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Book Review

On the Erosion of France's National Values (*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*)

The Republic, Secularism and Security France versus the

***Burqa and the Niqab* by Raphael Cohen-Almagor.**

(Switzerland: Springer. 2022)

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This book contributes significantly in explaining ambivalence or paradoxical situations in France. Through its motto (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*), the country has been promoting and implementing liberalism and secularism for many years, yet at the same time, the country is increasingly illiberal, as shown by its policy banning the *burqa* and *niqab* in 2010.

The book's author, Raphael Cohen-Almagor, argues that the ban shows that, in practice, France's old motto has been replaced by a new motto: *indivisibilité, sécurité, laïcité*.¹ In the past, fraternity meant mutual support among people of different religions and races without any exception. But now, it seems to promote mutual support so long as the French way of life is accepted. Wearing the *burqa* or *niqab* in the public sphere is seen by the French state as challenging its way of life, ultimately leading to a ban. As result, minorities who do not follow the French way of life experience social discrimination.

¹ Cohen-Almagor 2022: p. 33.

The book argues that the prohibition of *burqa* and *niqab*, which contradicts the values of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, is a misguided and counterproductive policy. It fails to respect religious freedom, a fundamental human right that should be upheld. This prohibition also weakens women's agency and freedom to express themselves. The ban departs from the assumption that the *burqa* and *niqab* constitute an unfair and unreasonable form of oppression of women. With that assumption, the ban is seen as being for the good of Muslim women, and, therefore, this coercion is seen as the right policy. In fact, coercing people to 'protect' women from their own culture when they have not asked for protection is unreasonable.

This book argues that France should choose the path of integration of minorities into the larger society and accommodation of minority cultures into the majority. When there is coercion and intervention in the internal affairs of a sub-culture, such as how to dress, then it violates the main principles. France advocates for fair and reasonable multiculturalism, assuming that members of society have positive intentions, fostering coexistence for the greater public good. Mechanisms of compromise, tolerance, and deliberative democracy are preferable to coercion and intervention as a way to achieve order and societal cohesion.

This book mainly employs the *niqab* and *burqa* ban to support its argument that there has been an erosion of the French national values held dearly for centuries. As such, other case studies are needed to investigate whether the above argument is valid.

References

Cohen-Almagor, Raphael. 2022. *The Republic, Secularism and Security: France versus the Burqa and the Niqab*. SpringerBriefs in Political Science. Springer.