

Interview with
Julien Talpin

L'ÉPREUVE DE LA DISCRIMINATION ENQUÊTE DANS LES QUARTIERS POPULAIRES

This interview was carried out by AOC
in partnership with the French Institute (Paris)

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What is the book's point of departure?

One of the theses of our book is quite simple. It is that France has not fully taken the measure of the discrimination and racism that run through it, or of the deleterious effects of this discrimination and racism on French society. My co-authors and I did not focus specifically on discrimination at the outset. We worked in working-class neighborhoods and the banlieues on political issues, on the civic crisis, the increase in abstentionism, the defiance vis-à-vis the political, participative democracy, etc. However, the issues of discrimination and racism came to the fore in the field, by virtue of our position as ethnographers, immersed in these neighborhoods over a long period. We realized that these issues reappeared constantly in our interviewees' responses. We could not truly understand their lives without placing these issues at the center of the study. This is, therefore, what we tried to do within the framework of this collective work.

How did you go about writing the book?

We initiated a major, essentially qualitative, survey in 2015 and 2018. We worked in six working class communities in Roubaix, Seine-Saint-Denis, Vaulx-en-Velin, in the banlieues of Bordeaux and Grenoble, as well as in Los Angeles, London and Montreal. We met the inhabitants of these neighborhoods, collected 250 life stories to see how they lived in these areas and whether the question of discrimination arose when they shared their life experiences. And we also—this was sort of the second part of the survey—worked with associations, social centers, municipalities, to see how they attempted to respond to discrimination, to take collective charge of this issue.

How is this book relevant today?

This work can obviously be related to current debates on separatism, radicalization, communalism, these being terms that we seek to deconstruct in the book. None of these issues can be understood unless one gives a central place to the concrete experience of discrimination. To be insulted, not to get a job or an opportunity that one thinks one deserves, these are forms of great symbolic violence for the individuals involved. They see it as a slap, a blow, a stab. Such discrimination also has very concrete consequences for the health of individuals and causes the latter to withdraw into themselves or into the group within which they find themselves categorized. A final point on subjective consequences and symbolic violence: these lead some of our

interviewees to render invisible a part of who they are, so as to be able to live 'a normal life.' They thus deny a part of their identity so as not to have to experience discrimination.