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Anne Sa'adah, *Contemporary France: A Democratic Education*. Lanham, M.D., and Oxford, U.K.: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003. xi + 340 pp. Notes, appendixes, and index. \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-7425-0198-1.

Review by W. Brian Newsome, Alfred University.

Anne Sa'adah, a professor of law and political science at Dartmouth College, examines democratic politics in modern France. She devotes primary attention to the twentieth century and is most concerned with political representation and state-society relations, placing her work within the long tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville, Stanley Hoffmann, and Michel Crozier. Sa'adah directs her interpretive essay, which is part of the series "Europe Today," at both college students and the wider academic community. Students will find her list of recommended readings, including novels and documents, quite helpful, while professors will appreciate her efforts to place the French experience in a global context.

Sa'adah divides her book into three parts, examining, first, the historical background of French political culture from 1789 to 1958 (chapters 1-4), second, the institutions and practices of the contemporary political community (chapters 5-6), and, finally, the challenges globalization has posed for French institutions and practices (chapters 7-8). Sa'adah organizes part one around the theme of nationalism, an ideology that emerged "as part of the revolutionary project to turn what had been an absolutist monarchy and a multilingual kingdom into *une République une et indivisible...*" (p. 17). By identifying the nation with "undivided popular sovereignty," the Jacobins justified stifling state centralization and "undermined the legitimacy of competition," thus pitting the revolution and republican forms of government against the crown, the aristocracy, and the church (pp. 20-21). Napoleon Bonaparte further complicated the political picture by detaching popular sovereignty from representative politics and associating it instead with plebiscitary dictatorship, establishing yet another tradition that contributed to the political and religious conflicts of the nineteenth century.

When the monarchy returned to power in 1814, nationalism became an "opposition ideology," a weapon that republicans wielded against their conservative opponents. Though Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte undermined the Second Republic in the 1850s, republicans established a Third Republic in the 1870s. But even as republicans tried to consolidate their victory, the Bonapartist right appropriated nationalism, using populist rhetoric to attack republican institutions during both the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs. Though all sides called a temporary truce in 1914, they could agree on neither an inclusive political settlement nor a common definition of nationalism. Divisions thus persisted, paving the way for World War II, which pitted the traditional conservatives at Vichy against the politically varied groups in the Resistance. In the long run, "the Vichy experience disqualified dictatorship as a desirable form of government, while participation in the Resistance brought both Catholics and communists into the republican fold" (pp. 70-71). In the short run, however, the Cold War encouraged "political paralysis at a moment when initiative and innovation were desperately required," explaining the inability of the Fourth Republic to develop a constructive response to the conflict in Algeria. In 1958, the Algerian imbroglio undermined the most recent incarnation of the republic and brought Charles de Gaulle to power.

De Gaulle redesigned republican institutions to provide both strong leadership (normally identified with dictatorship) and respect for rights (normally identified with the parliamentary republic). He also forged

a more inclusive form of nationalism based on his concept of state sovereignty. The state, in de Gaulle's opinion, made the nation possible, especially in France, where the political community was so divided. De Gaulle believed that his job was to establish institutions that could "resolve conflicts authoritatively" and to undertake common projects that could "remind people of their shared interests and values" (p. 101). To achieve the first objective, de Gaulle created a mixed presidential-parliamentary system. To achieve the latter goal, he sought to reestablish French grandeur by carving out a distinctive place for France between the two superpowers. De Gaulle thus withdrew French land forces from NATO's integrated command, built a nuclear strike force, and attempted to use the European Economic Community to multiply the power and influence of the French government and the French economy. Though the Gaullist project encountered many roadblocks, including the strikes and protests of 1968, Sa'adah argues that de Gaulle successfully forged a "politically inclusive and appealingly optimistic" form of nationalism that "resonated across the divide between the political left and the political right" (p. 106).

One finds little new in Sa'adah's interpretation of French political culture from 1789 to 1958. As stated above, she draws heavily on de Tocqueville, Hoffmann, and Crozier. However, she updates their discourse and packages it in a form that is easily accessible for college students. She also connects the past to the present in an illuminating fashion. In the chapter on World War II, for example, Sa'adah includes a long aside called "Vichy: A Past That Stayed," in which she highlights the Vichy syndrome by discussing the political careers of François Mitterrand and Maurice Papon. In the following chapter, on the war in Algeria, Sa'adah examines Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, an organization that she sees as a long-term consequence of decolonization and indicative of the political challenges of the present. Some might find such digressions distracting, but Sa'adah integrates them so well that they strengthen her overall analysis.

What historians will find disturbing, however, are some of the generalizations Sa'adah makes. In the first chapter, for example, Sa'adah explains the calling of the Estates General as follows: "The monarchy needed money, and given the enlightened spirit of the times, it thought it should ask before taking" (p. 18). Louis XVI did not call the Estates General because he was enamored with the political treatises of the *philosophes*; he called the Estates General because the nobility left him with little other choice.

Despite such drawbacks, however, Sa'adah provides sufficient background for the second part of her book, which covers "the institutions, processes, and practices of French politics" since 1958 (p. 109). Sa'adah first examines the reasons the Fifth Republic failed to establish a durable bipolar political system. The left was historically divided between the Communists and various Socialist factions. Only in 1972 did François Mitterrand forge a common program between the Communist Party and his new Socialist Party, founded just a year before. The political mistakes of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and the economic crisis of the 1970s brought the left to power in 1981. However, Mitterrand's adoption of a "first left" agenda (nationalization of industrial and financial corporations) alienated moderate supporters, leading to fragmentation of the left, parliamentary victory for the right, and the nation's first experiment in cohabitation (a president from one party and a prime minister from another). Though the left would regain control of parliament in 1988, the chasm between left-wing factions continued to grow. In the presidential elections of 2002, for example, half a dozen left-wing candidates drew so many votes away from Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin that he did not even make it to the second round.

The right, though in control of the presidency and the parliament from 1958 to 1981, was handicapped by de Gaulle's own hatred of party politics. During his presidency, de Gaulle used the power of his person to eclipse the divisions of the right, but he did not create a party that could remain united without him and thus permanently overcome those divisions. After de Gaulle resigned in 1969, "the

Fifth Republic's strong but divided executive... cultivated rivalry rather than unity among the right's leaders" (p. 130). Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Georges Pompidou's prime minister from 1969 to 1972, tried to implement a center-right reform program (*la nouvelle société*) designed to move beyond the *société bloquée* identified by Michel Crozier. Pompidou, however, refused to support Chaban and fired him in 1972. Similar conflicts marred the relationship between Giscard and his first prime minister, Jacques Chirac. The bipolar "system" established in 1958 thus turned out to be a bipolar "moment" that survived less than thirty years as no party proved capable of mobilizing and retaining the loyalty of centrist voters.

Sa'adah next analyzes state-society relations in the context of industrialization. Drawing on the sociopolitical analyses of de Tocqueville and Hoffmann and the socioeconomic treatises of David Landes and François Caron, Sa'adah examines the *dirigiste* tradition that hobbled civil society, the conservative industrial patterns that slowed economic growth, and the peculiar social structures (large farming and service sectors) that both contributed to and reflected those economic trends. The nation's postwar leaders identified social and economic conservatism—fundamental aspects of the "stalemate society"—as key factors contributing to the military disaster of 1940. They thus attempted to change those patterns, but they did so within the context of France's historic traditions. French elites therefore "looked to the state to direct and drive economic change and growth, and so to restore France to its proper *rang*" (p. 177). According to Sa'adah, what emerged was "a mixed picture of change and continuity" (p. 177). *Dirigisme* was renewed in the form of state-directed economic development, but social structures changed dramatically. The population grew, more young people gained access to secondary and higher education, a youth culture developed, immigrants poured into the country, farmers mechanized production, and "the working class moved to the center of the social and political stage" (p. 185). By the 1970s, the country seemed prosperous and stable, but "because the state played so central a role in so many facets of social life, France would prove peculiarly exposed to the disruptive effects of what was initially called 'the economic crisis' " and which "we now call globalization" (p. 190).

Globalization is thus the subject to which Sa'adah turns in part three of her book. By the 1990s, the failure of economic reforms, most dramatically the nationalization program of François Mitterrand, had engendered resigned, perhaps even resentful, convergence around neo-liberalism, known in France as *la pensée unique*. In Sa'adah's opinion, "the new circumstances offered a curious mix of freedom and powerlessness"—freedom from the centralized state, but powerlessness in the face of unemployment and social exclusion, both of which struck France's immigrant communities with particular severity (p. 207). Political leaders have tried to minimize the damage and integrate those on the margins of society by establishing new *baccalauréat* options for students, creating extensive training programs for workers, adopting measures intended to establish democracy in the workplace, reducing the workweek from thirty-nine to thirty-five hours, promoting urban renewal, and decentralizing government functions from state to local levels. The results have been mixed. Education and workers' training programs have helped, but employers have resisted both democratization and the thirty-five-hour workweek. Urban renewal has done little to integrate those stuck in the *quartiers d'exil*, and decentralization has not given power to the citizens. It has, instead, redistributed a few limited powers from central officials to local notables.

In the context of globalization, a new politics of identity also emerged, as Muslim immigrants, regional nationalists, women, and gays demanded the right to be different. In recent years, the French have debated citizenship and *laïcité*, the Corsican nationalist movement, political parity between the sexes, and the *pacte civile de solidarité*. Sa'adah analyzes these issues with clarity and precision, highlighting many different sides of complicated problems and relating them to the themes explored in previous chapters. At the root of each of these issues lies the French republican idea itself. Can *la République une et indivisible* admit *le droit à la différence* without such toleration giving way to *la différence des droits* and the

“tribalization’ of France” (p. 221)? Opponents of such change, those who fear an uncertain future in a global society, have responded with a resounding no, most dramatically in 1993 when the government of Edouard Balladur pushed through a law that forced immigrants’ children, born on French soil, to apply for citizenship. However, the reestablishment of *jus soli* (1998), the creation of a Corsican territorial assembly (1991), and the passage of parity and the *PACS* (both in 1999) indicate that many French citizens remain optimistic that “European integration and cultural diversity offer...opportunities for France to re-create its democratic traditions and reassert its cultural greatness” (p. 216).

Domestic identity politics is not the only challenge to the Jacobin conception of the republic. Traditional ideas of sovereignty, identified most recently with Charles de Gaulle, are in the process of reevaluation as the French polity attempts to adjust to the world around it. To highlight the problems of sovereignty, Sa’adah examines the French relationship to the European Union, which is requiring the French to redefine the nature of their political community; the French response to the wars in Yugoslavia, which highlighted the limited ability of the French government to project its power abroad; and the increasing prominence of non-governmental organizations, which are crossing borders between France and the rest of the world. This entire section is very well done. One wishes, however, that Sa’adah had devoted more attention to NGOs, which only merit five pages. In contrast to many other topics, Sa’adah makes little attempt to place recent NGOs, such as Doctors without Borders and the *Confédération paysanne*, in a larger historical context, even though the last century and a half are littered with examples of successful associations like the *Musée social*. As the building blocks of civil society, NGOs surely deserve more complete treatment in a book devoted to the “democratic education” of modern France.

NGOs might be conspicuous by their relative absence, but the second and third parts of Sa’adah’s book are truly masterful. Gone are the disturbing generalizations noted in part one. What one finds instead is a remarkably adept analysis built on a wide array of primary sources, including speeches, memoirs, press clippings, and government reports. Unfortunately, Sa’adah provides only a cursory conclusion that fails to tie together the many important threads strung throughout her narrative. *Contemporary France: A Democratic Education* will nonetheless prove useful not only for classroom use, but also for those fascinated by the political culture of modern France.

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