

French migratory policy and immigrant entrepreneurship

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to focus on the inequalities facing immigrants in access to the labour market and the impact of these on immigrant entrepreneurship. Unlike in other areas of legislation regarding foreigners, there has been a tendency to increase legal discrimination for over a century. Whereas European states have become the destination countries of immigrants mainly since 1945, France has been a receiving country for much longer. It was a destination for neighbouring Europeans as well as for people from other continents for a long time, with systematic evidence since the second half of the nineteenth century (381,000 resident foreigners in 1851, one million in 1881). Most of the discriminatory measures of the 1930s are still in force today. However, a class of small entrepreneurs of foreign origin has asserted itself in the receiving society during the past three decades, partly compensating for the continuous decrease in the number of French native entrepreneurs.

Introduction

Among the inequalities of rights between nationals and foreigners³, the most well-known and the most accepted are those relating to rights of free movement and residence, and to public rights. However, other less-studied inequalities exist in the sphere of economic and social rights, particularly those concerning access by foreigners to the labour market⁴. Unlike other

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³ In the French tradition, only the national is a citizen, whereas the foreigner has no authorisation to exercise the rights related to this quality. The difference between national citizens and non-citizen foreigners is far from being a marginal element of a foreigner's condition; it is on the contrary a central, essential element (the right to vote, access to public service jobs – which make up one-third of jobs available in the labour market, suspicion and penalisation of mixed marriages in France and in Europe, etc.) (Lochak, 1988).

⁴ See Danielle Lochak's essential work in this area. Legal discrimination in social welfare provisions affecting foreigners living in France will not be dealt with here. In relation to that issue, please refer to the works of GISTI (2002), *Le guide de la protection sociale des étrangers en France*, Paris: La Découverte; Gacon (1998); Toullier (1997).

areas of legislation relating to foreigners, there has been a tendency to increase legal discrimination during the past century⁵, because, resulting from “measures undertaken in haste and under the pressure of the time, many remained on a long-term basis or even permanently” (Lochak, 1995).

Measures aimed at banning certain occupations to foreigners were added subsequent to the others, and only those concerning European Union nationals were removed under the pressure of European legislation. French State policy towards self-employed immigrants is to regulate and restrict access to the trades. Nevertheless, restrictions and regulations have varied in degree depending on the era. Although the overall philosophy of the legislation has not evolved since the 1930s, it has been more or less strictly enforced in the intervening decades.

French migration policy has gone through various phases during the past century. First of all, there was the gradual institutionalisation of a migration policy, from a laissez-faire attitude to state intervention, then the free movement of immigrants in a context of minimal regulation and intervention by the State, to the current policy aiming to regulate and strictly control foreigners (Ma Mung, 2003 ; Dinh, 2008).

The first section provides an overview of France’s experience as an immigration country and presents successive migration policies and regulations, while the second section is devoted to the legal context, notably bans and exclusions concerning foreigners, implemented by the authorities during the 1930s, encouraged and supported by certain trade associations. Most of these exclusions⁶ are still in force today. The third section presents a recent statistical characterisation⁶ of immigrant entrepreneurship⁷ in France, which has developed within the confines of the discriminatory legislation of the past. This phenomenon constitutes a strong trend observed since the census of 1974, characterised by the appearance of this class of small entrepreneurs within the immigrant population in the 1970s, followed by decades of development.

Immigrant France

In contrast to its neighbours, particularly Germany⁸, France experienced a demographic deficit during the late nineteenth century and was from very early on obliged to rely on foreign labour – to ‘adopt foreigners in order to survive’. Already in the mid-nineteenth

⁵ This refers to discrimination not only sanctioned, but imposed, by texts, laws or regulations.

⁶ The most recent figures available date from 1999. The census methods of the Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, INSEE) have since changed, and they now conduct an annual census based on a sample. Applied for the first time in 2004, the first results will be available in the second semester of 2009.

⁷ The definition of immigrant entrepreneurs applied in this study is: ‘immigrant’ people – according to the INSEE definition – who engage in activities as craftsmen, as traders or as paid heads of companies of ten or more employees. For convenience, this group is referred to as ACE (‘Artisans, Commerçants, Chefs d’entreprise’, meaning “craftsmen, shopkeepers, company heads with at least ten employees on the payroll”).

⁸ What was increasingly alarming for the French political leaders was the growing contrast with their German neighbour, whose army crushed the army of Napoleon III in 1870-1871. Nevertheless, at that time there was not yet a marked difference in population size between the two countries, both having a population close to 40 million. Forty years later however, France, divested of Alsace-Lorraine, did not even reach this threshold of 40 million inhabitants (39,600,000 in 1911 within its borders at that time), whereas the population of the German Empire exceeded 65 million (Garden, Le Bras and Dupâquier, 1988).

century, elements of policies (the ‘Nationality’ laws of 1851, 1889⁹ and of 1927) aiming to attract immigrant workers were developed, yet a laissez-faire attitude of non-intervention prevailed until the 1930s. Moreover, France had the lowest overseas emigration rates of the larger countries of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. French cities were often more attractive than American ones (Haines, 2000).

Whereas European states have become destination countries for immigrants mainly since 1945, France has been a target country for much longer. It has been a receiving country for neighbouring Europeans but also for people from other continents for a long time. The evidence is systematic since the second half of the nineteenth century - the first census in which the category of foreigners appears is 1851, when 381,000 foreigners were enumerated. By 1881 there were already one million foreigners.

The immigration into France of foreign population groups - inhabitants of the border zones or neighbouring countries on the eve of the First World War - was, on such a scale, a unique phenomenon in Europe¹⁰. The demographic imbalance between France and Europe contributed to the welcoming of people from other European countries, who did not have to resort to moving across the Atlantic to far-off America in order to find employment and a means of living.

“France is a country of immigration just like the Republic of Argentina or Australia. Every year, on average around 40,000 to 50,000 foreigners settle here and establish ties” (Leroy-Beaulieu, 1886)¹¹. Neighbouring countries such as Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Switzerland and Germany constituted source countries of emigration to France. Immigrants from these countries were mainly employed in the processing industries. Another migratory wave emerged in the years preceding the First World War, as is the case for Poles migrating to France (Ponty, 1988). Afterward, from June 1919, the migratory phenomenon took on such a scale that France in 1930 was the country with the highest proportion of foreigners - 515 for every 100,000 inhabitants compared to 492 in the United States of America (Noiriél, 1988).

⁹ A decisive step in the history of the law on French nationality was reached when the word ‘nationality’ appeared for the first time in the title of a law governing access to French nationality in 1927. Decided after long debates (the proposal for the law dated back to 1882), the 1927 law became imperative just as much for demographic reasons (mainly a decrease in the birth rate) as because of compulsory military service from which foreigners were exempt. Thus, by completely revising the pre-existing legislation, the State introduced new measures aimed at facilitating foreigners’ access to French nationality (Maillard, 2007). For an understanding of nationality issues in France, see the contribution of Jean Massot (1985), “Français par le sang, Français par la loi, Français par le choix”, *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 9-19.

¹⁰ Already since the eighteenth century, the weak growth of the French population had been evident, increasing little before the end of the eighteenth century, approximately to 20 to 25 million inhabitants (Mauco, 1932). The need for an increased population and a qualified workforce for new industrial and commercial activities contributed to a regular immigration flow, the destinations of which were sometimes limited to areas like Corsica or localities like Calais, Longwy, or Sarrelouis, or in trades where there was a demand for labour (immigration of merchants or specialists of Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Greek or Armenian origin). For example, we note Jean Baptiste Colbert’s advice to King Louis XIV to import tinplate workers from Koblenz to work in French industries in order to compensate for the shortage of labour in these firms. Moreover, France welcomed Catholic refugees from England and Ireland and recruited foreign mercenaries. (See: Lequin, Y. (ed.) (1992), *Histoire des étrangers et de l’immigration en France*, Paris: Larousse. See also: d’Alteroche, B. (2002), *De l’étranger à la seigneurie à l’étranger au royaume, XI-XVe siècle*, L.G.D.J.).

¹¹ Cited by Henri Bunle (1943), p. 67.

Between 1920 and 1930, the official figures reveal a surplus of 1,150,000 entries of immigrant workers over departures (Bunle, 1943). They arrived under the aegis of international bilateral agreements signed by France with Italy in 1904 and 1906, Belgium in 1906, Poland and Italy in 1919, and finally with Czechoslovakia in 1920. This institutionalised a relationship between the receiving country, the origin countries and French companies, representing a strong convergence of interests. Until mid-1932, as passing border control was not compulsory, foreign immigration in France was de facto a free movement. The immigrant worker could enter without difficulty, as long as they did not make known their intention to occupy paid employment. They could then subsequently regularise their situation by presenting a contract of employment. During the 1920s, the United States of America had stopped allowing immigration and France welcomed many of those who might have otherwise gone to America.

The 1930s witnessed the dawn of a period of immigration restriction, becoming increasingly discriminatory and stringent until 1945. In that year, the Government passed a law that has acted as the legislative basis for immigration policy ever since. With the ordinance of November 1945 and the creation of the 'Office National d'Immigration' (ONI), the State took charge of migration management. Nevertheless, labour market forces remained very strong and the official recruitment of foreign labour covered only a minority of actual entrants. The overwhelming recourse to regularisation was one of the main features of foreign labour management during this time. Families arrived both in the years preceding the labour migration ban of 1974 and thereafter (Cordeiro, 1987).

After 1974, legislation that had previously focused on 'temporary workers' gradually shifted its priorities to those 'who came to France to stay'. The 1980s was a period of stabilisation and from the 1990s on, a tendency towards more control and stricter admission policies can be observed.

Legal context

Until the Great Depression of 1929, a laissez-faire policy of benign non-intervention prevailed. The Depression of the 1930s and the rise of xenophobic sentiments resulted for immigrants in a series of discriminatory measures aimed at salaried labour. Yet the economic crunch also affected tradesmen, craftsmen and professionals. Suspected of taking advantage of loopholes in the labour regulations, immigrants were accused of unfair competition. Trade organisations began to lobby against immigrant competition, evidence of deep-seated unity founded on a commitment to closely monitor immigrants. They called for other ways to restrict the number of immigrants setting up independent businesses, such as legislation similar to the law of 10 August 1932 regulating salaried labour, setting quotas for the number of immigrants in each business sector or region (Schor, 1985).

The decree of 8 August 1935 subjected immigrant business-owners to the same obligations that had been mandated in 1932 for immigrant salaried workers. It required the possession of a special identity card, a mechanism that made it possible to regulate the number of immigrants. To this day, many sectors of economic activity remain closed to immigrants, but nationals from EU member countries are in a privileged position, because they are entitled to practice the profession of their choice in the territory of any Member State. This legislation applied mainly to nationals from non-EU countries; in France, this means African and Asian immigrants.

These restrictions were not lifted until 1984 by the law of 17 July. The modification of the residence permits regime exempting immigrants with a ten-year residence permit from the requirement to apply for a special immigrant business licence granted a large number of immigrants access to a new legal status, allowing the exercise of an independent activity. This covered more than two million foreigners. Holders of a temporary residence permit (one-year) remained subject to the obligation to apply for a 'foreign merchant' licence¹². This applied to about 300,000 foreigners. This liberalisation can be explained by the Government's interest at the time in reducing unemployment among the foreign population. However, this intention is not explicitly stated in the official text of the law (Ma Mung and Lacroix, 2003).

One way of getting around these discriminatory restrictions was to acquire French citizenship. As a result, a large number of 'naturalised French citizens' engaged in business activities; 11.7 per cent of the naturalised French citizens were contractors or merchants in 1990, as opposed to 8.9 per cent of the native French citizens. Another strategy was to marry a French spouse who held the nominal title of head of the business. It is impossible to quantify the immigrant businesspeople who resorted to this strategy, but field studies indicate that it is a common practice. Likewise, a non-spouse who is a French national may hold the title of head of the business. Here again, the number of these businesspeople is difficult to establish (ibid.).

Nowadays, according to the *Groupe d'étude et de lutte contre les discriminations* (GELD, 2005)¹³, 5.2 million titular jobs are reserved for French nationals in three Government departments (State, Territory and Hospitals). Additionally, companies with a specific status that generate public utilities (La Poste, EDF-GDF, Air France) and public industrial establishments providing more than a million jobs are required to hire only French or European Union nationals. About fifty occupations are the object of limitations in relation to nationality, equating to 615,000 jobs¹⁴, or to the holding of French qualifications, equating to 625,000 jobs¹⁵. (For the exhaustive list of jobs that require French nationality or French qualifications, see the GELD report, pp. 22-32, available at: http://www.vie-publique.fr/documents-vp/ged_emploireserves.pdf.)

Faced with these discriminatory measures, immigrant businesses have developed within the confines of restrictive legislation. Understandably, foreigners gravitate towards the sectors subject to the least regulation on the basis of nationality: the grocery trades, other retail and wholesale trades, the restaurant sector, construction, the garment trade, and so on.

¹² From 1935 to 1984, foreigners who wished to engage in trade had to apply for a special licence as 'foreign merchants'. These licences were only granted in very limited numbers by local administrations.

¹³ Research Group against Discrimination (formerly GED).

¹⁴ Health care professionals: physicians, dental surgeons, midwives, pharmacists or veterinarians; legal professionals: court-appointed administrators, estate brokers, attorneys, notary publics, bailiffs and licensed auctioneers; but also licensed architects, surveyors and certified public accountants, among others. Immigrants from non-EU countries are banned by law from a large number of other independent pursuits. This ranges from owning a newspaper, a television or radio broadcast agency, or a co-operative newspaper/magazine distribution business, to selling tobacco or alcoholic beverages or engaging in self-employment in the insurance sector as a broker, general agent, and so on (CERC, 1999).

¹⁵ Foreign physicians who work in French hospitals are a good and convincing example. Recruited to compensate for a lack of staff, they are paid just one third of what French physicians are paid, can neither run their own business nor work in a private firm, and have their career pathway blocked (National Union of Physicians with non-European Union Diplomas, SNPADHUE, 2006).

Immigrant entrepreneurs: A statistical overview

From a strictly quantitative standpoint, immigrant activity has in fact been marginal since 1945, but the number of foreign shopkeepers and craftspeople was higher before the First World War than today. The discriminatory measures and the overtly xenophobic and racist policies of the French Government before the Second World War were factors in the sharp drop in the proportion of immigrants among entrepreneurs. The 1911 census counted 121,000 foreign business-owners (as compared to 107,100 in 1999), and the percentage of self-employed workers in the immigrant working population was much higher than it is today: 20.4 per cent in 1911 as compared to 6.9 per cent in 1999 (INSEE, 1999).

In 1999, the number of immigrant entrepreneurs¹⁶ was 166,222 - accounting for 10 per cent of all entrepreneurs. The most significant group is the Portuguese (15.8 per cent of immigrant entrepreneurs), followed by the Algerians (11.3 per cent) and Moroccans (10 per cent). They correspond to the most significant immigrant populations in France (Portuguese: 571,874; Algerian: 574,208; Moroccan: 522,504).

Table 1 - Changes in ACE immigrants from 1990 to 1999 (%)

Selected countries of birth	Crafts-people (1)	Shopkeepers (2)	Company heads with at least 10 employees (3)	Total 1+2+3	Active population at work	ACE workforce		Total of the active population at work	
						1990	1999	1990	1999
Spain	-35.1	-25.3	-24.0	-31.4	-32.6	15,824	10,853	188,319	126,974
Italy	-49.1	-24.8	-38.7	-40.6	-36.8	26,401	15,684	193,130	121,986
Portugal	0.4	30.9	59.9	8.5	-8.1	24,212	26,270	454,157	417,153
Algeria	24.8	-0.5	64.7	9.7	4.0	17,156	18,824	285,800	297,153
Morocco	74.6	40.8	61.1	53.3	26.5	10,844	16,625	233,045	294,826
Tunisia	4.5	4.4	-3.7	3.8	2.8	9,756	10,125	109,049	112,063
Turkey	25.3	109.9	51.7	47.6	26.1	5,524	8,154	77,376	97,608
VLC (*)	61.2	23.4	23.8	34.2	16.8	7,076	9,493	89,596	104,613
Sub-Saharan Africa	132.2	60.9	82.0	87.3	69.4	6,260	11,727	147,318	249,621
Total ACE immigrants	-1.2	17.2	3.8	7.0	7.3	155,336	166,202	2,134,840	2,291,540
Total ACE	-10.5	-8.9	-2.1	-9.0	5.9	1,822,856	1,659,052	25,055,236	26,537,436

Source: adapted from INSEE population censuses of 1990 and 1999. (*) Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia.

Between 1990 and 1999, immigrant entrepreneurs experienced an evolution very different to that of the population of entrepreneurs at large (see table 1). On the one hand, the total number of entrepreneurs in France declined by 163,804, representing a decrease of 9 per cent. On the other hand, the number of immigrant entrepreneurs increased by 10,866 (+7 per cent) (Ma Mung and Dinh, 2007). This evolution is a continuation of the process observed since the census of 1975 (Ma Mung, 1994; Ma Mung and Simon, 1990; Dinh, 2006). It is thus not a short-term phenomenon, but constitutes a strong trend characterised by the appearance of this class of small entrepreneurs within the immigrant population in the 1970s, followed by decades of development. However, this phenomenon can develop in very different ways

¹⁶ Unless otherwise specified, the figures presented in this section all come from the INSEE population censuses.

depending on the entrepreneurial category (shopkeepers, craftspeople and company heads with at least ten employees on the payroll) and depending on the group's country of birth.

Three observations can be made here :

Firstly, immigrant entrepreneurship is made up of small businesses. The number of immigrant 'company heads with at least ten employees on the payroll' is increasing, albeit at a modest rate (+3.8 per cent), whereas the entire category (immigrants + non-immigrants) is decreasing (-2.1 per cent). Despite this positive evolution, the proportion of immigrant heads of companies of with ten or more employees in the total immigrant ACE (7.3 per cent) remains lower than that of the nation as a whole (10.4 per cent). The proportion of small contractors among immigrant entrepreneurs is even more significant than is the case among the general population.

Secondly, a strong fall in the number of Spanish and Italian entrepreneurs is compensated for by the increase in the numbers of other immigrant entrepreneurs. A breakdown of the figures by country of birth shows strong differences (see table). The number of entrepreneurs born in Spain has fallen by 31.4 per cent (-4,971). This fall is even greater among entrepreneurs born in Italy (-40.6 per cent; -10,717). Overall, nearly 16,000 Italian and Spanish entrepreneurs have disappeared.

This drop correlates with that of the immigrant working population with origins in these countries (Italy -36.8 per cent; Spain -32.6 per cent), itself due to the ageing of these populations¹⁷ and to a strong reduction in the flow of migrants coming from these countries¹⁸. These changes point to the possible eventual disappearance of these groups of entrepreneurs. The sharp fall in the number of Italian and Spanish entrepreneurs is compensated for by a remarkable increase in the number of entrepreneurs originating from Morocco (+5,781), Turkey (+2,630) and Portugal (+2,058). The relative increase can be seen to be most marked among the Moroccans (+53.3 per cent) and Turks (+47.6 per cent). While the numbers originating from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are also remarkable (+34.2 per cent), the most pronounced increase is in the sub-Saharan African group (+87.3 per cent).

Thirdly, there is stagnation in the number of craftspeople, and an increase in the number of shopkeepers. The immigrant craft industry thus seems to be doing better than the French craft industry as a whole. Here again, however, the situation shows marked variation depending on the group in question. There has been an emphatic reduction in the number of Italian and Spanish craftspeople. Other groups, for example the Portuguese (+0.4 per cent), have maintained their levels, while yet others have experienced a conspicuous increase. Examples here are the South East Asians at +61.2 per cent, the Moroccans at +74.6 per cent and, most notably, the sub-Saharan Africans at +132.2 per cent. With 18,800 craftspeople, representing (in 1990) about a quarter of immigrant craftspeople, the Portuguese remain by far the principal group. The Italian craftspeople, even though they have lost half their manpower, still represent the second largest group (8,078), followed by the Algerians (7,155) whose number has increased by 24.8 per cent.

¹⁷ The over-60s represent 59.6 per cent and 51.6 per cent respectively, of the Italian and Spanish immigrants, as against 21.3 per cent for the whole population resident in France.

¹⁸ The number of immigrants coming from these countries since 1990 is only 6,876 for Spain and 9,583 for Italy, with all social and professional categories grouped together.

The situation is very different for shopkeepers, with their numbers increasing by 17.2 per cent. In terms of numbers, this branch of industry is more dynamic than the craft industry. However, here too it is important to examine the trends among the different groups. The Italians and the Spanish have lost about a quarter of their manpower, whereas the other groups display increases, some of them very significant. The most significant increases have been among the Moroccans (+2,676), the Turks (+1,517), the Portuguese (+1,374) and the sub-Saharan Africans (+2,908). The case of the Algerians is surprising, since they experienced a fall, albeit a slight one, in the number of shopkeepers (-0.5 per cent). Looking at the whole picture for 1999, one finds an almost perfect correspondence between these two categories of immigrant entrepreneurs, craftspeople making up 46.2 per cent, and shopkeepers comprising 46.5 per cent. This contrasts with the situation in 1990, when the former were proportionally more significant.

Focusing on the presence of different immigrant groups in entrepreneurial activities, the question is whether there is succession and replacement or cohabitation. The presence of immigrants in entrepreneurial activities is closely connected with the history of immigration and the various migratory waves that France has experienced. A group arrived in the 1950s and 1960s as immigrant workers, comprising Italians, Spanish, and later Algerians, many of whom became entrepreneurs. This group expanded its ranks and was joined by new entrepreneurs from other immigrant groups during the 1960s and 1970s, including the Portuguese and the Tunisians. Subsequently, in the 1980s and 1990s, these immigrants were joined by the Moroccans, the South East Asians and the Turks. More recently, in the 1990s, the Africans, the Indians, the Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis arrived.

It is possible to distinguish three phases in the entrepreneurial history of an immigrant group: a phase of installation and development, during which the number of entrepreneurs in the group rises strongly, and a phase of consolidation, during which the rate of recruitment makes only slight progress. Finally, there is a phase of decline where the number of entrepreneurs decreases. Immigrant groups are located at different phases according to the passage of time since their arrival.

The Spanish and Italians are in a phase of rapid decline. The Portuguese and Algerians, together with the Tunisians, are in a phase of consolidation, where their numbers are significant but recruitment is weak. We find the Moroccans, the South East Asians, the Turks and the Africans in a phase of installation and development. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, although the Italians and the Spanish are in a phase of decline, the proportion of entrepreneurs among their working population remains very high, compared to the average for all immigrants (respectively, 12.9 per cent and 8.5 per cent as against 7.3 per cent).

The existence of a class of entrepreneurs within these groups is a persistent rather than fortuitous phenomenon and represents an enduring change in their social structuring. In addition, it is not certain that the phases that one can identify from the tables will be exactly repeated in the future. Factors such as the development of Diasporas and circulatory economies can intervene in the development of a distinct group of immigrant entrepreneurs. These observations lead us to question whether the different groups successively replace each other, or whether they exist in a form of cohabitation. The census data do not allow us to answer this question, since the data at our disposal relate to a fixed point in time. Only a special longitudinal study could achieve this.

The phenomenon of succession is, however, observable on a local scale in certain Parisian districts, where one group succeeds another in the food or restaurant trade (Ma Mung and Simon, 1990). The same phenomenon has been observed in the USA (Waldinger, 1987) and in the Netherlands (Rath, 2000). However, very often cohabitation is observed, rather than replacement or succession. This is the case, for example, for the Faubourg Saint-Denis area in central Paris, where Turks, Chinese and Indo-Pakistanis share commercial space (Dinh, 2002, 2007, 2008).

Conclusion

The great number of jobs closed to foreigners has inestimable consequences in terms of processes of integration, and raises many questions about the efficacy of the fight against discrimination. Nevertheless, it did not prevent a class of small entrepreneurs of foreign origin from asserting itself in the host society. The strategies for getting around these discriminatory restrictions are numerous. Among them, the acquisition of French nationality remains the most evident and the most easily quantifiable.

Finally, in leaving foreigners with no option but to acquire French nationality, the French State effectively continued a policy of long-term immigration by encouraging the immigration of labour migrants with a vocation to stay in the country, transforming it into immigration of settlement.

The law of 17 July 1984 marked a step forward in facilitating access for immigrants with a ten-year residence permit to independent business activities. It remains the case that in many of the liberal professions, such as in medicine, foreign doctors are assigned to the most precarious positions and are paid 40 to 50 per cent less than their French colleagues with the same skills (SNPADHUE, 2008). This is despite the fact that they compensate for staff shortages in the French hospital system.

In other economic sectors where the jobs are considered to be menial tasks, such as in catering, security or cleaning, spontaneous strikes by undocumented workers in 2008 have highlighted a situation known to all: the employment of undocumented migrants, mainly sub-Saharan Africans, in the most difficult and worst-paid jobs. They pay their welfare contributions and taxes and contribute to French economic development without benefiting in return from the rights reserved for nationals. As French ‘citoyens’, that is “holders of a part of national sovereignty” (Lochak, 1988), we have internalised the limits of the nation-state and the political consciousness that characterises it to such an extent that we consider it “as normal that there are foreigners, that is people who do not have the same rights as us” (Kristeva, 1988).

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