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Ian Collier, *Arab France: Islam and the Making of Modern Europe, 1798-1831*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011. xi + 288 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780520260641; \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780520260658; \$20.00 U.S. (e-book). ISBN 9780520947542.

Review essay by Jennifer Heuer, University of Massachusetts

Ian Collier's *Arab France* is a rich and provocative work. First of all, it shows that the presence of Arabic men and women in France long predates contemporary struggles over immigration, Islam, and French and European cultural identity. Collier uncovers the history of a largely forgotten Arab-speaking population in France. He follows the lives of a socially and geographically diverse set of immigrants, most of whom set sail from Egypt with the remnants of Napoleon's Grande Armée in 1801; his story ends with the July Monarchy and the conquest of Algeria in the early 1830s.

But *Arab France* makes contributions beyond calling attention to the history of this population. One is to consider the relevance of an unusual group for thinking about the dynamics of community formation. A second, and perhaps more important, contribution is to challenge simplistic understandings of Orientalism and imperialism. In this optic, he pays particular attention to the trajectories—literal and figurative—of individual Arab intellectuals in France. A third significant goal is to chart not only the “making” but also the “unmaking” of an Arab-French community and to explain its disappearance.

The book follows a roughly chronological structure, interspersed with more thematic analysis. The first chapter assesses the dynamics and consequences of the French expedition to Egypt. The next two chapters trace how immigrants from Egypt to France became identified collectively as “Egyptian refugees” and the extent to which this heterogeneous group came to form a community. Collier seeks to show that their presence mattered not only in port cities, but also in the heart of France; he thus chronicles the “making of Arab Paris.” Chapter four, “Policing Orientalism,” considers one key aspect of identity both for this new community and for wider cultural and political relations: struggles between Orientalists and French-Arab intellectuals to determine how Arabic should be taught.

The tragic massacre of Egyptians in Marseille on June 25, 1815 ended any easy vision of assimilation. In chapter five, “Massacre and Restoration,” Collier seeks to explain both these deaths and the relative silence around them, including by Egyptian refugees themselves. The subsequent chapters, “Cosmopolitanism and Confusion” and “Remaking Arab France,” address evolutions in intellectual life during the Restoration. In the final chapter, he traces the disappearance of his version of “Arab France” to the late 1820s and, paradoxically, to the conquest of predominantly Muslim Algeria.

Collier's attention to a long history of ethnic and cultural diversity in France is not in itself radical, at least among academics. Historians have increasingly sought to debunk the myth of an exclusively Franco-France first shaken by waves of immigration only at the end of the twentieth century. Specialists on the revolutionary era and early nineteenth century have explored topics including the effects of border migration on national identity, changing definitions of political refugees, and the

complicated movements to and from the colonies, especially in the wake of the Haitian Revolution.^[1] But the “Egyptian” refugees have received less attention, I suspect in part for linguistic reasons and in part because they are less visibly connected to revolutionary and colonial upheavals than some other migrants.

One of the strengths of Coller’s book is thus simply to trace their lives. Here he draws on Arabic- as well as French-language sources, especially correspondence. From the beginning, he emphasizes the difficulties of characterizing a set of people who came from different parts of the Middle East—even if they all set sail from Alexandria—and who were from very different social backgrounds. He is particularly good at presenting religious complexity. He provides a clear overview of the differences between Coptic and Melkite Christian communities and the respective roles of these groups among the interlocutors with French in Egypt, as well as the lives of those who subsequently came to France. Indeed, he notes that many immigrants were Christian rather than Muslim.

Coller, however, is less concerned with social tensions than discerning what, if anything, made these people into a community. Loyalty to a common leader could have provided a source of cohesion, but the figure who led most of them to emigrate, General Ya’Qub, died on ship before reaching France. Prospects for a common political or “national” identity were also limited. The Egyptian legation had hoped to be part of the peace negotiations in the Treaty of Amiens but was excluded from the process. To the extent to which these men and women shared an identity as “Egyptians,” it was increasingly as refugees seeking pensions from the French state rather than as national representatives. In the absence of other compelling commonalities and in the wake of the progressive depoliticization of the emigration, Arabic language became the strongest unifying force. Coller also argues that while there were strong connections between people living in Marseille and in Paris—especially after changes in government policy in 1811 made it easier for many to move to the capital—there were also significant differences in the experiences of those in each city.

In investigating the Arab population in France, Coller also suggests a wider model for understanding group formation. He insists that we need to think about the role of mobility, rather than residence, in defining community: “Only through recognition of mobility as a constitutive practice of community... does it become possible to recognize the extent and complexity of this community” (p. 212). Various scholars of diasporas have explored how groups could develop and sustain distinctive identities across widely dispersed geographical areas.^[2] Coller’s emphasis on mobility is nonetheless useful here, partially as a corrective to popular narratives of immigrants who move from their homeland and then either settle and assimilate—or refuse to assimilate—directly into their host country. I would like to know more about what was distinctive both to this community and to the forms of mobility possible in the period. Coller does mention certain specificities. For example, while travel across the Mediterranean was clearly possible (indeed, Coller postulates the relative proximity of France and Egypt as one of the main reasons for the French expedition), it was more challenging for “Egyptian refugees” to go back and forth across physical borders than for immigrants in frontier regions. He argues that within eighteenth-century Egypt Copts had more possibilities for social mobility and Melkite Christians for geographical mobility; how did these different experiences translate into a French context? Other possibly unusual aspects of the group raise different questions. Would mobility mean different things in thinking about a community if language was a less important force of cohesion or if immigrants were less dependent on the state? What did mobility mean for women as well as for men?

Coller also makes a series of arguments about the nature and function of Orientalism in the period and in the intellectual world of Arabs in France. He disputes a common view of 1798 as a watershed moment for the Middle East, an understanding of history that often equates Egypt with stagnation and France with innovation. But he also wants to reframe, rather than discount, the importance of French-Egyptian encounters. He implicitly criticizes the approach of Edward Said and his followers, which emphasizes

the commonalities of Orientalism across different periods and places. Instead, he places these encounters within the distinctive cultural and political negotiations of the early nineteenth century.

Coller particularly insists on the need for historical specificities in chapter four, "Policing Orientalism." He argues that both French attitudes towards Egypt and the Middle East and opportunities for Arab-speakers in France were shaped at least as much by the structures of the Napoleonic empire as they were by Orientalist attitudes. To show this, he focuses on debates over teaching Arabic. Several intellectuals associated with the migration became important translators and teachers of the language in France. Coller is most interested in Ellious Bocthor, who sought to modernize Arabic and approaches to teaching it. He and others encountered strong opposition from influential French Orientalists, most notably Silvestre de Sacy, who treated Arabic as a sacred and fixed language. This was not simply an academic debate, but rather one with real consequences for how contemporaries understood cultural transformation.

Coller argues that the Napoleonic state's need for interpreters and contemporary intellectual interest in the language created quasi-official spaces for Arabic intellectuals to function within the heart of the empire. But their hopes of change--fed both by modernizing trends within Egypt and by revolutionary ideals--also confronted serious limits from entrenched elites and a government ultimately more preoccupied with pragmatic concerns than intellectual experiments. He argues that this combination of universalist hopes and effective limits was one intrinsic to the Napoleonic empire and, in passing, labels it "repressive cosmopolitanism" (117). This is an intriguing formulation and one that deserves further articulation.

Coller then moves from the halls of the Parisian Ecole des Langues Orientales to provide a vivid account of the massacre of Egyptians in Marseille in June 1815.^[3] While the attacks seem to have begun as part of the anti-Bonapartist White Terror after the Hundred Days, it seems clear that they were also racially motivated. Not only were individuals of color among the first attacked, but the terms "nègre" and "nègresse" are recurrent in contemporary eyewitness accounts. Coller even recounts a story that is probably apocryphal but is nonetheless revealing: that of darker-skinned immigrants who wore signs proclaiming, "I am not black." This chapter is helpful in illuminating the complexities of race in the period and in countering an image of metropolitan tolerance in contrast to colonial prejudice. It suggests that the re-institutionalization of slavery in 1802 may have had repercussions well beyond the Caribbean.

Coller is interested in the aftermath of the massacre even more than in the killings themselves. Few Arabs wrote about the 1815 massacre or their more general experiences in France, except in pleas for pensions from the government. Nor did any major French writers of the period describe the group. Coller contrasts this literary silence to visual evidence from the early nineteenth century, in which turbaned Oriental figures appear in scenes of Paris, often with little comment or signs of unease. Explaining this silence is challenging. Unlike many immigrants, Arab elites in France were highly literate and produced other kinds of writing. Coller suggests that their silence is explained partly by the general project of "forgetting" during the Restoration and the particular difficulties of discussing the White Terror of 1815. He also claims that it was a selective silence unique to the Arab French population.

Like the question of mobility and community, that of historical silences is one of general interest to scholars. I would, however, like a clearer sense of what was not being discussed in this case. How much can we be sure this was a deliberate silence? Did Arab French writers avoid writing not only about the massacre, but also about other aspects of their lives in France? Coller implies the latter. But it seems likely that they presented at least some narratives of experiences in specific forums, from personal correspondence to court cases. I would like to know more about how individuals recounted their lives in petitions, the one consistent source of self- and group-presentation. Coller argues that with the

Restoration, connections to Catholicism became more useful for political negotiations with the state than civilizing narratives and accounts of personal connections to the Egyptian expedition. This fits with the few petitions written by “Egyptian refugees” that I have read in the archives. For example, Georges Boèce, petitioning for an increased pension in 1817, was careful to portray the French-Egyptian encounter in terms likely to appeal to the Bourbon government. He argued that he was part of a group of Egyptian Copts, who welcomed the French not out of allegiance to Napoleon but out of respect for “Christians, like them, liberators, brothers, who came to free them from the yoke of the Muslims;” he also condemns the “intrigues of a Turk” in France, whom he claims was responsible for diminishing his stipend.[4] I am curious to know more about how individuals framed, and reframed, the narratives of their lives in writing authorities. There have been various studies of the rhetoric of petitions for different groups; how do these narratives—and silences—compare?[5]

Coller presents an intriguing transition away from such anti-Muslim rhetoric by French Arab intellectuals in the late 1820s. Several figures, most notably the writer Rifa’a al-Tahtawi, increasingly began to depict Muslims not as intruders and vandals but as part of a great civilization. At the same time, however, French attitudes towards imperialism shifted significantly. Indeed, Coller’s “Arab France” seems to have peaked at the very moment—the late 1820s—that it was being destroyed. For example, he describes one man, Jonny Pharaon, as “the first truly French Arab” (p. 193)—while showing how Pharaon lived through a period which made such an identity impossible to sustain. The concluding chapter opens with a dramatic account of Pharaon, a descendant of Egyptian immigrants to France and the chief interpreter to French military commander in Algiers, on the steps of a mosque. Four thousand Muslims were locked inside opposed to French plans to convert the mosque into a cathedral. Coller uses Pharaon’s potentially divided loyalties between French authorities and his Arabic connections to explore the wider question of French-Arab identity. Unlike many of his predecessors and compatriots, he was politically active. Pharaon seems to have been the first to condemn the massacre of Arabs in Marseille. He commented on political events in both France and the Ottoman empire, praised the progressive efforts of the Muslim leader of Turkey in 1829, and participated in the 1830 revolution in France. Forced to choose between loyalties, he ultimately became what Coller refers to as “a reluctant imperialist... unable to articulate a principled opposition to the process into which he had been co-opted.” (208)

If Pharaon became part of imperialist France, for many, the more aggressive phase of imperialism in the wake of the invasion of Algeria meant that it was no longer possible to be both French and Arab. Coller shows how Joseph Agoub, fêted under the Restoration as both an educated Frenchman and Egyptian, lost his position teaching at a prestigious Parisian lycée. Coller connects his exclusion both to new policies towards “foreigners” in general and a growing sense of Arab racial difference. He suggests that it became inappropriate to have an “Arab” in an influential position in Paris at the center of the colonial system that sought to subject thousands of newly-conquered Arab subjects to French rule. Instead, a number of Arabs left the French capital for new lives in Algeria.

While Coller acknowledges that life was difficult for Arab-French men in the Napoleonic era and Restoration, there is something almost elegiac about this account, a lament for a possibility of cultural hybridity destroyed by aggressive imperialism. Yet this possibility was itself created by a failed—if glorified—colonial enterprise in Egypt. It initially took shape in the context of the massive Napoleonic empire, even if it seems to have flowered most after the end of the empire. Coller presents the early Restoration (after the White Terror) as a surprising moment of cultural openness; interest in Egypt and other exotic places appears on its own merits rather than as a proxy for imperialistic impulses. For him, as for a number of historians, the period 1827 to 1833 is the real moment of rupture. It’s a plausible narrative. But an analysis of attitudes and policies towards the “old empire” of the Caribbean in the period may provide a somewhat different chronology or set of turning points, from the 1825 indemnity from Haiti to new laws on *gens de couleur* in the early 1830s.

Every book must skim over certain topics, but I wonder how a more expanded attention to gender would affect Collier's analysis. Certainly, as Collier readily acknowledges, the records on women are often fragmentary. For example, we know that there were 756 men in the initial migration, but not how many women were part of it. Collier addresses gender dynamics most in Marseille in 1806 and 1807. The city's mayor identified black women, including "Egyptian *nègresses*," with prostitution and public disruption, but was limited in the actions he could take against them. Here Collier provides a fascinating analysis of why the mayor may have objected to such women and of the power struggles between local administrators and Egyptian notables in the city.

He combines this discussion with several other brief accounts of Arab women in the French empire. Unearthing these examples undoubtedly required creativity and hard work, but the effect is still largely anecdotal. I suspect there would be further ways of exploring men and women's different experiences of "Arab France." For example, Collier mentions that the pension system encouraged Egyptians to marry among themselves and to have large families. But looking more systematically at those who did marry native French could provide further insight into both social relations and cultural identity. Conversely, several Egyptian women (or women from various ethnic backgrounds living in Egypt) married French military men and followed them back to France. At least two such cases in which inheritance quarrels called the legitimacy of their marriages into question went to the Supreme Court and garnered substantial attention in contemporary accounts of *causes célèbres*. Such women were not necessarily an active part of an intellectual Egyptian/Arabic community, but they were part of the "Egyptian" presence in contemporary France, and their fates sometimes led to broader discussion of social practices. [6]

A common Orientalist trope associates Arab identity and exotic sexuality. This association is especially strong in works such as Delacroix's 1834 painting *The Women of Algiers*, but it was by no means absent in the Napoleonic period or the Restoration, from Ingres's 1814 painting *Grande Odalisque* to the portrayal of harems in popular theatre. [7] Clearly, such fantasies had little to do with the lives of the predominantly Christian migrants in France; they also usually took place in an exotic, vaguely Ottoman setting, rather than one that could be identified with a specific place. Yet it could be productive to think further about the sites in which Orientalist tropes of gender were—or were not—relevant in thinking about power and constructing French Arab identity in the period.

I am also ambivalent about the book's subtitle, "Islam and the Making of Modern Europe." It's a sexy title and smart marketing; it is likely to draw readers who might not otherwise find the book. But it is also somewhat misleading. Certainly, Islam features in this story at many points, from the predominantly Muslim world from which these travelers to France came, to Arab French intellectuals' changing portrayals of Muslim civilization in the 1820s, to the repercussions of the conquest of a largely Muslim Algeria. But the resonance of the title, at least in the contemporary world, promises something different than what the book delivers: a close attention to Islamic religion as a historical force. This is problematic precisely because, as Collier shows well, many of the Arabs in France were not Muslim but Christian of one form or another. But it also suggests that "Islam" is an actor, whereas one of the strengths of the book is to explore individual agency in negotiating cultural identities, albeit within important constraints. It seems to reinforce some of the Orientalist binaries Collier seeks to challenge.

At the same time, I am not sure how much this is really about the "making of modern Europe." Collier's attention is on France, not on Europe as a broader entity, despite his initial invocation of Islam and Europe as interlocking spaces. A story that covers both the making and "unmaking" of Arab France sits oddly with the title promise of "making Europe"; it is unclear what is ultimately transformative, rather than transitional, in this account.

Overall, however, this is an ambitious and thought provoking work. Collier has done a remarkable job not only of tracking down scattered sources and combining them imaginatively, but also of providing a provocative narrative of migration, colonialism, and cultural negotiation.

NOTES

[1] A few examples include Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France: The Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Greg Burgess, *Refuge in the Land of Liberty: France and its Refugees, from the Revolution to the End of Asylum, 1787-1939* (Houndmills, UK and New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008); and Darrell Meadows, "The Planters of Saint-Domingue, 1750-1804: Migration and Exile in the French Revolutionary Atlantic," (Ph.D. thesis, Carnegie Mellon, 2004).

[2] Among others, see Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

[3] Coller has also analyzed the racial aspects of the massacre in depth elsewhere. See Ian Coller, "Race and Slavery in the Making of Arab France, 1802-1815," in Richard Bessel, Nicholas Guyatt and Jane Rendall, eds., *War, Empire, and Slavery, 1770-1830*, (Houndmills, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 61-80.

[4] Archives Nationales C2028.

[5] Among others, see David Troyansky, "'I was wife and mother': French widows present themselves to the ministry of justice in the early nineteenth century," *Journal of Family History* 25, no. 2 (2000): 202-10; Mary Ashburn Miller, "Exile and Identity: Emigré claims to French national identity in the early nineteenth century," unpublished paper presented at the 2011 Society For the Study of French History conference; and Stacey Renee Davis, "Citizenship, the Limits of French Identity, and the 1851 Insurgents," *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 34 (2006), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.0642292.0034.011>.

[6] In the case of Anne Nazo, the probable wife of General Destaing, both Orientalist experts and "seven Egyptian refugees" were called to testify about how Christian marriages were treated in Egypt. Coller does mention contested inheritance cases briefly but does not analyze them here.

[7] Such as *Le Médecin Turc* (1803) or *Le pacha et la vivandière* (1829).

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