

le nom » existe réellement dans les écrits, parfois très anciens, qu'il analyse, ce qui offre donc l'occasion d'une réflexion sur le sens d'une telle histoire rétrospective d'un concept. À la question de l'inscription dans une histoire particulière s'ajoute d'ailleurs celle de son caractère national. L'ouvrage mentionne en passant l'absence d'équivalents anglais ou américains de l'expression « lien social » et la notoriété scientifique et politique de la notion en France : il ouvre ainsi discrètement la voie à une analyse comparée de cette présence française, de cette « absence » anglaise ou américaine, et de leurs conditions sociales de possibilité.

Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaïsse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006).

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This is by far the most comprehensive and best documented book available in English on the Muslim population in France. It works systematically through the now sizeable body of research and other evidence available on Muslims in France and finds that they are working with the grain of French society far more than is often thought. In chapter after chapter, we see that, contrary to widespread myths about the alleged incompatibility of Islam and French republican values, the vast majority of Islamic organizations and individual Muslims in France seek equality *within* the Republic on the basis of its constitutional principles, including that of *laïcité*, rather than through *shariah*-based separatism. The principal obstacles to the incorporation of Muslims in French society are shown to reside not in any reluctance on their part to integrate but in socio-economic inequalities, Islamophobic prejudices, and ethnic discrimination.

After laying out this thesis in Chapter One, the authors document in Chapter Two the prejudices and exclusionary attitudes with which Muslims have had to contend. Chapter Three discusses the "1001 Ways of Being Muslim" in France, underscoring the diverse and rapidly evolving ways in which succeeding generations of Muslims have adapted the religion of their forebears. If, as the authors argue, there are signs of a process of re-Islamization with the emergence of a third generation of Muslim heritage, this is not to be equated with Islamism. Instead of seeking to impose a political vision of Islam on French society, young people identifying themselves as Muslims appear more commonly to seek in Islam a sense of personal worth and collective dignity to compensate for social marginalization. The diverse and fragmented

nature of the Muslim population is reflected in the organizational structures that have sprung up around it. These are examined in Chapters Four and Five, which show that while the principal federations of Muslim organizations have agreed to work together in the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM), they remain faction-ridden though united in their acceptance of the need to work within the framework of French law, including the code of *laïcité*. In Chapter Six, the authors help to restore a sense of proportion in their analysis of the Islamic headscarf affairs, which are shown to have been in many ways a storm in the tea-cup of Parisian politics and its media amplifiers. After a chapter summarizing the main lines of French public policy towards Muslims, Laurence and Vaïsse move on in Chapter Eight to examine the myth of a “Muslim vote” in France. They show that, far from constituting a unified voting bloc preoccupied with skewing French foreign policy in the Middle East, enfranchised Muslims are much more concerned with the need for social policies to address the inequalities they suffer within France. Chapter Nine focuses on the recent upsurge in recorded incidents of anti-Semitism, often blamed on Arab youths in the *banlieues*. After examining the evidence the authors conclude: “At the end of the day, the deeper cause of anti-Semitism—especially in disaffected areas where Muslims are numerous—is lack of socio-economic integration” (243), leading to a situation in which “traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes (Jewish power, wealth, greed, and so forth) reinforce Muslim feelings of solidarity with oppressed Palestinians—and, more generally, for all Muslims oppressed by Western society” (237-38). Similar explanatory factors are adduced in Chapter Ten for the behavior of French Muslims who have engaged in terrorist activities who, no less importantly, are shown to be statistically “marginal, numbering just a few dozen cases a year out of a population of around 5 million Muslims” (244).

While the main lines of the argument advanced by Laurence and Vaïsse are well conceived and soundly documented, the book is not immune from minor errors. Because of state restrictions on the collection of ethnic and religious data, statistics in these fields are notoriously slippery. The authors do their best to navigate this quagmire but do not always manage to stay on entirely dry land. They define Muslims as “those individuals who, by dint of their national origin or ancestry, are of Muslim culture or sociological background. This population, of course, includes many secular-minded citizens who would object to being classified primarily as Muslims” (74). Laurence and Vaïsse acknowledge that the important qualifications that they spell out here can easily be lost sight of by the reader since “the book admittedly succumbs to the convenience of shorthand” (10) by generally speaking of “Muslims” *tout court* despite the fact that “many of the challenges of integration—perhaps most of them—have nothing to do with Islam or a putative ‘Muslim culture’ (which, in that abstract form, does not exist) and everything to do with the poor social conditions and lack of educational capital of recent immigrants and their children and grandchildren” (10). This important tension could

have been greatly reduced by referring more frequently to the populations concerned as being “of Muslim heritage” or through similar locutions designed to avoid reification. While the wish to avoid cumbersome terminology is understandable, at the end of the day the political and media distortions that the authors rightly set out to correct cannot be properly rectified without correcting the simplistic terms of political and journalistic discourse.

For similar reasons, it is unfortunate that Laurence and Vaïsse speak repeatedly of “second-generation immigrants” and sometimes of “third-generation immigrants,” misnomers that have no place in a work of this quality. The second and third generations referred to here are not immigrants at all, since they were born in France and did not migrate there. French citizens at birth or on reaching the age of majority, they are the second and third generations of minority ethnic groups among which only the first generation are immigrants in the true sense. Referring to those born in France as second- or third-generation “immigrants” plays, no doubt unintentionally but nonetheless unfortunately, into the hands of those who argue that the descendants of migrants from predominantly Muslim countries can never be other than outsiders in French society. This kind of nomenclature also leads to some baffling statistical quirks, as in Table 1-6, which states that Muslims account for 75 percent of France’s “total immigrant population” (24). Granted that the 1999 census found that Africans (mainly but not entirely Muslims) and Turks (very largely Muslims) accounted for just 43.3 percent of immigrants in the true sense and that few Muslims are to be found among other immigrant groups in France, there is no credible basis on which Muslims could be held to account for 75 percent of all immigrants. If, by “immigrant population,” the authors mean first and second generations of minority ethnic groups combined, it is still very far from clear how Laurence and Vaïsse calculate that three quarters of these are Muslims.

Where the ethnic origins of Muslims are concerned, in Chapter One the authors state that “perhaps only half of France’s 5 million Muslims are of Arab descent” (21), whereas in Chapter Three they put the proportion at 69 percent (Figure 3-1, 75); no explanation is given for this apparent discrepancy. On the question of citizenship, it is misleading to say that “naturalization statistics are taboo” (17). The distinction between people born French (*Français par naissance*) and those who acquire French citizenship later in life (*Français par acquisition*) has long been a staple of French census data. If it is true that *Français par acquisition* technically include those acquiring French citizenship automatically as well as those formally requesting naturalization, there is no shortage of official reports documenting naturalization rates in the narrower sense. On other matters, Jacques Chirac was president (and not, as stated on page 141, prime minister) when he visited the Vatican in 1996; Hamlaoui Mékachera and Tokia Saïfi were not cabinet members of Jean-Pierre Raffarin’s government (as stated on page 177) but held the positions of *Ministre délégué* and *Secrétaire d’état* respectively, junior ministerial posts below cabinet rank.

While unfortunate, slips of this kind are minor blemishes in what is basically a well informed and thoughtful piece of scholarship that deserves to be read by all those in the English-speaking world seeking a better understanding of Muslims in France.