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Book Review: Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France by Jean Beaman

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Beaman, Jean. *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017. xiv + 152 pages. Paperback, \$34.95.

Jean Beaman, a Northwestern University-trained sociologist, employed an ethnographic research approach in her doctoral dissertation-turned-academic text. *Citizen Outsider* challenges French exceptionalism and ideology of colorblindness, and the notion that “being French” supersedes racial, ethnic, and cultural affiliations. Beaman, an African American, was initially drawn to France due to her love of the French language. In her fieldwork, she interviewed forty-five adult children of Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian descent, living in Paris and its conurbation. This second generation of maghrebin origin were born in France (hence, natural French citizens), were university educated, have professional jobs, and attained middle-class status, and, most of all, embraced French culture and share the country’s sense of Republicanism, as captured in the French national motto *liberte, egalite, fraternite*. In every respect, they feel French and have succeeded by societal standards, but they are not accepted as truly French. In spite of their natural citizenship, they feel they are treated as outsiders.

Thus Beaman’s research and analyses focus on implications of being a minority in a country that does not recognize minorities. Against the backdrop of the notion of France as a colorblind society, Beaman’s research draws attention to race, ethnicity, and religion as crucial factors for understanding marginalization in France. Given that Maghrebin-origin individuals are not Caucasian, European, or Christian, their race/ethnicity and Muslim religion intersect with cultural differences. Hence, mainstream French society doubts their assimilability. Because of their maghrebin ancestry, this French-born population is denied cultural citizenship. With their experiences of discrimination and exclusion, Beaman framed these individuals as “citizen outsiders,” a framework rooted in earlier works by other black scholars, including Audre Lorde, W.E.B. DuBois, and Frantz Fanon (p. 4).

Despite a long history of colonialism and immigration, French Republican ideology promotes a monolithic version of French identity and history. For example, a 1972 law banned the collection of statistics related to race and ethnicity, even in the census. To this end, French government policies emphasize formal race neutrality and envision racism as an individual, as opposed to institutionalized, act. To the contrary, as Emile Chabal (2015) argued, France has not been the uniform entity that the Republican model suggests. In fact, about 25 percent of the French population is comprised of citizens with at least one immigrant parent or grandparent (Barou 2014). Furthermore, during colonialism, French colonial subjects were considered French nationals, but because of the distinction between citizenship and nationality, Maghrebins had a second-class status. Colonial relations, by and large, framed French citizenship and belonging. This framework did not change after colonialism ended (p. 11).

In what Beaman described as France’s racial project, she argued that race and ethnicity continue to be significant. The significance is borne out by the fact that one’s ethnic or racial status constitutes a barrier to full cultural citizenship. Moreover, this denial of cultural citizenship challenges the touted French exceptionalism, in terms of marking differences among citizens. French citizens of maghrebin origin may feel as French as anyone else, and respondents strongly voiced that claim, but are still not accepted as French by others. The denial of race and ethnicity, coupled with the focus on culture, sustain the myth of colorblindness in French society. As Artwell Cain (2010) put it, “What exists in France is citizenship without societal inclusion, an ‘ambiguous citizenship.’” Beaman stresses that citizenship in France cannot be understood without acknowledging France’s racial divides. It is the latter that explains why people are formal citizens but are informally excluded from full societal inclusion. Frantz Fanon’s

exploration of France's racial divides in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, (1967) lends credence to Beaman's observation. Fanon, a Martinique-born psychoanalyst, had noted that French colonialism codified different statuses for whites and nonwhites to the effect that colonizing whites were superior and colonized blacks were inferior. Fanon himself was not viewed as a doctor but as a black man who was a doctor (p. 88).

In "Boundaries of Differences" (Chapter 5), Beaman contends, despite the commonly-accepted notion that racial issues in France and the United States differ, that they are, indeed, similar in certain ways. For example, like African Americans in the U.S., children of North African immigrants were born in France, but experience societal exclusion. Beaman's interview respondents made diasporic connections to a transnational blackness, linking the experiences of African Americans in the United States and Maghrebins in France. In both countries, both populations respectively share similar experiences of stigma and discrimination. The North African-origin minorities may not identify as black, but their experiences reflect a consciousness situated in the framework of blackness as a permanent otherness in Western society. In this work, the author occupied multiple social positions of insider-outsider: insider as a member of a racial minority in the United States, as well as France, but also outsider as a non-French person and non-maghrebin-origin. As a researcher, the author's position as an outsider is appropriate for an ethnographic study.

Citizen Outsider is a clearly documented narrative of the experiences of the children of North African immigrants in France and the dual cultural worlds they had to navigate between France and the Maghreb. Beaman notes that even after the second generation maghrebin-origin individuals attain middle-class status, they are still treated differently because of their racial and ethnic origins. Their denial of cultural citizenship transcends into adult life, not only in residential neighborhoods and the workplace, but also in the public sphere. Although France proudly celebrates its Republican ideology of equality and non-recognition of racial, ethnic and religious status, the experiences of Maghrebin-origin citizens suggest otherwise. This book affirms the continuing significance of race and ethnicity in France. Beaman, by no means, suggests that racial discrimination in France is institutionalized. In fact, French national policy maintains that any differential treatment of minorities is individual behavior, not systemic. Kudos to Jean Beaman for ethnography done right. *Citizen Outsider* should be recommended reading for students of race/ethnic relations and immigration studies.

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