



★ **Discretion**

Faïza Guène

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Saqi Books (Oct 10, 2023)

Softcover \$14.95 (224pp)

978-0-86356-976-0

The members of an Algerian immigrant family cope with their losses but retain their dignity in Faïza Guène's novel *Discretion*.

Yamina left Algeria for the first time as a child, during the war with France in the 1950s. Since then, the concepts of home and belonging have grown vague and seem not quite attainable to her. She faced poverty, domestic abuse, and emotional distance; she learned to keep her head high and her emotions in check.

Now, as an old woman in France with four grown and troubled children, Yamina forges ahead in the only way that she knows how: by remaining kind no matter what and by supporting her children in every way that she can. A patient, generous woman, she remains poised and upbeat, even as she faces continuing prejudice in ordinary places, as when she's in line at the pharmacy or in her own apartment building. Through it all, she maintains an equanimity that her children never learned—even despite their greater opportunities (or perhaps because of them).

There are poignant, astute, and sometimes cutting observations made about Yamina's family and the different ways of life that exist on different continents. The family navigates their various worlds as well as they can, always aware of the features that set them apart. They do not always understand each other, yet they spend their lives supporting each other through personal crises, unfulfilled ambitions, and questions of belonging in a nation that exploits their labor and never accepts them. Despite their individual troubles and disagreements with one another, they remain bound by love—and by Yamina, the quiet, strong matriarch who kept them together through all of their difficult years.

Discretion is an intricate novel in which living, and expressing one's identity, at the margins takes multiple forms.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2023)

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