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ABDELMALEK SAYAD AND THE DOUBLE ABSENCE

Toward a Total Sociology of Immigration

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At the time of his death, the sociologist of immigration Abdelmalek Sayad (1933-1998) was putting the final touches on a collection of his principal articles—since published under the title *La Double Absence*.¹ The publication of this collection provides, I think, a good occasion for introducing Sayad to the anglophone public, which to date has had almost no exposure to his work. In France, Sayad's sociology has been essential not only to the study of Algerian immigration, but to the understanding of migration as a "fait social total," a *total social fact*, which reveals the anthropological and political foundations of contemporary societies. The introduction of this exceptional work to American specialists of French studies is timely, moreover, because immigration and more recently, colonization have been among the most dynamic areas of research in the field in the past few years.

In America, these topics have mostly been the province of historians, although anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists have engaged them to a lesser degree. None of this work to date, however, has explored the relationship between colonization and immigration, and little of it moves beyond the disciplinary specialties of the authors. One of the great strengths of Sayad's work is that it permits us to think outside these disciplinary enclosures. His research brings to light the historical processes through which the colonization of Algeria engendered Algerian immigration to France as well as the structural homologies that underlie the two phenomena. Sayad began to systematically explore this articulation in the early 1960s, and in the course of his career brought to bear a remarkably diverse sets of methods and angles of approach. These contributions are scattered throughout numerous articles and several collaborations, but despite this productivity Sayad never wrote a larger

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synthesis of his work. Nonetheless, Sayad's work builds patiently, and sometimes repetitively, on past results. Far from a fragmentary body of work, his articles reveal a strong implicit coherence which it is partly the ambition of this article to reconstruct. Sayad's integration of different dimensions of the experience of migration might be described, borrowing from a Durkheimian vocabulary, as the project of constructing an integrated social science of immigration. His approach builds upon an analytical core of remarkably rich and subtle ethnographic investigations, which support a strong historical analysis, linguistic and anthropological inquiries, and political theory. This article will try both to underline the methodological originality of Sayad's work and to locate it within the intellectual context of research on immigration.

A Fundamental Break

Because Sayad's work represents a radical break with the approaches to immigration dominant in the 1960s and 70s, it may be useful to briefly sketch their principal characteristics. Doing so, moreover, allows us to respect Sayad's constant insistence that the sociology of immigration adopt a reflexive attitude toward itself, and in particular toward the effects of the "imposition of the problematic [of immigration]"—in other words, a reflexivity about the effects on sociology of the way immigration is construed by different social actors. One recognizes here the vocabulary and methodological precautions of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology, with which Sayad's work has always been closely linked.² Sayad's sociology of immigration has, in fact, been sometimes modestly presented as a specific application of the general theoretical framework of Bourdieusian sociology, although one might see it, as I hope to do here, as a more successful empirical realization of some of its most interesting potentialities.

In 1977, Sayad published his first important work on immigration, "*Les trois 'âges' de l'émigration algérienne en France.*"³ This article gained him admittance to the CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique) and posed the questions that he would try to answer for the next twenty years. At the time, the sociology of immigration was in its infancy in France. As Gérard Noiriel has noted, social history and more generally the social sciences in France had long ignored questions related to migration, for reasons that were at once methodological, epistemological and ideological.⁴ Research on immigration tended to be conducted by academics close to political power, who accordingly constituted themselves as experts. At the turn of the century, the discourse on immigration was largely monopolized by jurists; between the world wars, this role had devolved to a large degree upon demographers and economists; by the 1960s and 70s, political scientists had largely assumed the role of experts on immigration—in particular that dominant branch of political science which considered itself an auxiliary of government, and whose central institution remains the Institut d'études politiques in Paris ("Sciences-

po"). These latter experts typically interested themselves in the questions posed by politicians in the period regarding the management of immigration, and the status of immigrants with respect to national and international law.⁵

In the 1970s, the economic crisis in France did much to stabilize the movement of populations—especially those coming from the former colonies, first and foremost of which was Algeria. Although the transformation of immigration from an influx of ostensibly temporary workers ("immigration de travail") to an influx of permanently residing families ("immigration de peuplement") was in reality an old and gradual process, it is only in these years that this transition began to be remarked upon. As Sayad has authoritatively shown, this recognition was accompanied by the growth of general interest in questions of immigration and the proliferation of discourses on the subject in all spheres of society.⁶ The social sciences were no exception. Responding to this public expression of interest, a sociology of immigration emerged in this period that directly translated the preoccupations of the moment. This line of work isolated different aspects of the phenomenon of migration and associated them one by one with various institutions or domains of activity, thereby constituting a range of "social problems."

By virtue of this "thinking in pairs,"⁷ the sociological literature fractured into a potentially infinite list of joined themes: "immigration and work," "immigration and culture," "immigration and education," and so on. These associations between the immigrant population and diverse 'external' themes reveal the degree to which sociologists uncritically repackaged common representations of immigrants. These representations were fundamentally abstract, insofar as they avoided asking questions about the modes of constitution of the immigrant population, its place in both the societies of origin and destination, and above all the individual and collective trajectories that passed from the one society to the other. To make use of Sayad's terminology, immigration thus conceived was essentially an "imposed problematic"—in effect, nothing more than the sum of social problems with which it could be associated. Such sociology, despite its frequently good intentions and sincere denunciations of these "problems," involuntarily reinforced the forms of stigmatization experienced by immigrants. In order to undertake a "true sociology of immigration,"⁸ Sayad argued, one had to pass from analysis conducted in terms of "social problems" to the constitution of immigration as an "object of sociology"—a well-known foundational gesture of Bourdieusian sociology.⁹ This implied overcoming both the preconceptions associated with representations of immigration and the poverty of objective data on immigration, which had never been the subject of significant statistical research or archival attention.¹⁰ But Sayad's essential rupture with both established research and the newer forms of sociology of immigration consisted in his objectification of the totality of the migratory experience, which is never simply an *immigration*, but also an *emigration*. Sayad persistently situated each moment of the social trajectory of migration within this larger matrix of emigration and immigration:

Any study which neglects the conditions of origin of emigrants is condemned to give only a *partial* and *ethnocentric* view of the phenomenon. On the one hand, such studies give consideration only to the immigrant, not to the emigrant, as if his existence began at the moment he arrived in France. On the other hand, the implicit and explicit problematic of such studies is always the immigrant's *adaptation* to the 'welcoming' society.¹¹

This combined approach to emigration and immigration effectively decenters the traditional perspective on immigrant populations, no longer envisaging them solely in terms of the host society—or to put it more directly, in terms of the statistical, social and moral norms of that society.¹² Sayad's break with the "ethnocentrism" of immigration studies and his recentering of analysis around the totality of the migratory experience of individuals and groups was doubtless facilitated by his personal trajectory: Sayad was born in a Kabyle village in the Bougie region; he conducted his first studies of the crisis of traditional agriculture in Algeria in the late 1950s, and only later—after the Algerian war—moved to France to pursue his doctoral studies.¹³ Above all, however, Sayad brought to the question of Algerian immigration a profound knowledge of the structures of the society of origin and the social and cultural characteristics of the *émigrés*—knowledge without which the condition of the *immigrés* remained opaque to the observer. This expansion of the question of immigration had several consequences for Sayad's work. First, it implied the need for careful studies designed to illuminate the social trajectory of immigrants over a long period. This, in turn, necessitated narrowing the object of study to a single immigrant population at the expense of more general or comparative analyses of immigration in France.

Sayad's deliberate decentering of immigration also explains the relative absence of debate between Sayad and other researchers who were similarly engaged in renewing the field of immigration studies in the 1980s. Many of these researchers are better known to American specialists of French studies. In the area of history, for instance, Gérard Noiriel's pioneering work, *The French Melting Pot*, first published in France in 1988, opened a new field of inquiry into the contributions of immigration to the social history of France, as well as into the relationship of immigration to the transformation of national identity and processes of state formation over the long term. This work was very consciously an attempt to place into historical perspective the so-called "crisis of immigration" that had allegedly confronted French society since the 1970s, with the most recent wave of immigration from the former colonies and from North Africa in particular. Establishing a correlation between economic cycles, migratory fluxes, and xenophobic social movements, Noiriel demonstrated that each of the major immigrant populations of the last century had been stigmatized at a given moment as "unassimilable," prior to melting into the French population to the point of losing all social visibility. For strategic reasons, Noiriel refused to distinguish between immigrant populations, choosing instead to privilege the question of the location of immigrant groups within a

cycle of “national assimilation.”¹⁴ This made the elapsed time since the initial arrival the principle explanatory variable of the social characteristics of specific immigrant groups. This choice tended to ignore the processes that generated of emigration in favor of the logic of “needs”—in particular the needs of the labor force—in the country of destination. It is not surprising, therefore, that this approach had few points of contact with Sayad.

The political sociology of immigration constituted the other rich direction of inquiry into immigration in the 1980s. For similar reasons, it made little use of Sayad’s work, although here one can imagine what might have been a very fruitful encounter. In seminal work, Dominique Schnapper analyzed the integration of immigrants into national society, the social institutions that played a role in that process, and the sociological and philosophical assumptions that supported it.¹⁵ Like Noiriel’s work, however, this perspective focuses primarily on the host society, even if it confers a greater explanatory role to the specific characteristics of immigrant populations.

The position these two approaches have in common is their lack of attention to colonization and its influence on the most recent currents of immigration. The first approach, by seeking to uncover sociological constants which apply to all the influxes of immigrants, avoids integrating into its explanatory model the specific modes which generated each migratory current. The second distances the question of colonization by characterizing the exclusion of the colonized from the “community of citizens” simply as a historical aberration with respect to the democratic logic of the nation—an exception which does little, in Schnapper’s view, to illuminate the otherwise successful processes of national integration.¹⁶ But as Sayad demonstrates convincingly, the historical and sociological characteristics of Algerian immigration in France have been highly dependent on the history of French colonization in Algeria, which in certain respects it prolongs. The relatively early and “total” colonization of Algeria, which began in 1830 and envisaged control not only of the land but of the “bodies and souls” of the colonized,¹⁷ provides considerable explanatory purchase on the fundamental interrogation of French society posed by Algerian immigration in the 1980s.¹⁸

For Sayad, there is, to be sure, a homological relationship between colonization and immigration—both are part of a social system which tightly articulates economic organization, the imposition of cultural norms, and relations of domination. But there is also and above all a generative relationship: colonization brought about the occupation of the land, and thereby modified the forms of structuration of Algerian society—a society until then based on a tribal system of collective property, with its associated cultural forms. This process produced an unemployed rural proletariat whose only options were to relocate to the cities, or to France. At the same time, demographic conditions and the emergence of a certain social and political equilibrium in France created a structural need for labor that could be paid at a level below that offered to nationals. If the colonization of Algeria was exemplary for its duration,

amplitude, and symbolic place in the imperial French imaginary, Algerian immigration in France is equally exemplary for its numerical importance, early appearance, the clarity of the relations of domination, and the complex, conflictual nature of the national question between the two countries. Because Algerian immigration magnifies the essential characteristics of the migratory experience, Sayad believed, it can help to elaborate analytical tools for the study of immigration in general. For Sayad, Algerian immigration is exemplary in that it is both typical and exceptional: Algerian immigration, he writes, “seems to contain the truth of all the other immigrations and of immigration in general; it seems to carry the qualities that are dispersed and diffused in the other immigrations to the highest level and furthest point of ‘exemplarity.’”¹⁹ This somewhat paradoxical use of the notion of exemplarity is indicative of the limits of generalization in Sayad’s work. By recentering the question of immigration around the problematic of the generation of emigration, and thus, in the case of Algeria, around the history of colonial domination, Sayad committed himself to an analysis of historical particularity that conflicted with his later gestures toward generalization.

Beyond bringing to light the relationship between colonization and immigration, Sayad’s fundamental break with the “ethnocentrism” of immigration studies in France opened the way toward a critique of legalism (*juridisme*). Under this term, Sayad denounced the tendency of immigration studies to privilege the legal definitions of the condition of immigrants produced by national and international law. Such studies proceeded, he argued, at the expense of precise analyses of immigrants’ social status, which could in no instance be reduced to their legal status. Such studies missed, he claimed, a whole dimension of the social reality of immigrants, beginning with their irreducibility to the status of foreigners. Sayad envisaged in this critique most contemporary research on the question, including, I would venture—although Sayad never specified targets other than “Sciences-po”—works such as Noiriel’s or Schnapper’s, which treat the state and the nation as the central operating concepts, and which give long consideration to the juridical modes of national identity.²⁰

Sayad’s break with both “ethnocentrism” and “legalism” had two major methodological consequences. First, it permitted Sayad to pay close attention to the meaning which individuals gave to their experience—an objective Sayad approached through the long autobiographical interviews which provided the principal material for his work and analyses. Sayad’s work is therefore first and above all else ethnographic: a large number of his articles present individual trajectories—most often a single case, treated and analyzed in detail. These are generally cases which exemplify the condition of the Algerian immigrants, but which also provide Sayad an occasion for focusing intensely on certain elements of that condition. His article, “*Elghorba*, le mécanisme de reproduction de l’émigration,” for example, is based upon two interviews conducted with a Kabyle immigrant before and after a visit to Algeria.²¹ His analysis examines the effects of long residence in France, marked by frequent visits

to Algeria, on the man's representations of his community of origin, French society, and finally himself. By lending anthropological analysis to one of the symbolic schemas of the Kabyle culture—the opposition between the land of birth and the land of exile—*elghorba*—Sayad demonstrates that a symbolic reversal occurs in the immigration process, after which the land of exile is no longer France but Algeria. The categories of judgment that the Kabyle schema enabled are destabilized, and with them the sense of identity they helped to structure. In another article, “La ‘faute’ de l’absence ou les effets de l’émigration,” Sayad traces the professional, social and psychological trajectory of another immigrant by examining a “catastrophic” event in his life: the birth of a child to his wife during his absence.²² This event, too violent to be named directly by the man or even by Sayad in his extreme respect for the man's discourse, serves to reveal one of the specific characteristics of the immigrant condition: the sense that absence is always a fault—always suspect from the point of view of the community of origin, the host community, and the immigrant himself. As Sayad shows in “Les enfants illégitimes,” this fault is reproduced in the immigrants' children born in France, who suffer a double estrangement with respect to both the immigrant generation of their parents and the society into which they are born.²³ “Les enfants illégitimes” is organized around a long interview with a young student, born in France to Algerian immigrants. She recounts at length her relationships with her parents, brothers and sisters, her trips to Algeria, and above all the division within the family that opposes those who immigrated from Algeria—parents and older children—to those born and socialized in France. Her relationship with her parents is characterized by mutual incomprehension—the children born in France are “illegitimate” insofar as the parents do not recognize themselves in them.

One should not conclude from these examples that Sayad's procedure is purely phenomenological and subjectivist. Rather, given the near total absence of longitudinal statistical studies of immigration at the time, Sayad's emphasis on oral testimony made a virtue of the necessity of constructing his own archive on immigration. All of Sayad's ethnographic inquiries, moreover, involve a constant juxtaposition of the meaning that immigrants give their experience with the objective conditions which form the framework of that experience. These can include sociological factors of dramatically different scale. Thus, in the same article, Sayad is capable of articulating anthropological interpretations of the Algerian peasant ethos, the place that a specific Kabyle village occupies in the migratory chain, the international division of labor and the international conventions it engenders, and careful analyses of individual experiences²⁴—without any of these elements taking precedence over the others. In this slow and patient work of reconstructing explanatory networks, Sayad elegantly addresses one of the fundamental methodological imperatives of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology: the call to overcome the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism. If it is difficult to find a concrete appli-

cation of this rule in the empirical work of the latter, Sayad's work, on the contrary, is a constant illustration of the heuristic power of such an approach.

Sayad's epistemological break has a second methodological consequence. Because immigration is considered as a continuing process that begins with emigration, and not simply as a mode of adaptation to the host society, Sayad's work is deeply historical. Through his integration of temporality as a fundamental variable of sociological explanation, Sayad's work appears today as one of the most completely realized contributions to French historical sociology. Some of his most remarkable analyses in this regard are those that articulate individual trajectories and large-scale population movements over long periods, as well as those that demonstrate the existence of feedback effects in the migratory process.

These two notions are already present in his 1977 article "Les trois 'âges' de l'émigration algérienne en France." Here Sayad reconstructs the evolution of forms of Algerian immigration to France and their determinants over a long period, beginning in the interwar years. He distinguishes three historically distinct modes of generation of Algerian immigration—each of which characterizes a separate migratory phase. In the first phase, immigration is largely oriented by communitarian peasant values. This immigration is dominated by adult men who act as emissaries of their villages, and whose mission it is to earn money that will permit the family group to conserve its land. These men were primarily peasants themselves, and they tended to stay for relatively short periods, subject to regular returns to the villages to participate in agricultural work. It is this phase that corresponds best to the image of the "noria"—of immigration as a circle or wheel—which persists as a comfortable if erroneous representation of Algerian immigration long after its basic constituents have changed.

In the second phase, this model is progressively transformed by the long-term effects of colonization and by the process of emigration itself. Regarding colonization, Sayad made use of the principal results of his early collaboration with Bourdieu on the crisis of the traditional peasantry in Algeria.²⁵ This study described the breakdown of communitarian village culture and the encroachment of an individualist and capitalist ethos—consequences of the spoliation and privatization brought about by colonization and accelerated by the policies of population relocation adopted by the French army during the Algerian war. As Sayad and Bourdieu argued, the peasants became "sabirs culturels," still subject to the communitarian logic but scarcely familiar with the cultural imperatives of modernity.²⁶ This resulted both in a system of values and behavior marked by contradiction and in a vision of emigration as an escape from an untenable condition. In the second phase of emigration, the emigrants were no longer uniquely motivated by the goal of preserving family and communal lands, and their behavior was no longer strongly determined by the group and its communitarian norms. This change is also partially explained by two feedback effects of the emigration process: by emptying the villages of adult men, emigration reinforced the agricultural crisis and the

sense of collective anomie; it also provided a vector for the introduction of modern cultural ideas, precipitating the decline of traditional norms.

Sayad was one of the very few at the time to identify the third phase of immigration, which was only beginning to be visible in the 1970s. Starting in the mid-1960s, the immigration of whole families began to be common, eventually taking precedence over the model of solitary men and radically changing the modes of structuration of the immigrant population in France. The departure of women and children accelerated and amplified the deleterious effects of emigration on the social equilibrium of the village communities, and transformed the signification of the presence of the Algerians in France. No longer a form of labor immigration (*immigration de travail*), it became a process of broad based and permanent relocation (*immigration de peuplement*).

This historical analysis permitted Sayad to bring to light the multiplicity of forms of immigration and their determinants, as well as the process of evolution over time. He thus moved beyond the reassuring and, at the time, dominant image of the “worker immigrant” (*le travailleur immigré*)—a figure without history or goals other than work, a man, in short, without qualities. With his careful emphasis on individual trajectories, Sayad proved to be a resolute empiricist in the sense that Max Weber described in insisting upon the need for “interpretative sociology [to consider] the individual and his action as the basic unit, as its ‘atom’ ...”²⁷ Much of the interest of Sayad’s work lies in his attention to the “effects of composition” of these atoms, according to which the accumulation of individual trajectories produces a collective movement which, in turn, modifies the environment in which those individual trajectories occur. The process, he suggested more than once, could be compared to the accumulation of a “pile of sand.”²⁸

A Sociology of Demystification

The principal result of Sayad’s unified perspective on emigration/immigration and of his methodological engagements is to articulate contradictions that affect the migratory process. The words he returns to most frequently are “paradox,”²⁹ “contradiction,” and “ambiguity.” Not only, he argued, are these contradictions objectively necessary for the maintenance of the social equilibrium constituted by the emigration/immigration process, they are only effective when actively ignored by the ensemble of actors concerned—that is, by the society of origin, the host society, and the migrants themselves, who collude to maintain them as collective illusions.³⁰

The first contradiction is temporal. Immigration was first defined, above all in the case of the Algerians, as a temporary phenomenon. But a variety of forces acted to prolong their residence in France, beginning with the arrival of women and children in the 1960s, and continuing with the policy of family reunification put in place after the official end of the immigration of unskilled

labor in 1974.³¹ Nonetheless, almost all actors worked to prolong the myth of the return: the host society, which was reluctant to see the immigrant population take root, the society of origin, which had suffered the absence of a large part of the adult male population, and the immigrants themselves, for whom the myth of eventual return served to lighten feelings of guilt toward the village communities and to help withstand the difficulties associated with the immigrant condition, especially in the area of work.

Corresponding to this temporal contradiction of an indefinitely prolonged yet provisional residence, Sayad identifies a spatial contradiction that he calls "the double absence." On the one hand, the immigrant is always an emigrant—absent from the society of origin, and increasingly distant from it in cultural and psychological terms. On the other hand, the immigrant remains an outsider in the host society, subject to a residency status that is always conditional and revocable, and prevented from participating in civil society. Even naturalization fails to erase the stigmas and fundamental alterity associated with the immigrant condition. As Sayad demonstrates, the acquisition of citizenship does little to change the immigrant's social condition.³² This double absence, which might also be seen as a form of diminished presence in two societies at once, is sustained by the uncertainty surrounding residence in the society of arrival. The immigrant cannot choose one place over another.

These two contradictions are complemented by a third which concerns the definition of the migration process, again through a form of collusion by all actors concerned. The society of origin, the host society, and the emigrants/immigrants all had an interest in defining the migration process as an exchange of workers between a society with a surplus of labor and a society with a corresponding deficit. Limiting immigration to this narrow role justified not only the provisional character of residency—revocable once the need for labor has passed—but also the lack of political and civil rights, reflecting the immigrants' allegedly less-than-complete investment in the society of arrival.³³ Considered by society and often considering themselves purely in terms of labor, immigrants found themselves at the bottom of the industrial work ladder, especially in factories where they became identified with the category of "semi-skilled worker" (*ouvrier spécialisé*, or OS) assigned to the most menial and repetitive tasks.³⁴ In this context, the concept of an "unemployed immigrant" (*immigré-chômeur*) appears almost paradoxical.

This labor-centered definition, however, is itself marked by a contradiction that becomes more and more pronounced with the passage of time. In the first instance, it confines migration to a context of pure economic rationality, in which the costs and benefits of immigration are constantly being weighed by both immigrants and the host society alike. Sayad devotes brilliant analyses to re-establishing the explicit role of this logic in the recent history of immigration, and to revealing its underlying political and ideological suppositions.³⁵ By masking the relations of domination that lie at the heart of both the colonial experience and the phenomenon of migration in favor of eco-

conomic rationality, the labor-centered definition of immigration ignores the political stakes of immigration in both the host society and the society of origin. It ignores the fundamentally political question posed in Algeria by the departure of a large portion of the population and the equally political question of the presence in the host society of a large population of outsiders. This contradiction between the economic definition and the political stakes of immigration became more and more intense under the combined weight of the economic crisis of the 1970s and the process of reunification of immigrant families in France.

Sayad placed his work squarely in the line of Bourdieu's sociology, carrying through a demystification (*dévoilement*) of the contradictions at work in the phenomenon of immigration. He assigns these contradictions the status of objective illusions, in the sense that the interested groups are unaware of them. These contradictions, moreover, are coterminous with the migratory process itself, which in transporting the population of one society to another, calls into question the fundamental category of the modern political unconscious, the nation. Taking up one of Bourdieu's central categories, Sayad demonstrates that immigration and emigration are profoundly *illegitimate* for all concerned, insofar as they menace the national order. In compensation for the double absence of the immigrant condition—part betrayal of the village and Algerian national community and part stigmatization as a foreign body in the host society—immigration must be constantly legitimized by all in terms of labor. That is why the collective representation of immigration as a provisional situation is maintained so long after its dominant characteristics have changed.

But these contradictions and the efforts of legitimation that they imply are not only manifested at the collective level. As usual, Sayad is careful to demonstrate how they are incarnated in the individual trajectories and self-perceptions of the immigrants. In a series of interviews, which form a remarkable oral archive, Sayad shows how the indefinitely prolonged provisional status, the double absence, and the evacuation of the political are reflected in the experiences of individual immigrants.³⁶ He examines at length the strategies that the immigrants use to justify themselves vis-à-vis the two communities and in their own eyes—a challenge that many of them find psychologically overwhelming.³⁷

In the end, however, demystification is not denunciation, and Sayad never leaves the terrain of rigorous sociological analysis to enter explicitly into political polemics. He does, however, carry through a form of liberatory practice which consists in letting the immigrants speak for themselves, and in showing the way from self-analysis to "socio-analysis." Insofar as they themselves articulate the contradictions which they confront, they are better armed against them.³⁸

These contradictions have not disappeared with the end of large-scale Algerian immigration to France in the late 1970s. On the contrary, they have been amplified by the de facto permanence of the Algerian immigration, and above all by the birth of a generation of children who, despite French birth

and citizenship, are still collectively considered immigrants. Born and socialized in France, these children are often complete foreigners to the Algerian culture of their parents, and are commonly treated as “too French” during visits to Algeria. From the other side, they are constantly accused in France of being “not French enough.” The diverse forms of suspicion raised during debates over the “code de la nationalité” in the 1990s clearly illustrate this point. As Sayad argues, the condition of these children reproduces and reinforces all the contradictions that marked the trajectory of their parents: they are destined to remain in France, but at the bottom of the social ladder; they are strangers to the system of peasant values which remains the frame of reference of their parents, but they do not have the cultural capital necessary to autonomously practice the values of French society. Drawing on Bourdieu’s analyses of the mechanisms of reproduction of the social order, Sayad envisaged the passage from one generation to the next as essentially the *reproduction* of a situation of domination in the host society. And yet their parents do not recognize themselves in these “sociological monsters,”³⁹ who incarnate and thus constantly remind them of the painful contradictions of their lives. To rephrase the title of a wonderful article in which Sayad presents a long interview with a young girl born in France, the children become “illegitimate.”

The contradictions to which this so-called “second generation” is subjected—an expression Sayad avoids because it does not distinguish between social and biological concepts of generation—are most apparent in the question of nationality. Because Algeria had been a French territory, French citizenship was extended to all children born in France after 1963 to parents born in Algeria before independence. This status was conferred automatically. Moreover, because Algerian citizenship law operated on a principal of “jus sanguinis,” the children were also accorded Algerian citizenship at birth. This imposed double nationality is the juridical side of the sociological splitting (*dédoublément*) that marks the condition of these children. In practice, being Algerian and French effectively meant being neither Algerian nor French. The juridical splitting thus prolongs the “double absence” of the immigrant population—itself a prolongation of the splitting imposed by colonization, which had made the Algerian peasants into “French muslims,” foreigners on their own lands.

The National Question

By the 1980s, the question of immigration was no longer restricted to the economic terrain and had become an object of discourse in many social domains. This breakdown of the collective illusion governing immigration was largely due to the presence of the “second generation,” which intensified the contradictions of the situation in ways visible to all. The arrival of women and children beginning in the 1960s had permitted Sayad to understand that

immigration was a differentiated phenomenon which evolved over time as a function of the conditions in the country of emigration. Similarly, the appearance of a “second generation” revealed the illusory nature of the justification of immigration on the basis of work and drew his attention toward the mechanisms that neutralized the political dimensions of the question of migration. In this context, emigration and immigration finally appeared as what they were: phenomena that fundamentally interrogate the national order. Only at the end of his life did Sayad return to the study of the relationship between “immigration” and “national order”—a subject he had long resisted as failing to adequately grasp the social reality of the migratory experience and which now occasioned a remarkable process of self-critique. In this context, Sayad admitted that “[the state] may be one of the last things that one discovers when one works and reflects on the problem of immigration, although one no doubt should have begun there, or at least have known it before beginning.”⁴⁰ Sayad drew little distinction in this work between the “national order” and the state, and often used them interchangeably. The concept of the nation that henceforth figured so centrally in his work designated above all the political community—the nation as nation-state. Such a stance is not surprising for someone who spent his whole life reflecting on the cases of France and Algeria—states whose history can with considerable justice be treated as efforts to coincide with and even produce the nation as community.

Because, for Sayad, migration made sense only in the context of the nation-state, he devoted his last works to considering the relations between these two historical phenomena. Because, as he came to appreciate, the double absence concerned not only workers and later families, but also political subjects, migration functioned as a paradox of the political order—paradox in the etymological sense of a rupture with the *doxa*. Migration constantly challenged the coherence of what in the modern world has become the primary and often unconscious category of political understanding: the nation. The enveloping force of the nation—what Sayad called “national fundamentalism” (*intégrisme national*)—is such that the emigrant is never completely excluded from the nation of origin and never completely included in the host society, following a logic that also depends on the complicity of all the actors involved:

Fundamentally, everything we understand about our social and political order, and all the categories of that political (and non-political) understanding, are at stake in the “collective perceptions” of immigration. These both define the immigrant and the larger discourse in which that definition operates. What is that definition? That one only accepts to leave the familiar universe, comprising the social, economic, political, cultural, moral, and mental universes, to which one “naturally” belongs (or in which one is “naturalized,” to borrow the juridico-political language of naturalization) on the condition that one can persuade oneself that it is only a temporary burden—a challenge that carries within it its own resolution. Only then does one accept to emigrate and, one thing leading to another, live as a stranger in a foreign country (i.e. immigrate).... All the specifications through which the immigrant is defined and through which he defines himself find their principal genera-

tor, sum, power, and final justification in the political status of the immigrant, according to which he is not only an outsider, but more than that, a “non-national,” who can only be excluded from the body politic.⁴¹

All the inherent contradictions of the immigrants’ social condition which he had previously described thus find their final explanation in the question of the immigrants’ “juridico-political” status. Between social condition and political status lies the national community—a mediating category of belonging which appears “natural,” and which frames and gives sense to all social experience. As Sayad argued, however, this community is subject to the juridical and institutional power of the state, which constantly sets the multiple limits of inclusion and exclusion. The nation is a nation-state insofar as it is produced by the state. By the same token, *nationality*, in the sense of cultural and social identity, is subordinated in the last resort to *citizenship* as the institution which defines participation in the body politic.

Thus the essence of the specific social condition of immigrants, for Sayad, is their exclusion from the body politic, which rests on the question of their juridical status. The long detour through ethnographic description and the late “rediscovery” of the national question result, in the end, in a somewhat circular analysis of the relationships between law and fact. If social status is not reducible to juridical status, the concepts nonetheless reinforce each other. It is, in effect, juridical exclusion from the body politic that justifies the multiple forms of social discrimination directed at immigrants—forms that would otherwise appear scandalous in a democratic society. This social discrimination, in turn, legitimizes the exclusion of immigrants from the body politic.⁴² Sayad here employs—with considerable circumspection—Hannah Arendt’s analysis of the condition of the Jews under Nazism. The “negation of the right to life” of the Jews, Arendt argued, was only possible in the context of a prior negation of their political rights—an exclusion from the historical and social community. Sayad carries this logic to term when he affirms that “the whole identity of the person is contained in civil (or civic) identity.”⁴³

Sayad takes pains, however, to show that his inquiry into the relations between migration and the nation-state does not imply a return to the legalism which he had previously criticized. He insists that those relations are not defined at the logical level by a simple dialectic of alterity—the familiar distinction between the same and the other. Rather immigration and emigration generate multiple forms of confrontation at the level of collective practices between nationals and non-nationals in the sphere of work, law, education, and so on. At the heart of these confrontations, Sayad rediscovers the state and its sovereign power to define the “natural” limits of the nation. Here, Sayad draws once again on Bourdieu, and in particular his analyses of the state’s role in producing and guaranteeing the internal and external frontiers of a society.⁴⁴ The state, in this role, is the producer of legitimacy “in the last resort.”⁴⁵ But once again, Sayad’s empirical analyses demonstrate what often remains at

the level of assertion in Bourdieu's work: for Sayad, the state is not a disembodied figure which mysteriously produces "social magic," but an ensemble of institutions whose actions are constantly analyzed in interaction with those of the immigrant population.⁴⁶

In this context, immigration becomes "the best introduction"⁴⁷ to political sociology because the presence of outsiders (*allogènes*) among the indigenous exposes the fundamental role of the state in defining the limits of the national and the non-national, or, one might equally say, the "natural" and the "non-natural" in reference to the use of the term in old French to designate a subject of the king (a meaning which comes down to us in the term "naturalization"). This power to limit participation in the body politic and, more importantly, to articulate such distinctions as natural rather than arbitrary constitutes, for both Bourdieu and Sayad, a primary function of the state and its essential mechanism of legitimation. Because immigration reveals the arbitrary quality of this state power, it is perceived as a constant threat both to the cohesion of the nation and to the legitimacy of the state. Because the "second generation" is split to an even greater degree among the two nationalities, the two juridical statuses, the two systems of values, and so on, it challenges the legitimacy of the national order in even less ambiguous fashion, and consequently becomes the object of a much more explicit national debate. Whereas the parents were easily identified as outsiders by all, the children were more difficult to categorize—less clearly identifiable and thus more threatening to the division between national and non-national that underlay the social order.

Nonetheless, the height... of violence with regard to the "national consciousness" seems to be attained with these ersatz "immigrants," these children of the immigrants. They are hybrids who do not completely possess the qualities that define the ideal, integral immigrant, the fully realized immigrant who conforms to the representations people make of him. Nor do they possess the objective and, above all, subjective characteristics of nationals. Rather, they are and they are not immigrants like the others, in spite of the designation. They are, in other words, treated as strangers in the full sense of the term. Yet they are neither culturally foreign, since they are integral products of the society, with its mechanisms of reproduction and integration—the language..., school and all the other social processes. Nor are they nationally foreign, since most often they hold the status of nationals in the country. But they remain agents of trouble, of equivocation. They blur the frontiers of the national order and, consequently, the symbolic values and the criteria that organize the hierarchy and classification of groups. Doubtless it is this that one pardons least in these immigrants—precisely this attack on the function and diacritical signification of the separation that the state establishes between nationals and non-nationals.⁴⁸

Because this diacritical function of the state applies universally to all non-nationals, it provided Sayad with an opportunity to reflect upon the *constants* of the emigration-immigration process, and in so doing to reconsider the possibility of generalizing from Algerian historical experience to other migratory experiences.⁴⁹ Here, despite major differences in perspective, Sayad's work

would seem to converge with the historical and sociological analyses of Noiriél and Schnapper, at least insofar as they all privilege the processes at work in the formation of national identity and the determining role of the state in the analysis of immigration. But whereas Noiriél and Schnapper emphasize the complex but ultimately efficacious process of integration—above all of the children of the immigrants—Sayad insists on the continuation of forms of stigmatization and the reproduction of exclusion.

Even in the terms of Sayad's analysis, then, one might raise questions about the long-term determinants of this reproduction. If domination is to be equated with exclusion from the body politic, what happens as the children and grandchildren of the immigrants become citizens? Unfortunately, Sayad never addressed this question. There is also an empirical question concerning the little studied but indisputable forms of integration of the second generation into French society—a complex process that Sayad himself recognizes when he says that the children are not “foreign since they are integral products of the society, with its mechanisms of reproduction and integration.”

In the end, Sayad did not resolve this contradiction. Sometimes he describes immigrants and their children as completely excluded from French society and objectively dominated by it; sometimes he describes them as integrated in important social and cultural respects.⁵⁰ This contradiction parallels the unresolved tension in Sayad's work between the early critique of legalism and the late rediscovery of the importance of the state.

In all likelihood, Sayad would have continued to work toward a clarification of these issues, since they had become so prominent in his work and in the social condition of the “second generation.” In the absence of that work, I think we can see the usefulness of Sayad's dilemma in pointing, finally and fundamentally, to the poverty of the alternative between integration and the reproduction of exclusion. In fact, it may be possible to read Sayad's work—when evaluated in light of the most interesting analyses of the successful social integration of other groups—as an opening toward the investigation of the different modes of presence of immigrants in French society. The exemplary history of Algerian immigration cannot be entirely superimposed on the no-less-exemplary history of immigrant Poles or Italians. Sayad himself provides us with tools for thinking through this complexity, recognizing the multiplicity of historical modes of inclusion and exclusion. In a reading of classic political philosophy—particularly Hannah Arendt—and the history of antiquity, Sayad notes that in contrast to the radical exclusion of slaves from Athenian public life, the helots in Sparta were permitted a wider margin of participation in the community of citizens—especially in the area of military service.⁵¹ Is it possible, then, to think through the differential structures of the subordination of immigrants in France? To see the whole as part Athens, part Sparta?

Conclusion

Abdemalek Sayad's intellectual trajectory is exemplary in many respects. Beginning relatively modestly in ethnographic analysis, he finished by moving beyond the description of Algerian immigration in France toward the study of the sociological constants involved in migration more generally. Because these later inquiries called into question the mechanisms of national cohesion and legitimation, they necessarily eventuated in a sociology of the state.

Perhaps even more than Bourdieu, it is Marcel Mauss who provides us with one of the keys to reading Sayad's work. Borrowing from Mauss, Sayad often characterized immigration as a "total social fact," in the sense that it interrogates the social order in its entirety, or, in Mauss's terms, "involves the totality of society and its institutions."⁵²

As Sayad can teach us, immigration's status as a "total social fact" requires a strong interdisciplinary approach—at once anthropological, sociological and historical. Levels of analysis are constantly mixed when one tries to describe collective logics and the historical processes they engender, the anthropological analysis of symbolic constants in different cultures, and the sociological examination of individuals' actions and the significance they assign them. To take one example among many, Sayad's analysis of naturalization mobilizes all these approaches—an account of the laws governing nationality, anthropological analysis of rites of inclusion, historical analysis of the conflictual relations between France and Algeria on the national question, and a detailed sociological analysis of the modes of acquisition of citizenship.⁵³

Sayad brought to this exemplary sociological object a correspondingly exemplary sociology—at once highly exigent with respect to his empirical data, remarkably patient in accumulating and articulating his results over the years, and always flexible enough to return to concepts and problematics whose value he had not appreciated earlier. Thus in addition to his analysis of migration with all its diverse ramifications, Sayad offers us a scientific and human trajectory from which there is much to learn.

Notes

I would like to thank Jacques Revel for the initial idea for this article, the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions, and Joe Karaganis for some of the final touches.

1. Abdelmalek Sayad, *La Double Absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré* (Paris: Seuil, 1999). This text contains a complete bibliography of Sayad's work.
2. Bourdieu, three years older than Sayad, was his philosophy professor at the University of Algiers at the end of the 1950s and the mentor who introduced him to sociology. Their first collaboration dates to their fieldwork in 1958-1959—the height of the Algerian war—concerning the relocation centers for the Algerian population (*centres de regroupement*) organized by the French army. This work resulted in a groundbreaking study of the combined influence of colonization and the war on the Algerian peasant communities. See Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *Le Déracinement. La crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie* (Paris: Minuit, 1964).
3. Abdelmalek Sayad, "Les trois 'âges' de l'émigration algérienne en France," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 15 (June 1977): 59-79. This article is reprinted in Sayad, *La Double Absence*, pp. 55-98. All article citations indicate the date of first publication and whether or not the article was reprinted in one of Sayad's two collections of essays. In such cases, subsequent references are to the collected editions.
4. See Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset français. Histoire de l'immigration. XIX-XX siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1988) and especially Chapter I, "Non-lieu de mémoire" [*The French Melting Pot, Immigration, Citizenship and National Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)].
5. For an analysis of what Sayad calls "l'immigration à la rue Saint-Guillaume," see "Entretien avec Abdelmalek Sayad," *MARS, Monde arabe dans la recherche scientifique* 6 (Spring-Summer 1996): 7-56, in which Sayad recounts his personal and intellectual trajectory.
6. See Abdelmalek Sayad, "Tendances et courants des publications en sciences sociales sur l'immigration en France depuis 1960," *Current Sociology* XXXII 3 (Winter 1984): 219-304.
7. Sayad, "Tendances et courants," p. 239.
8. Sayad, "Tendances et courants," p. 247. Sayad here reproduces the extremely normative dimension of Bourdieusian epistemology.
9. On this question, see for example Remi Lenoir, "Objet sociologique et problème social," in *Initiation à la pratique sociologique*, Patrick Champagne, Remi Lenoir, Dominique Merllié, Louis Pinto eds. (Paris: Bordas, 1989), pp. 53-100.
10. In this respect, the last ten years have seen a remarkable shift with the publication of major longitudinal statistical studies of immigration conducted by the INED (Institut national d'études démographiques) and the beginnings of a vast enterprise of collecting and presenting archival information on immigration with *Les Étrangers en France. Guide des sources d'archives publiques et privées, XIX-XX ème siècles* (Paris: Génériques/Direction des Archives de France, 1999)—a project whose first fruits have just been published in three volumes.
11. My translation, Sayad's italics. These are the opening lines of Sayad's seminal "Les trois 'âges,'" p. 56.
12. These are often indiscriminately mixed in statistical work on immigration—a case in point being Michèle Tribalat's *Faire France. Une grande enquête sur les immigrés et leurs enfants* (Paris: La Découverte, 1995).
13. For biographical information on Sayad, the best published source is the interview previously cited, "Entretien avec Abdelmalek Sayad."

14. These reasons were as much political as scientific. The crucial context of this work was the early series of electoral victories of the Front National, built in no small part on the claim that, for religious and cultural reasons, the new, mostly Muslim immigrants were incapable of integrating into a Christian society.
15. See Dominique Schnapper, *La France de l'intégration. Sociologie de la nation en 1990* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991); *La Communauté des citoyens. Sur l'idée moderne de nation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) [*Community of Citizens: On the Modern Idea of Nationality* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998)]; *La Relation à l'autre. Au cœur de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).
16. Schnapper, *La Communauté des citoyens*, pp. 152-3.
17. Abdelmalek Sayad, "L'immigration algérienne, une immigration exemplaire" in *Les Algériens en France, genèse et devenir d'une migration*, Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux et Émile Témime, eds. (Paris: Publisud, 1985), pp. 19-49, reprinted in Sayad, *La Double Absence*, pp. 101-32. See especially p. 103.
18. The parallel histories of the colonization of Algeria, the dispossession of its inhabitants, and the large-scale emigration to France is traced in a collaborative work between Sayad and Alain Gillette, *L'Immigration algérienne en France* (Paris: Entente, 1976).
19. Sayad, "Une immigration exemplaire," p. 101.
20. On this, see Schnapper, *La France de l'intégration* and Gérard Noiriel, *La Tyrannie du national. Le droit d'asile en Europe 1793-1993* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991).
21. Abdelmalek Sayad, "Elghorba, le mécanisme de reproduction de l'émigration," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 2 (March 1975): 50-66, reprinted in *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 1991), pp. 25-48, and in *La Double Absence*, pp. 25-51.
22. Abdelmalek Sayad, "La 'faute' de l'absence ou les effets de l'émigration," *Anthropologica Medica* 4 (July 1988): 50-69, reprinted in *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, pp. 111-44, and in *La Double Absence*, pp. 201-32.
23. Abdelmalek Sayad, "Les enfants illégitimes," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 25 (January 1979): 61-82 (Part 1) and *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 26-27 (March-April 1979): 117-32 (Part 2), reprinted in *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, pp. 185-258.
24. All these elements can be found in "Les trois 'âges' de l'émigration algérienne en France."
25. Bourdieu and Sayad, *Le Déracinement*.
26. Bourdieu and Sayad, *Le Déracinement*, chapter VIII.
27. Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1951), p. 415; see Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Galaxy Book, 1958), p. 55.
28. On this point see Sayad, "Qu'est-ce qu'un immigré?," *Peuples méditerranéens* 7 (April-June 1979): 3-23, reprinted in *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, pp. 51-77. On this concept, see especially p. 77.
29. Sayad uses this word in the title of one of his principal collections of articles, *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*.
30. *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, p. 18.
31. For a very thorough analysis of the history of the policy of immigration and its specific treatment of the Algerian case, see Patrick Weil, *La France et ses étrangers. L'aventure d'une politique d'immigration, 1938-1991* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1991).
32. See Sayad, "Les immigrés algériens et la nationalité française," in *Questions de nationalité. Histoire et enjeux d'un code*, Smaïn Laacher, ed. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987), pp. 127-97, reprinted in *La Double Absence*, pp. 321-71.
33. Sayad, "Qu'est-ce qu'un immigré?"

34. Sayad, "OS et double condition," in *Ouvriers spécialisés à Billancourt: les derniers témoins*, Renaud Sainsaulieu and Ahsene Zehraoui, eds. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), pp. 295-330, reprinted in *La Double Absence*, pp. 235-53.
35. See for example, Sayad, "Qu'est-ce qu'un immigré?," pp. 54-56.
36. Other than the articles cited above, see "Du message oral au message sur cassette. La communication avec l'absent," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 59 (September 1985): 61-73, reprinted in *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, pp. 147-81 or "Naturels et Naturalisés," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 99 (September 1993), pp. 26-35.
37. Sayad commented several times on the potentially pathological effects of this difficulty. See in particular "Santé et équilibre social chez les immigrés," *Psychologie médicale* 13, 11 (1981): 1747-75, reprinted in *La Double Absence*, pp. 257-303.
38. On the liberatory function of sociology, see "Les torts de l'absent," p. 142 or "Les enfants illégitimes," pp. 256-58.
39. "Les enfants illégitimes," p. 252.
40. "Immigration et 'pensée d'État,'" *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 129 (September 1999): 5-14, reprinted in *La Double Absence*, pp. 395-413 (p. 396). See also "Entretien avec Abdelmalek Sayad," p.46.
41. "Qu'est-ce qu'un immigré," p. 63. My translation. Sayad owes Bourdieu not only the methodological debt to which I have alluded, but also a stylistic debt, which raises similar difficulties of translation.
42. "Qu'est-ce qu'un immigré," p. 64.
43. On this point, see Sayad, "L'ordre de l'immigration entre l'ordre des nations," in *L'Immigration ou les paradoxes de l'altérité*, pp. 291-311 (p. 296).
44. Bourdieu and Sayad borrow this notion from Émile Benveniste's linguistic analyses of the diacritical function of the prince, who has the power to trace the border between the sacred and the profane, the legitimate and the illegitimate. See Émile Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*. Vol. 2. *Pouvoir, droit, religion* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), pp. 14-15. [*Indo-European language and society* (London: Faber, 1973)].
45. On the role of the State in producing social classification, see for example Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and symbolic power," *In Other Words, Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 123-39 (especially pp. 136-7).
46. On this, see "Naturels et naturalisés."
47. "Entretien avec Abdelmalek Sayad," p. 47.
48. Sayad, "Immigration et 'pensée d'État,'" pp. 410-11. My translation.
49. Sayad, "Immigration et 'pensée d'État,'" p. 395.
50. This alternation might be profitably considered in the terms that Claude Grignon and Jean-Claude Passeron develop in their analysis of academic discourse concerning the lower-classes, *Le Savant et le populaire: Misérabilisme et populisme en sociologie et en littérature* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). Grignon and Passeron identify two dominant and generally exclusive representational practices: *miserabilism*, which thinks the Other as radically different, and *populism*, which thinks the Other in the utopian terms of sameness.
51. On this point, see Sayad, "L'ordre de l'immigration entre l'ordre des nations," p. 298.
52. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 1990 [1923]) p. 78.
53. See "Naturels et naturalisés" or "Les immigrés algériens et la nationalité française."