



## Why Muslim integration fails in Christian-heritage societies

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Why Muslim integration fails in Christian-heritage societies**, by Claire L. Adida, David D. Laitin, and Marie-Anne Valfort, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2016, xv+264 pp., \$45.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780674504929

The literature on European Muslims has been expanding in recent decades. The earlier scholarship primarily focused on certain aspects of migration, ethnicity, and citizenship where the general paradigm has concentrated on socio-economic inequality. According to this view, Muslim integration failed as a result of massive flow of migrants to European countries which were then unprepared for providing necessary employment. More recent studies have increasingly begun to pay attention to religious and racial discrimination. They started addressing the sources of integration problems and shifted the debate towards a discussion of increasing visibility, norms, and practices of Islamic religiosity. Islamophobia as a politically contested concept has further stirred this scholarly debate in recent years.

In *Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian-Heritage Societies*, Claire L. Adida, David D. Laitin, and Marie-Anne Valfort examine the conditions under which Muslim integration problems are a consequence of religious discrimination in Western societies. Their study finds that Muslim integration in France suffers from both rational and non-rational Islamophobia. Rational Islamophobia occurs when labour market disfavours Muslims due to their intense religiosity, controversial gender norms, and poor command of French. On the other hand, non-rational Islamophobia refers to the ways in which the French fear of Muslims is unwarranted. This latter form of religious discrimination comes into play when the Muslims become more numerous and visible among the French – a socialization which leads the French to ‘condition their behavior on the religion of the people with whom they interact’ (105, 3). Such a behaviour is accompanied by exaggerated images of Muslims. The authors argue that rational Islamophobia (statistical discrimination) and non-rational Islamophobia (taste-based discrimination) feed off each other in a vicious cycle. Thus, both the French and Muslims are accountable for the failure of Muslim integration in France, a crucial national concern that has only exacerbated over time.

The authors contend that Muslim immigrants, unlike their Christian counterparts, alienate themselves more from the mainstream society in France because of the perceived enmities. Over the course of the years, not only did Muslims fail to develop a sense of belonging and patriotism towards France, but also they became more attached to their home country (114). Accordingly, the authors discuss what can be done to strengthen the ties between France and its Muslim minorities in the last chapter, which is also the most interesting section of the book (148–182). They identify three problem areas to be addressed by the policy makers: micro, meso, and macro levels. At the micro level

(individuals), their policy recommendations focus on the idea of nudging that can curb discrimination among individuals. These are improvements in media-coverage of Muslims and the latter's willingness to give their kids relatively less religious names (perhaps even one French and one Muslim name). At the meso level, the authors suggest some improvements in institutions such as firms and education system that would better highlight the appreciation of diversity. Finally, at the macro level, the authors discuss whether assimilationist or multiculturalist policies has a better turn out for minority integration. They suggest that the former is a better policy choice for states. The French model clearly rests on assimilation and as the authors rightly observe, France has increasingly involved in multicultural experimentations of integration. Yet, they conclude that Muslim integration problem in France owes more to the factors observed at micro and meso levels rather than the problems at the macro level (182).

Indeed, one cannot ignore that discrimination against Muslims occurs in everyday life and public spaces and that the state policies may well seem to be irrelevant in such a context. Yet, one may well raise the following question: If assimilation is a better state policy that can bridge the gap between minorities and mainstream society and if France exercises exclusively assimilationist policies, why is France the most challenged Western European country in the accommodation of Muslim minorities? In a sense, the failure of Muslim integration seems to be more connected to the decay of French republican model, an issue that can be observed at the macro level. Perhaps such a negligence to discuss long-term historical factors stems from the research design of the book, which has primarily focused on the micro and meso levels – that is, individuals and firms at the expense of macro-historical trends.

Accordingly, the research design of the book has both merits and insufficiencies. The meticulous and ambitious research design enabled the authors to identify the causal mechanism behind the religious discrimination against Muslims. However, the very same research design does not necessarily allow the authors to elaborate on the origins of such discrimination (especially the non-rational Islamophobia), which may have led them to different overarching conclusions. To be more exact, Adida et al. compare a group of Senegalese Muslim migrants to France (SM) with a group of Senegalese Christian migrants (SX), and how both groups interact with the autochthonous French. Based on a series of repeated experimental games, surveys, and ethnographic interviews, the authors make causal inferences from their combined sample of SMs and SXs. The strength of the research design is the way in which the sample is gathered. Both SMs and SXs were chosen in a way everything between them is similar, except their religion. Such a precision helps the authors to clearly identify that there is a religious discrimination against Muslims. On the other hand, the research design is weak because Senegalese Muslims can hardly be counted as representative of French Muslims, whose ethno-religious background is mostly located in the former colonies of North Africa. By excluding the long history of brutal French colonial policies towards North African Muslims and focusing on more immediate causes, the authors seem to ignore durable legacies of mutual fear and distrust on contemporary Muslim accommodation.

While its research design sets some limits for its conclusions, this book is quite innovative and original. It highly deserves merit for its precise illustration of Islamophobia through comparative political orientation. In this sense, Adida et al.'s work will be more likely to trigger examination of other country cases for future research.

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