurant at this address became implicated in a false identification card ring. ADBDR 4 M 950.

40. North-African immigrants in France during the interwar period were almost exclusively male. The 1931 census, for example, shows that women made up only 3.71 percent of the North-African residents of the Bouches-du-Rhône department, as compared to 47.51 percent of the Italian population, 44.49 percent of the Spanish population, 43.58 percent of the Armenian population, and 33.27 percent of the Russian population. For statistics, see “Atlas de l'immigration en France entre les deux guerres,”at http://barthes.ens.fr/clio/revues/AHI/ressources/atlasclio. The rue des Chapeliers, as described by Albert Londres: “Voulez-vous voir l’Algérie, le Maroc, la Tunisie? Donnez-moi le bras. Je vous conduis rue des Chapeliers... Vous...
êtes à Sfax, à Rabat, et dans le ghetto d’Oran. … Si le gouvernement, comprenant pour une fois les intérêts de la Patrie, me nomme bientôt gouverneur de l’Algérie, je n’irai pas à Alger, je m’installerais rue des Chapelières.” (1926), reprinted in Albert Londres, Marseille, porte du Sud (Paris: Éditions de France, 1927; repr. Éditions Le Serpent à Plumes, 1994), p. 23.


42. Expulsion order in ADBDR 4 M 1389.
43. Or the length of time for which he could prove residency.
44. Chemin de la Madrague-Ville, in what is now the fifteenth arrondissement of Marseille.
45. ADBDR 4 M 1389.
47. Préfet (Bouches-du-Rhône) à M. le Ministre de l’Hygiène, de l’Assistance et de la Prévoyance Sociales (Assistance et Hygiène Publiques, Cabinet du Directeur), 12 December 1923. ADBDR 1 M 1782.
48. It was the Communist party organ L’Humanité that used the term “sordid” to describe the Oddo barracks. Altmann, “Mornes Aspects.”
51. Foreign parents of children born in France could declare their children to be French nationals before a justice of the peace while they were still minors and thus remove their option to decline French nationality upon reaching adulthood.
53. Letter from P. M. dated 29 May 1919, with blue grease pencil emphasis, with reference to Carmine K., who, it was also noted, was “the father of 3 children who have been declared French.” ADBDR 4 M 1389.
54. See, for example, ADBDR 4 M 1497.


60. In fact, their characteristics paralleled those valued in naturalization cases. Legion were the cases rejected for naturalization in Marseille because the applicant was “single” or because the applicant had a “household without children.” Indeed, it was not uncommon for naturalization cases to be adjourned “until foundation of a French family.” It is worth noting, as well, that while residence in the periphery did not automatically secure naturalization, central-district dwellers only very rarely figured among the successful naturalization candidates. Naturalizations, granted, in ADBDR 6 M 746 through 6 M 1283; naturalizations, adjourned, in ADBDR 6 M 1306 through 6 M 1355. Outright rejections, with the exception of those erroneously filed under adjournment, have not been saved in the archives, nor does there exist a general register of requests. It is thus impossible to know if the lack of central district residents in the files reflects the rejection of their cases by authorities or whether, unlike peripheral district residents, they did not request naturalization.

61. To the extent that this division was “racial,” I am arguing for an elastic concept of race, one based not so much on phenotypical distinctions but rather one where, as Ann Laura Stoler has put it, “class distinctions, gender prescriptions, cultural knowledge and racial membership were simultaneously invoked and strategically filled with different meanings.” Stoler, “Sexual Affronts,” p. 521.

62. Of the over 1,300 files I sampled, 532 contained initial orders of expulsion from the country for offenses ranging from vagrancy to homicide, while 384 contained warnings. The remaining files concerned individuals who already had been expelled prior to the filing of their dossier in the Bouches-du-Rhône prefecture. A very few also concerned persons whose refoulement (denial of residency with no penal implications) rather than expulsion was ordered, and even fewer concerned persons who could not be expelled because they were, or had become, French. Expulsion orders from files containing no data at all on residency have been excluded from my calculations. In contrast, those files indicating “no fixed residency” have been included. Data compiled from sampling of ADBDR files 4 M 1389 through 4 M 1981. Based on common characterizations of Central Marseille as comprising the seven inner districts (arrondissements), persons living in those districts have been deemed “residents of the center” for this calculation; residents of districts 8 through 16 have been deemed “residents of the periphery.” See Figure 1.

63. One observer, Rebecca West, was so concerned that she launched an investigation into the Balkan conflicts. See prologue of Black Lamb, Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia (New York: Viking, 1941). See also Keith Brown, “The King is Dead, Long Live the Balkans! Watching the Marseilles Murders of 1934” (Paper delivered at Sixth Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University, 5-7 April 2001).

64. Left- and right-wing sympathizers quickly labeled the crime alternately as a “fascist” or “communist” plot. See the review of press contained in L’Information Sociale

66. After all, it had only been two years since Paul Doumer, then president of France, had been assassinated by a Russian national.

67. The first Interior Minister to replace Sarraut, Paul Marchandeau, indicated by circular dated 17 October 1934 that all Spanish refugees should be required to live north of the Loire River, so as to avoid “incidents” on the Franco-Spanish border. In particular, Spanish refugees were to be excluded categorically from Marseille. The principles behind this directive were reiterated in another circular signed by Marchandeau from the Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale to Prefects, dated 31 October 1934. ADBDR 4 M 959. See also Temime and Attard-Maraininchi, Migrance, esp. 74-78; and Vicky Caron, Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933-1942, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. 45-46. The day before the assassination in Marseille, the Spanish Army had landed in the Asturian port cities of Avilés and Gijón and had begun to put down the local resistance they met. See Gabriel Jackson, The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931-1939 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 157-59; Pamela Beth Radcliff, From Mobilization to Civil War: The Politics of Polarization in the Spanish City of Gijón, 1900-1937 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. ch. 10.


70. Portions of the newsreel “Assassination of Alexander and Barthou” can be viewed on-line at http://www.watsoninstitute.org/pub_detail.cfm?ID=132. See also Keith Brown’s commentary at same site.

71. Seton-Watson, p. 28. See also the New York Times report from 12 October 1934, featuring the following headline and sub-headlines: “Inadequate Guard for King Stirs New Crisis in France; Yugoslavs Attack Italians – Police Sparse in Marseilles, film shows; Shots and Crowd’s Cries Ring in Newsreel.”

72. Seton-Watson, p. 28.

73. M. de Kerellis in L’Oeuvre, reprinted in L’Information Sociale 545 (11 October 1934), p. 3.


75. Ministre de l’Intérieur (Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale, 7e bureau), circular to Prefects and the Governor General of Algeria. 31 October 1934. ADBDR 4 M 959.

76. Sous-préfet au préfet (Bouches-du-Rhône), 5 November 1934. ADBDR 1 M 1737.

77. Commissaire de Police Spéciale (Dhubert), au préfet (Bouches-du-Rhône), report no. 3985, 15 December 1934. ADBDR 1 M 1737.


80. Commissaire spécial des Ports (Letort), Rapport Statistique Général de l’Année 1936 - Police des Ports. ADBDR 4 M 11. It should be noted that arrests made by other branches of the Marseille police are not included in this report.

81. We do not have precise figures on the increase in expulsions following the assassination because there are 9,801 expulsion files dated from late 1933 to early 1938 that are missing from the Bouches-du-Rhône’s archival collection. However, that 9,801 represents an increase, on average, of 478 expulsion files per year.


84. In particular, the limitation of identification cards to one department was discontinued under the Popular Front. By March 1938, police figures in Marseille had reached 447 inspectors and 1,952 beat policemen, an increase of 15.5 percent and 6.9 percent over the 1935 figures.


87. This clause reflects the fact that foreign men, unlike foreign women, did not have the option of acquiring French nationality automatically upon marrying French nationals.

88. The idea behind using such criteria as a basis for rights had been brewing for some time, having been debated in meetings of the Interministerial Commission on Immigration, led by Philippe Serre, named Undersecretary of State for Immigration by Chautemps in 1937. See Rahma Harouni, “Le débat autour du statut des étrangers dans les années 1930,” Le Mouvement Social 188 (juillet-septembre 1999): 61-75.

89. This division was furthered by the 12 November 1938 decree barring foreigners from marrying in France if they had not legally lived there at least one year.

90. “Quelle est sa religion?” See, for example, the notices contained in ADBDR 6 W 1.

91. Moves within cities where population was less than 10,000 were exempt from this requirement.

92. As with the preferences granted to immigrants fitting certain categories, the repressive side of the May Decrees also drew from the deliberations of the Interministerial Commission on Immigration. See Harouni, “Le Débat,” p. 71.

93. Five million francs for detention and repatriation, and another 3.25 million for the personnel of the Sûreté and the mobile police who would be needed in order to track down the foreigners. In total, sixteen million francs in credits were opened in mid-1938 for the Interior Ministry’s newly decreed Service Central des Étrangers; in 1939, an additional eleven million francs were added. Thus, whereas the 1938 budget had accorded 900,000 francs for incarceration and repatriation of foreigners who had been expelled or turned back, in 1939, this budget item was accorded 3,300,000 francs. For discussion of budgets see Caron, Uneasy Asylum, p. 175; Jean-Charles Bonnet, Les Pouvoirs publics français et l’immigration dans...


95. On labor disputes and absenteeism in the Marseille police force, see Michel Bergès, Le syndicalisme policier en France (1990-1940) (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995). Despite the improvement in their numbers, Bouches-du-Rhône officials still requested more police in the wake of the May Decrees. See Commissaire Divisionnaire Chef des Services de Police Spéciale au Préfet (Secrétaire Général de la Préfecture), Communication no. 2980, 12 May 1938; Commissaire (Sous-Chef) de la Sûreté, Antonini, au Commissaire Divisionnaire Chef des Services de Police Spéciale, Communication no. 615, 15 May 1938; Commissaire Divisionnaire Chef des Services de Police Spéciale au Préfet (Secrétaire Général de la Préfecture), Communication no. 5600, 12 August 1938, Commissaire Divisionnaire Chef des Services de Police Spéciale au Préfet, Communication dated 22 October 1938. ADBDR 4 M 11.

96. Le Temps (28 October 1938), cited in Vicky Caron, Uneasy Asylum, p. 194


98. Jugements Correctionnels, hearings dated 22, 24 and 27 June 1938. ADBDR 403 U 1288. All foreigners aged fifteen and over were required to have identification cards. This foreigner was twenty. In a year, he would be French if he did not decline his birthright French nationality. He was nevertheless imprisoned for infraction of the 2 May 1938 decree. Other similar cases can be found in ADBDR 403 U 1288-1312.


100. One case dated to 1893; see Jugements correctionnels, 23 August 1939, ADBDR 403 U 1312. The case in question concerned a Spanish man expelled on 25 March 1893, first notified on 4 April 1895 and only found to be in infraction of the expulsion on 24 March 1939. As a result, he was sentenced to six months in prison. For similar cases, see multiple entries in Jugements correctionnels, ADBDR 403 U 1287-1312.

101. See discussion of Hagop’s case cited in note 52.

102. All of the expulsions sampled for 1939 were ordered by local authorities, without prior recourse to the Interior Ministry. This was true of expulsions dating from before the onset of the war as well as those coming after it. A complete record of expulsions for 1939 was not, however, available. ADBDR 6 W 1 through 6 W 4.


104. Ibid. The foreigner in question was expelled by prefectural order on 25 May 1939 for “exercising a profession other than that mentioned on his identification card.” Expulsion order signed by M. Lota, the General Secretary of the Bouches-du-Rhône prefecture. ADBDR 6 W 1.

105. Indeed, scholars have argued that the repressive provisions of the May Decrees were the only ones that were implemented. See Weil, Qu’est-ce qu’un français?, p. 88; Caron, Uneasy Asylum, p. 178.


107. 40 percent average calculated based on data from mid-June 1938 to the onset of war in 1939. Jugements Correctionnels, ADBDR 403 U 1288-1311. These figures are conservative and may represent an undercount, since—to avoid double counting—I did not include re-hearings of defaulted trials in my calculation.

108. Jugements Correctionnels. ADBDR 403 U 1292 and 1293. In contrast, the Lyon Correctional Tribunal’s docket for the same month had only 10.7 percent of its cases pertaining to such infractions. Archives Départementales du Rhône, Jugements Correctionnels, October 1938. Lyon police had engaged in an earlier crackdown on immigrants. See Lewis, “The Company of Strangers.”

110. “Les années noires” or “Les années sombres,” expressions used in France to refer to the Second World War and the years of occupation by—and collaboration with—Nazi Germany. For an analysis of the connections between the exclusions of the late 1930s and those under Vichy, see especially Gérard Noiriel, Les Origines républicaines de Vichy (Paris: Hachettes Littératures, 1999); for an analysis of some of the differences as well as the continuities, see Weil, Qu’est-ce qu’un français.