

MAGHREBIS

Making Their Way in French Society

As most readers of this book will know, the Maghreb region of Northwestern Africa, particularly Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, and the people who trace their origins to the Maghreb, known as Maghrebis, play a major role in the history, demography, and politics of France. A general background may still be helpful.

The modern period of French involvement in the Maghreb dates back nearly two centuries, to 1830, when France began conquering the coast of what is today Algeria. Almost immediately, the economic opportunities opened up by France's control of this region drew large numbers of European settlers. In 1848, with the conquest of northern Algeria complete, France absorbed this area, with its cities and expanses of arable land, as *départements*; that is, as administrative units of France itself. But unlike the *départements* of mainland France (the "metropole"), Algeria's population—primarily composed of Arabs and Kabyles, a Berber ethnic group—was subject to two profoundly different legal statuses: the European settlers were French citizens, while the vast majority of Maghrebis were French "subjects" with virtually no rights.¹

By 1871, there were almost 300,000 people of European descent living in Algeria. This number increased to 800,000 by 1914, and to more than a million by 1960. Familiarly known as *pièds-noirs*, these people dominated commerce in the coastal cities, especially Algiers, and ultimately owned almost 90 percent of the arable land, which they hired Maghrebis to farm for extremely low wages. The mass of Maghrebis—by the 1950s, totaling almost ten million—were left with few rights and meager economic resources. Beginning in 1954, a bloody war of independence wracked Algeria. As the struggle intensified, it roiled

French politics so severely that it contributed to the collapse of France's Fourth Republic in 1958. A 1961 demonstration by Algerians in Paris was met with brutality by the police, who killed more than one hundred demonstrators. Finally, in 1962, after eight years of war and approximately 300,000 deaths, Algeria became an independent country. About 800,000 *pieds-noirs* fled to mainland France, together with about 90,000 Algerians who had fought on the French side, known as *harkis*. Even after resettling in France, many former *pieds-noirs* maintained a deep disdain toward people of Algerian origin.

France's involvement with Tunisia and Morocco was shorter, less intrusive, and less violent than with Algeria. France forced Tunisia to become one of its "protectorates" in the early 1880s. Control of Morocco came later and more gradually. France established zones of influence in parts of Morocco in 1904 and made it a protectorate in 1912. While France developed significant economic interests in both Tunisia and Morocco, neither developed a European settler community on the scale of Algeria. Tunisia and Morocco gained independence in 1956 without significant violence.

During the thirty years following World War II—both before and after these countries had gained independence from France—large numbers of Maghrebis came to France for work. With France experiencing economic growth and a chronic labor shortage during the so-called *Trente Glorieuses*, French companies actively recruited manual laborers, especially Berbers, from the Maghreb. While many of these people returned "home" to retire, others remained in France. France closed the door to economic migrants in 1974, when its economy fell into recession, but two years later instituted a policy permitting "family reunification," which drew large numbers of the workers' wives and children to France. Net migration from the Maghreb continues through the present. Of the 63 million people living in mainland France in 2011, an estimated 3.8 million people (6 percent) were of Maghrebi origin (Tribalat 2015: 9).²

The term Maghrebi is not limited to immigrants from the Maghreb or people living there. As discussed in the introduction, the term is used in France for anyone who is perceived as Maghrebi, and thus is presumed to have a Maghrebi origin. The main basis for this social identity, interviewees reported, is a

person's *faciès*: those whose Arab or Berber *faciès* is discernible will be seen as Maghrebi.³ This is the case with Nour, Fouzia, Zhora, Samuel, and Abdel, even though each of them was born and grew up in France and has little attachment to the Maghreb or Maghrebi culture. People of mixed Maghrebi and “French” parentage, like Samuel and Abdel, are also seen as Maghrebi if they are thought to look Maghrebi. A recognizably Maghrebi name may also suggest a Maghrebi identity, though this assumption apparently can be neutralized where a person (like Selma, as discussed below) has a European *faciès* and European parentage.

Although many “French” people harbor particular ill will toward people they identify as Algerian, including those who have spent their entire lives in France, this attitude extends to other Maghrebis. According to the interviewees, many “French” people see Maghrebis as stubbornly clinging to a religion and way of life that is antithetical to French norms. Maghrebis supposedly indulge in criminality and abuse France's generous benefits programs. Even those who were born in France are thought by some to stick together, adhering to *communautarisme* (roughly, keeping apart from the rest of French society) rather than *intégration*.

Attitudes toward Maghrebis became particularly harsh following a series of terrorist attacks in France in 2015–16. On 7 January 2015, French-born brothers of Algerian origin attacked the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo, a political satire magazine, killing twelve people and injuring eleven.⁴ On 13 November 2015, coordinated attacks in Paris at the Stade de France soccer stadium, the Bataclan theater, and several bars and restaurants resulted in 130 deaths and 416 injuries. Planned by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as ISIL or Daesh), the perpetrators of these attacks were Arab Muslims. On 14 July 2016, a Tunisian man living in France rammed a truck into a crowd of people celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, killing eighty-six people and injuring 458. Since 2016, there have been more than twenty terrorist attacks in France. Although none were as destructive as the 2015–16 attacks, some—particularly the 2020 beheading of Samuel Paty, a high school teacher who had purportedly shown disrespect for the prophet Muhammad—have gained harsh news coverage. Most of these attacks have been blamed on “radical Muslims,” and many of the assailants were described as Maghrebis or Arabs.

Today, millions of Maghrebis in France are relegated to run-down public housing projects in the poor, ethnic communities that surround French cities. Many of these people are deeply marginalized from French society—geographically, economically, politically, and culturally—and do not speak, act, or dress according to traditional French norms. The interviewees for this project are different. Almost all have been well-educated in francophone schools (most at French universities), speak “good” French, believe in core French values, including *laïcité*, live in middle-class, mixed communities, and dress and act like the “French” people around them. Unlike some people in the poor, ethnic suburbs, the women are not veiled, and the men do not wear skullcaps in public.⁵ They have jobs within the larger French economy and work with “French” people.⁶

ZHORA

“Your project interests me, of course,” read the message that Zhora sent me the morning before my arrival, so we met in time to discuss it at dinner. I took the metro to her home, a small but carefully maintained house in town, and we talked about the project and her life. The interview began the next day after breakfast and continued at her kitchen table or in the living room for much of the day. Zhora was at turns hurt, angry, nostalgic, and proud. She often laughed at the incongruities of her life.

Now in her early fifties and divorced, Zhora lives on her own after raising three children. Her parents, both Berbers from Algeria, had never planned or even wanted to come to France. At seventeen, her father-to-be escaped the life of a shepherd by taking a job with the French army as a gardener at a military post, but evidently did not realize that this made him a *harki*. “How young, how naive” he must have been, Zhora thought. This was in 1961, shortly before France lost the war. The French army evacuated in 1962, leaving behind most of the *harkis* to be killed by the victorious Algerian army. Zhora’s parents-to-be were lucky: they escaped on the last helicopter out of Algeria. Their first child, a son, had been born that morning.

The family began their lives in France at a former World War II internment camp, where armed French guards kept the Algeri-

ans from escaping. "It was winter and there weren't even blankets, nothing," Zhora's parents would later tell her. Her father was then recruited to be a miner elsewhere in France, and he was shipped to the city near the mine. The family soon joined him, settling in a poor, immigrant community in the *banlieue*. Zhora was born two years later, and other children followed.

While neither parent spoke French at first, they insisted that their children speak only French at home. They would declare, "We were Algerian, but we're no longer Algerian. We will be French." They also insisted that their children get excellent grades at school, telling them, "You are brilliant. You must succeed. You will leave this life of menial labor."

Zhora did well, and her older brother was "first in his class." Impatient to make a success of himself, her brother left school at sixteen to start his own business. It soon failed, leaving him bitter; he claimed that "an Arab can't succeed because business is reserved for the French or the Jews." Her brother disappeared without a word, even to his family.

Zhora went in a different direction. Even as a young teenager in her poor, isolated community outside the city,

I always felt free inside. To be who I was, I knew I had to get away. It was like a corral, with the horses inside. There might be horses that are happy in there, but there's a horse that says to itself, I don't want to be in this enclosure. The others don't mind, but I see the countryside outside. I will go out there. I'll jump over the fence and go toward the horizon. So I jumped over the fence.

As soon as she turned sixteen, Zhora transferred to a high school in the city and moved into a small student apartment. A government grant covered her expenses until she turned eighteen. She then "took any job at all," and finished high school at night. "I cleaned houses, I took care of kids, of old people." Zhora enrolled in the local university, and to support her studies she took a lowly job with the metropolitan government "collecting trash and cleaning offices." At the time, "I was the only Arab government worker among three thousand, the only one. I was very young."

People working in the offices she cleaned kept calling her *bougnoule*, a highly insulting slang term for Maghrebis or, more generally, Arabs.⁷ They did this "even in front of their supervi-

sor." Zhora wondered, "Why do they call me a *bougnoule*? What did I do? Did I fail to do my job, to be respectful? I've done nothing wrong."

When this name-calling didn't stop, Zhora asked the supervisor how he could let it go on, but he only replied, "They don't really mean it. Why make a scandal?" Finally, Zhora "went to the big boss to tell him what was happening," but his only response was to fire her. By chance, someone who, she said, "knew my whole story" intervened, and she was called back to the boss's office. There, a secretary told Zhora, "You're not fired, but don't come back, *bougnoule*." She went back to work and was treated as she had been before.

Zhora continued with her studies and began to date. Initially interested in Maghrebi men, she discovered that they weren't as "free" as she was, so she turned to "French" men. At twenty-two, she married a man with "red hair, blue eyes, and white skin" from a family that was "French on both sides." After becoming pregnant with their first child, Zhora left college to raise her family.

As a mother, Zhora butted up against the same problem over and over. Although she has the relatively pale skin and smooth hair sometimes seen among people of Berber origin, people who didn't know the family assumed that her children weren't hers. They had "blond" hair and "pale" skin, she said, "especially when they were kids." Zhora laughed as she thought of the family's return from the annual summer vacation, when she "was darker and they were even blonder." But it wasn't funny when people assumed she was "either their babysitter or a housekeeper, never their mother." Of all the times she remembered being asked for proof of parenthood, the time a train conductor wondered aloud whether she had "kidnapped" her children brought fresh disgust and fury.

There was also trouble in the family. Zhora's mother-in-law often spoke disparagingly of Arabs. When she used the word *bougnoule* in Zhora's presence, Zhora told her, "Mother, don't ever say that in front of me." Her mother-in-law replied, "Oh, that's not an insult. Everyone says it. It's no big deal."

About fifteen years after her older brother's disappearance, Zhora learned that he was alive and still living in the same city. When the two met, her brother told her that he had transformed himself: "I changed my identity," he said, because "I was sick

of the racism." He had changed both his first and last names, married a "French" woman, and gone into business as a "French" person. He and his wife, who knew his secret, had settled in a part of the city far from his original family and had three children. His new business has been a success. "Since I changed, God be praised, business has gone well. I no longer have money problems. Everything goes well for me."

Zhora was furious. "You say that people are racist, so you'll change flags. That's your strategy," she told him, but she'd do no such thing. People "treat me as a *bougnoule*, but I face it." While her brother is "not very *typé*," she explained to me—the whole family is of Berber origin—Zhora imagines that people suspect the truth but do not confront him or his family about his charade.

Although she was hurt by her brother's absence—their mother had died without even knowing he was alive—Zhora suggested that the two families get together. Her brother refused, explaining that neither his children nor his in-laws know that he isn't "French." Showing her a photo of his family, he said, "To my great misfortune, my middle daughter looks just like you. Look at this photo. Every morning, when I see her, it's you who I see." He was right, Zhora said to me: "I swear, Larry, it was my very portrait." She told her brother, "You wanted to forget me? Well, you see me every morning. God has punished you." The families have never gotten together, and Zhora has never met her niece.

Zhora continued to work at the same municipal government where she had once cleaned offices, taking professional training courses and standardized exams to gain more skilled positions. She now serves as a land use specialist on projects where the municipality is acquiring private property for public purposes such as roads and community centers. While she is respected for her expertise, the sting from her early days remains:

Today, you see, Larry, when someone sees me, it's funny, but I think I unsettle them because, in the beginning, when they saw me, they called me *bougnoule*. That hits me, knowing the life my parents lived, how they suffered, and then to be called a *bougnoule*, it's not right.

Problems at work occasionally crop up. During a recent legal training class at her office—"imagine a big conference room

with everyone”—the instructor spoke of a neighborhood that had been “invaded.” Zhora recalled:

Everyone understood what she meant. I waited for a reaction. I couldn't say anything because of who I am. I didn't want to make a scandal. I waited for my supervisor to say, “Madame, please use a different way of speaking,” but she said nothing. The instructor kept saying “invaded, invaded, invaded.” Everyone frowned—they understood—but no one said anything.

At the coffee break, Zhora spoke with her supervisor, who told her, “Yes, it's not right what she said.” Still, the supervisor declined to do anything because, she explained, “It's delicate.”

There have also been problems relating to social and economic class. “Some lawyers and other jurists have made me know that I'm ‘a little shit’ because I'm not from the middle class.” Even though, she says, “it's gotten me in trouble with my boss, I tell them, ‘I may be a little shit because I was born into the working class, but you're lucky to have the poor to make money from. Don't spit on them.’” Some of these lawyers switched their files to others in the office, but they returned to Zhora after a couple of years. She told them, “We'll start from zero. We'll respect everyone. Me, I respect the poor because I know where I come from.” Then “we work together again. I treat them as equals.”

A few months before our interview, Zhora got into a dispute on the street. She was about to move into a parking space, but another car suddenly took the spot. When she complained in her accent-free French, the man in that car responded, “What are you going to do about it? If you're not happy, go back to your country, dirty *bougnoule*.” Although many people witnessed this incident—“everyone was there,” watching him insult her—“no one did anything.” Zhora said nothing to the man. At such times, she tries to “remain a master of myself and leave such people in their smallness.”

Some incidents are less extreme. She and her mother-in-law once ran into a friend of her mother-in-law on the street. After everyone had exchanged greetings, the friend said, “You have a charming housekeeper.” A recurring problem involves deliveries. “You see that I have a pretty house in a residential neighborhood,” Zhora told me. “Sometimes, I order something, like from

Amazon. And it's always like this. When I answer the door, the delivery man asks, 'Is Madame here?' or, 'Is the owner of the house here? I'm looking for the person who lives here.'" When Zhora says that she's the owner, the man responds, "Sorry, I thought you were the cleaning lady. No problem."

Religion is a simple matter for Zhora: "Me, I'm an atheist." (I had noticed that she had wine and served a pork dish at dinner the night before.) But she did not raise her children to follow her lead. Just as "it's been my choice about how I'll live my own life, I never chose a religion for my children. When you're an adult, it's for you to decide, not me. It's as if you gave them a sexual orientation. No!" As it turned out, her son became religious after moving out of the house at age twenty. "My daughters are atheists and my son is Muslim." That's fine by her, she said, though complications arise when her son comes home to visit. She tells him, "You want to pray, fine, you can pray in your room, but not the rest of the house. That's my domain." And when her son brought home a girlfriend who was veiled, Zhora told her, "Take off your veil. There are no veils here."

Zhora thinks that her children can also decide whether they are French or something else. Although she had retained her Maghrebi name, each of her children has a French first name as well as their father's French last name. "People often ask me why I didn't even give them a middle name that reflects my origins. That would be ridiculous. Their name is French. Why would I make trouble?" Their appearance is closer to the French norm as well. Even in adulthood, their skin color is relatively light, while their eye colors range from blue to brown. She thinks that even the younger daughter—"the one who you can now tell is *métisse*, though you'd need a keen eye" to see it—is probably seen as "French."

Now young adults, Zhora's children have chosen their own identities. "My son would say, 'I'm not French, I'm Arab and a Muslim.'" While she accepts this, it strikes her as odd since her family was Berber, and Arabs were the original "invaders" of Berber lands. Both her daughters have embraced French identities, though she thinks they draw the line at anti-Arab insults. Zhora believes that if the older daughter, who has "strawberry blonde hair and very white skin" as well as a French name, "hears an attack on Maghrebis or Arabs, she'll say: 'Stop right there, I'm Arab!'"

While Zhora thinks her children can choose their identities, she cannot. The reason is simple: "My identity is on my face." But even if she can't decide how others see her, how does she think of herself? She speaks only a few words of the Berber language Tamazight, and no Arabic at all. "I'm incapable" of speaking these languages, she says; "I'm blocked." She was born in France and grew up speaking French. She lives and works among "French" people, married a "French" man, and raised children in France. Still, Zhora says, "I never say I'm French." Why not, I asked. She answered, "I don't have a feeling of belonging."

Zhora kept coming back to this issue. At one point she told me, "the only thing I say is that I'm Kabyle"—a person originating from the main Berber region of Algeria—"I'm a woman and a Kabyle, that's it." At another point she was less certain: "I don't know who I am, I don't know who I am, I confess to you, I don't know who I am." It was only while writing this profile that I realized that she had expressed her feelings most fully during the first few minutes of the interview. In an emotional whisper, she explained:

I don't feel I'm in a country. I don't feel that I'm of any country. That's the problem. The problem is with a piece of land, that's what's missing. Religious people say, "From dust one comes and to dust one returns." A person wants to belong to some dust.

MAKING ONE'S WAY IN FRANCE

Although the Maghrebi interviewees recounted a great variety of experiences, a single theme arose again and again: to be truly accepted into French society, they must do away with whatever reflects their Maghrebi identity. Although the interviewees are already like "French" people in their language, habits, and values, they must also eliminate any clothing or public behavior that is associated with Islam, have a European *faciès*, and have a first and last name that is French or at least European. According to the interviewees, this process might be partial at first—for example, one can eliminate all public signs of being Muslim—but it would only be complete in their children or children's children, through the reduction in Maghrebi *faciès* (where

Maghrebis have children with “French” spouses or partners) and the assumption of European names.⁸

This process is less extraordinary than it might seem: once called assimilation and now *intégration*, the absorption of immigrants has been a mainstay of modern French history. Beginning long before the influx of people from non-European countries following World War II, millions of people from elsewhere in Europe took this route to acceptance, much like Europeans who settle in France do today. For them, the path to incorporation into French society was straightforward, even if many faced intense bias in the beginning. They needed to start behaving according to French norms and learning to speak French; their children and grandchildren, in turn, would conform more closely to French norms and speak without an accent. The rest of the transformation was far quicker and easier for Europeans than it would be for Maghrebis: their *faciès* were usually close to what is seen as a French *faciès*, their religious background was typically Catholic, rather than Muslim, and their names were already European.

One of my Airbnb hosts showed how quickly this transformation can happen. Originally from Portugal, rather than outside Europe, as I had expected, Mariana was seven when her family moved to France. She learned French within months, was Catholic by birth and upbringing, and has relatively light skin and smooth hair. From the start, she felt accepted in the village where she grew up, and now, living in a nearby city, is seen as “French” by those who do not know her background.

Although it takes more time for Maghrebis to be fully assimilated into French society than it does for Europeans like Mariana, it is possible for people of Maghrebi origins to become nearly indistinguishable from “French” people within two or three generations. This is not to say that a particular individual will choose this path or that one’s social identity is a binary choice between Maghrebi and “French.” Zhora and her family illustrate some of the choices one might make. Zhora decided to keep her Maghrebi names, both first and last. Remaining unashamedly Maghrebi, she has always participated in the world around her—including a workplace dominated by “French” people—and fought for respect.

Zhora’s older brother and her children illustrate other choices. Her brother tried to become “French” by cutting all ties with his

Maghrebi family, changing his first and last names, marrying a “French” woman, and presenting himself as a “French” person. Because he is not *typé*, he may have largely succeeded, though Zhora imagines that people around him suspect the truth. Zhora’s children are differently situated: they have a “French” father and *faciès* that combine both parents’ *faciès*, have French first and last names, and were raised in a largely “French” downtown neighborhood. Today, her daughters apparently see themselves as French and are largely or entirely seen that way by the “French” people around them, while her son has taken a different path, identifying as “Arab” and becoming the only practicing Muslim in the family.

The Maghrebi interviewees vary enormously in their backgrounds and life stories. Along with some of the richness of each person’s life, the following profiles show how each person deals with issues of identity. To keep these accounts from becoming a blur, the interviewees are grouped according to three general approaches to life in France: (a) interviewees who have become, or were raised to be, as similar as possible to the “French” people around them; (b) interviewees who have developed strategies for achieving success in French society while maintaining a distinct Maghrebi identity; and (c) interviewees who have pursued a slower path in French society for both themselves and their children.

(a) *As French as Possible*

At least eight of the interviewees have become, or were raised to be, like the “French” people around them in language, values, and norms. While this has allowed them to participate in the larger French society and economy, it has not been enough for them to be seen as French.

Samuel. I met Samuel at his handsome apartment in the historic center of town, where he lives on his own. He was dressed like a successful man on his day off. An enthusiastic host, he cooked most of our meals during my two-day stay with him—the cuisine was French—and we talked almost nonstop. Our formal interview totaled almost six hours. It contained many surprises.

Now forty-three, Samuel was born in France of a “French” mother and Maghrebi father. “Swarthy” at birth, he said, Samuel was given a French first name to lessen the “racism” his ma-

ternal grandmother thought he'd face in life. His last name is Maghrebi, however, and he was raised in a Muslim household, his mother having converted. Being "*typé*" since childhood—Samuel described himself as "dark-skinned with brown hair and brown eyes"—he was seen as "an Arab, not French." Unlike most of the Maghrebis interviewed for this project and counter to his manner and appearance today, Samuel grew up extremely poor in a deeply dysfunctional household. At sixteen, he dropped out of school and left his parents' home.

Although explicit insults were rare while he was growing up, he said, "with my face" prejudice was a fact of life. One day, when he was walking down the street, "a woman from the window of an upper floor threw some ham down on me, calling it 'a *bougnoule's* supper.'" As one of the few Maghrebis in school, he felt like the "black dog" of the class. Recounting these childhood experiences brought Samuel close to tears, but he pushed on: "It's not so bad if I cry a little. It clears the soul." The problems continued into adulthood. When he tried to file an application at city hall, the official there "threw my documents on the floor like I was a dog." During a parking incident, he was called a "damned *bougnoule*." Remembering that "this kind of thing happened often enough," he began to cry.

Samuel worked at fitting into French society. During his teenage years, an employer taught him how to speak, act, and dress like a respectable "French" person. "He educated me. Because of him I speak as I do today. He taught me good manners." Samuel had a series of jobs in restaurants and cafes and then as a door-to-door life insurance salesman. By his twenties, he had "started to feel more and more French." When he was about thirty, he got an entry-level job in the entertainment industry. Working day and night, Samuel said, he became "one of the best" in his field and won various awards. By the time I met him, he was living in an overwhelmingly "French" neighborhood in "one of the richest parts of town."

Two themes of Samuel's life will be discussed in later chapters of this book. Always drawn to "blondes with blue eyes," he has had a turbulent love life, as will be discussed in chapter 5. Meanwhile, his devotion to Islam has swung from intense as a child to absent as a young adult and back to intense in recent years (see chapter 6).

Early in his twenties, Samuel had two daughters with a woman of mixed “French” and Algerian parentage. They have his Maghrebi last name, but French first names. The older daughter, who is now twenty years old, “doesn’t look very Arab,” though he thinks it’s evident that she has “origins.” She has decided to be “a rebel” and, full of resentment, “dresses and behaves like a girl from the *banlieue*.” Samuel believes that she does this to make a statement: “You want to see me this way, well, then that’s how I’ll be.” For him, “it’s a vicious circle,” since the more she acts that way, the more she’s seen that way. His younger daughter, who is now eighteen, is “blonde with blue eyes,” and, unlike her sister, has “many French friends. She doesn’t have a problem with that.” People probably assume that she “has origins, but that’s less important, since she looks French. She’s more accepted.”

The spike in anti-Maghrebi and anti-Arab attitudes since the 2015–16 attacks has had a dire effect on him. “An Arab in France,” he says, “is a potential terrorist.” Although he dresses and behaves well, Samuel became uncomfortable in public. “I no longer take the metro because of how people looked at me. It was incredible.” Even in his own neighborhood, “I’ve started to lower my eyes to avoid frightening people.”

Samuel became emotional toward the end of his interview. There are now just two types of people in France, “the Arabs and the French.” This sharp division eliminates people like him, who feel themselves to be French and live like “French” people, but who are Muslim and of Maghrebi origin. “We look for a place for us, but there is none. We are lost.”

Elise and Abdel. Siblings in their twenties, Elise and Abdel were born and raised in France. Their mother Lina, who is profiled later in this chapter, had left Morocco to attend college in France, married a “French” classmate, and started a family. Her husband was successful in business and the family was well-off.

Although the marriage ended in divorce, Lina and her children continued to live in the handsome, overwhelmingly “French” neighborhood near the center of the city where I met them. Having raised them to be French rather than Moroccan, Lina says, “my children are French.” After all, they had a “French education, dress in the French style, and have a French father.” They also have their father’s French last name. But Lina raised

her children to be Muslim, and thus to be “Muslim and French at the same time.”

While Elise and Abdel do not recall many insults growing up—Elise says that their Catholic school would not tolerate such behavior—it was not unknown. As noted in the introduction, a girl once told her “*nique ta race*” (roughly, “fuck your race”). This was a “brutal insult,” both because of the coarseness of *nique* and the “signification of the word *race*.” In the interview, Elise also spoke about insults directed against her mother by her paternal grandfather (Lina’s father-in-law).

Now young adults, Elise and Abdel are strikingly different from each other. Elise, whose first name and last names are both French, works as an investment banker. She has long, smooth hair, and, while her skin is “a bit *typé*,” she says, people “can’t tell that I have an Arab origin.”

By contrast, Abdel has an Arab first name and is “more *typé*.” With his “very curly hair and a beard,” Abdel says, he has “an Arab *faciès*.” Their religious identities are the reverse of their first names and physical appearance: Elise remains devoutly Muslim, while Abdel is completely unreligious.

Both Elise and Abdel have had problems fitting in with the “French” people around them. As a practicing Muslim, Elise abstains from pork and alcohol and fasts during the month of Ramadan. Whenever a “French” person notices this, she says, she is asked whether she’s Muslim, and, when she can’t sidestep this question, she’s forced to “justify” herself. These interactions undercut her professional relations—client entertainment entails copious amounts of wine and other alcohol—and cause friction in her social and romantic life. As reported in chapter 6, some people act as if she is less French, or as if she’s doing something wrong. For her, “it’s a battle every day.”

Abdel’s issues are rooted in his *faciès* and first name. Although he feels “culturally French in quotes,” as an adolescent he was often stopped by the police because of his “Arab head.” This infuriated him. These days, when people get to know him, they often say things like “You’re not an Arab like the others,” or “You’re the only Arab I think well of.” Although “made in a friendly way,” these comments upset him since they reflect “a monumental separation between the garbage that people think Arabs are and the person who’s Arab but behaves like a French person.” He’s

not seen as “French” because of his *faciès* and first name, nor as “Arab” because of his behavior. And feeling neither one nor the other, he has concluded that a person’s identity is “something of a fiction.” After becoming fluent in other languages (German and English, but not Arabic) and traveling extensively, he thinks of himself as “a citizen of the world.”

Abdel spoke about French history with unrestrained fury: “People have forgotten everything about colonialism.”⁹ France “took people out of their own countries to fight in its wars—wars they had no connection to—and to be killed.” Later, France put Maghrebis in public housing projects outside the cities, “parking them in boxes, telling them to stay there.” Now “French” people complain that “France no longer belongs to the French.” They say such things as “We’re in France, we’re in a White country, so why are there mosques?” And offended by how many French-born Maghrebi kids in the poor *banlieues* reportedly behave, they say that “Arabs are monsters and terrorists, they do terrible things,” and they “want to throw these people out.” To Abdel’s mind, “it’s hypocritical.”

Estranged by the growing “intolerance” (as Elise says) and “racism” (as both Elise and Abdel say) in France, both siblings moved to other countries as young adults—Abdel to Greece and Elise to Switzerland. It was only by chance that they were visiting their mother when I stayed at her apartment.

Nassim. Now thirty, Nassim and his family left Algeria for France when he was one. They settled in a small city with “very few foreigners,” by which Nassim means people with “dark” skin. “These were the years I suffered the most from racism,” he recalls. Often the only “foreigner” in his class, he would be “pushed around” by the other children. “When something was stolen, automatically everyone looked at me.” He still remembers when, at the age of six, he was sent to the neighborhood bakery for a baguette and the proprietor “wouldn’t even look at me.”

As an adolescent, Nassim went about becoming “more likable,” particularly “more French.” He became “obsessed with mastering the French language,” he said, and began to eat pork and drink wine “like everyone else.” He dated only “European” girls. By young adulthood, people remarked that he had become “almost French.”

Adjustments to his physical appearance were an important part of this process. To be “like the French” with their “smooth hair,” Nassim says he kept his “curly” hair short and used chemical relaxers. When I commented that his hair is still smooth, he laughed aloud, and said, “Thank you!” Although his skin is “not as white as French people,” he says, “I’m paler than other foreigners.” In fact, “I’m mostly White.” Driving the point home, he put his arm next to mine and laughed again: “I’m lighter than you!”

Nassim’s efforts to become “more French” reached their peak a few years ago. He did his best to be French, to be accepted as French, at the company where he worked. By this time, he dressed, ate, drank, and acted French. Many of his colleagues deferred to his expertise in French, asking him to correct important memos. Some professed surprise at his background, saying, “You were born in Algeria?” A letter from the company’s Director of Operations in support of his citizenship application in 2014 confirmed this perception:

[Nassim] has always shown such an attachment to France that all his colleagues are convinced that he already has French nationality. . . . Since his arrival at the company, he has shown, time and again, that he has established very strong ties with France. . . . He has allied himself with the traditions and habits of our country better than anyone. . . . As I often tell him, he is “the most French person I know.”

This letter made Nassim “very happy.” But even as he was promoted at the company, becoming its youngest manager, he experienced increasing stress. This spiked following the 2015–16 attacks, when almost everyone at his company, even the president, he says, insisted that “I condemn the attacks, totally and absolutely” and make clear that “I’m not a terrorist.” He understood how the others viewed him. “At this point I realized the difference: why me rather than the others? Why? It came to a point that I experienced a physical reaction. I was stressed, very stressed.”

Realizing, Nassim says, that “I had betrayed my identity and my origin, I abandoned it all.” He left the company and broke up with the “French” woman he’d been dating. He learned to read and write Arabic and became a practicing Muslim. No longer

does he eat and drink like “French” people. He is now engaged to a religious Maghrebi woman.

As the interview drew to a close, Nassim looked back at his life. “I had passed the exam” of becoming “more French than the French,” but this came “at a personal sacrifice.” It was all unnecessary. “I could have been another person, in sync with my two cultures, even if this made me socially less acceptable in France.” Whatever the future holds, “the Nassim of today is not a mask.”

Nour. Born in the same large French city where she still lives, Nour has always considered herself French. Almost fifty, she now lives in a downtown apartment with her seven-year-old son. We met in the nearby apartment she rents through Airbnb. It was her day off from work, and she was dressed in close-fitting jeans.

Although Nour’s parents had come from Algeria, the family lived in a “French” neighborhood of a large city for most of her childhood. Everyone went to the local French schools, which, she says, inculcated “French values.” “It was very fluid, very pleasant” back in the 1970s, when people “were less frightened.” She felt accepted from the start. “Those were the best years of my life.”

Within the family, there was a sharp divide between the generations. Her parents, devout Muslims, were nonliterate and at first did not speak French. Nour and her siblings spoke only French with each other and their friends. She “didn’t have any feeling of belonging to Algerian culture” and didn’t care about Islam, eating pork when her parents weren’t looking and ignoring the Ramadan fast each year. As adults, she and her siblings married or partnered with non-Muslim, non-Maghrebi people: “All my brothers and sisters are with French people.”

Nour attended college, where she got a teaching degree. She had no trouble fitting into the schools where she worked, since both the students and faculty were “of different ethnicities.” She then switched to a position with the local public transportation system, where she has encountered problems with some of the “French” staff she supervises, as discussed later in this chapter.

Nour’s romantic relationships have all been with “French” men, and one is the father of her son. Unlike Nour, her son has French first and last names, and he is *métis*, a mixture of his two parents’ *faciès*. He’s had no trouble fitting in so far; she and her

son live in a mixed neighborhood, and he attends a school with a wide range of children. Following the 2015 terrorist attack at the office of the journal *Charlie Hebdo*, she and her son marched in the “I am Charlie” demonstration against the attack and in support of freedom of speech.

Nour has always been certain about her identity: “I’m French. I was born in France and grew up in government schools with the values of the Republic. France is my country.” She says that the words assimilation and *intégration* “make no sense” in her case because “my frame of reference is France.” Still, some people see her differently: “Because of my first and last names and my *faciès*, some people make very clear to me that I’m not French.” Although French by conviction, values, habits, culture, experience, and birth, Nour occasionally described herself as a “foreigner” during the interview. When I asked why—she hadn’t noticed this—she answered, “because, in the eyes of people who see me on the street, I’m not French.” People sometimes ask what she “truly” is.

Fouzia. Fouzia was born in the early 1960s in the same French city where she still lives. Originally from Algeria, her parents had been in France since the 1930s and did not follow Muslim practices, except to avoid pork. She has the “light skin” and “smooth” hair associated with Berbers.

Fouzia learned French when she began school. She heard insults like “dirty Arab” and “Arabs are thieves,” though these weren’t addressed directly at her. It was more of an “atmosphere” of bias, she says, which “sent me back to my ethnicity, to my origins.” French people felt a particular “rancor” toward Algerians because of the bloody Algerian War and its aftermath. “Even if a person has fit in, she’s implicated in these prejudices.”

Over the years, Fouzia socialized with “French” people, she said, if only because her “social and cultural milieu” did not include Maghrebis. She was one of only two Maghrebis in her high school class and then became a nurse. Her coworkers, neighbors, friends, and the men she dated were “French.” She bought an apartment in a “good” French neighborhood. French became her primary language and she forgot much of the Algerian Arabic she had known as a child. She has never been religious.

Fouzia has a nineteen-year-old daughter by a “French” man. Her daughter looks mostly “French,” she says, and has a non-

Maghrebi name, including a “typically French” last name. Fouzia thinks that her daughter feels French, though she has heard that it’s now stylish at her daughter’s school to claim a bit of Maghrebi origin.

Although Fouzia is “French of Algerian origin,” she feels she’s still French: “Even if you’re not 100 percent French, you’re still French.” And so “it’s hurtful when you hear people say ‘France for the French’”—a long-time motto of the right-wing National Front political party—because they mean only people of European origin. Using France’s 2018 World Cup champion soccer team as an example, Fouzia explained, “They were French in name, but because of their *faciès*, their skin color,” some people said that the players were “Africans, not French. It’s bizarre, but that’s the way it is.” For many “French” people, France “is a history of religion, of continents, and of *faciès*.” People who trace their origin to Africa or Asia “have different *faciès*” and different religions.

Olivier. A twenty-four-year-old university student, Olivier shares an off-campus apartment with other students. After I had put my bags in the extra bedroom he rents on Airbnb, he said that he wanted to be interviewed elsewhere. We settled outside a nearby McDonald’s. After two hours of intense conversation, he went into town for the night, but was interested in doing another session. We resumed the interview the next morning outside the central train station before I left for another city. For much of his interview, Olivier held the digital recorder and talked directly into it.

Although Olivier is of Moroccan origin and grew up in Morocco, his father was born in France, and his parents met as university students there. Olivier has been a French citizen his whole life and has spoken both French and Moroccan Arabic since childhood. After graduating from a French government high school in Casablanca, he moved to Montreal and then to France. In France, he has transformed himself into someone just like the “French” people around him, changing “whatever’s visible, for example, clothes, accent, way of speaking, and even my opinions about certain things.” His friends are all “French,” and he speaks “perfect French without any accent.” He also began to use a French name; more than an hour into the interview, he revealed that his real name isn’t Olivier, but Ali. When I commented that he dresses like the stereotypical “French” man—

like “Jean-Christophe,” I joked—he replied, “I feel reassured. It’s working.”

“On a more profound, a more psychological level,” Olivier said, the process of adopting French ways “has been very subtle. The last thing that could be changed is my *faciès*. It’s the last thing, the thing that escapes me.” I asked whether he’d want to be magically transformed, so that his *faciès* were no longer his own, but that of “Jean-Christophe.” “It wouldn’t bother me at all to look like Jean-Christophe,” he replied. “I wouldn’t have any problem signing a paper to become Jean-Christophe.” Indeed, if “other Maghrebis were asked the same question, if they were being honest, 99.9 percent would say the same thing.”

As the interview continued, Olivier began wondering whether he’s been fooling himself about how much his external transformation has affected his character. While earlier he had said that he’s just wearing “a mask” in France, and that he hadn’t undergone “plastic surgery,” now he wasn’t so sure. He senses that the changes go deeper, even though he “didn’t see it” at the time. Olivier had “always been frightened to look into such things,” he said, so “it’s only now, when I think of my own case, that I see that I’ve changed.”

Asma. Now fifty-seven, Asma has always considered herself French, even though she spent her first four years and a few years as a young adult in Tunisia. Since early childhood, she has always had “only French friends” and a “French mindset.” She’s a French citizen, has “no accent,” and lives entirely in French ways. This includes eating pork and drinking alcohol; the evening I arrived at her apartment she had set out charcuteries and aperitifs. She has never been a practicing Muslim.

Asma had “always dreamed of marrying a French man and having a French daughter.” She made this dream come true, marrying a “French” man she had met at a bank and having a daughter, to whom she gave a distinctly French first name to go along with her husband’s French last name. Life hasn’t been easy. When she was pregnant, her father-in-law derided her—“Whatever you do, your child will be a *bougnoule*”—and neither he nor her mother-in-law, she says, has “ever seen their granddaughter.” The invitations and photos Asma sent them were returned unopened. Her husband “betrayed” her, and they divorced. Since then, “he’s never seen his daughter.”

As a single parent, Asma raised her daughter to be totally French. “No one knew that she had an Arab mother. Not her teachers, not her friends, no one.” Islam was never a factor in her upbringing, and now that her daughter is an adult, she is an atheist. Since Asma is not “very *typée*” and her former husband is “French,” she thinks that her daughter is able to present herself as “French.” In the photo she showed me, her daughter has straight, blonde hair (which Asma says she dyes) and fairly light skin. To maintain her social identity as “French,” her daughter never revealed the ethnicity of her mother to schoolmates or to her bosses at work. “No one knew that she had a Tunisian mother.” Asma isn’t bothered by this. Her daughter tells her that “there are racists everywhere,” and Asma agrees. “People here are idiots, they’re completely racist.” Her daughter recently moved to New Zealand.

Throughout her interview, Asma spoke about feeling French but being seen as Maghrebi. With Olivier’s comments fresh in my mind (his interview had been a week earlier), I asked how she’d feel if she woke up some morning and discovered that, magically, she had blonde hair and blue eyes. She replied, “I’d love it. It would let me live as an equal. If I were a blonde with blue eyes, I’d live like the people in our country. I’d be very happy.”

**(b) *Strategies for Becoming Successful in France
Without Trying to Become French***

While the interviewees profiled above would like to be seen as French, other people I interviewed have taken a different approach: they conform to French behavioral norms, but do not identify as French or hope to be seen that way. Having grown up in the Maghreb, they either hold firmly to their original identities or are indifferent to the whole issue. Each has developed a strategy to succeed in France without being French.

Rania. I arrived at Rania’s small but cozy apartment in the early evening. Looking like a professional woman after a day of work—wearing jeans and her hair pulled back, but still with makeup on—she did not fit the cliché of what she turned out to be: a devout Muslim woman from the Maghreb. During a home-cooked Tunisian dinner, her interview later that evening, and

breakfast the next morning, Rania cheerfully described how she navigates work at a high-tech French company while remaining true to herself. She often laughed at how odd but enjoyable it all was.

Now twenty-eight, Rania was an only child in a poor family in Tunisia. At school, she was “very intelligent” and “studied all the time, always the first in my class.” Rania was admitted to the country’s elite high school and did “super well” in her high school diploma exams. At this point, she says, “the government offered me scholarships to attend universities in Germany or France, but I said no. I couldn’t leave the country with my parents there.” Instead, she did two years at a preparatory school and two more at “the best IT school in Tunisia.” Only when France offered a scholarship that allowed her to support her parents did she agree to go. She received a “double diploma” and a master’s degree at a French university after two years, and then started a six-month internship at a tech company in a large French city. The company offered her a job after only three months, and she has worked there ever since.

Rania has always been a devout Muslim. Inspired by a dream she had at the age of twelve, she began veiling herself even though her mother did not do so. She continued to be veiled throughout her university years in France, but after some time with the tech job, her supervisor told her that while the company had no problem with her being veiled, it would make clients uncomfortable. After speaking with her mother—who said, “Take it off, take it off!”—she decided to remove the veil. She soon went further. To succeed in the work world, she decided, a woman must be “well-made-up, well-perfumed, well-coiffed.” She straightened her hair, began dressing stylishly, and applied makeup every workday. She also adopted the distinctive accent of people from the city where she lives and works, and she would change her first and last names if that were useful. “Why not? None of this matters to me.”

Even as she dresses and behaves like the French people around her, Rania is unapologetic about being Maghrebi and Muslim. She openly adheres to all Muslim dietary restrictions. When one of her French superiors joked about how Maghrebis are thieves, she joked back about how, as he’s told everyone, he sneaks high-priced meat out of supermarkets. After the 2015–16

terrorist attacks, “when everyone came to me as if I were responsible,” Rania made them agree that there are many other people like her. She told them, “Okay, so there are the good and the bad.”

Rania has been very successful during her four years at the tech company. Her immediate supervisor has been an important source of support. “He helped me a lot, helped me fit in. He taught me a lot about work, but also about life. He’s like my father.” She has been promoted every year. “What matters to me,” she says, “is competence.” Some colleagues “are jealous, saying ‘Why her, why do you give her these responsibilities when she’s not even French,’” but others treat her “like family.” With her ever-increasing salary, she has no trouble supporting her parents back in Tunisia.

Rania’s dual life—adhering to big-city, professional French norms in public while remaining devoutly Muslim in her private life—is reported at length in chapter 6. She does not aspire to be French in *faciès* or religion, but she succeeds in all ways that matter to her.

Lina. As already noted, Lina is Elise’s and Abdel’s mother. Raised in Morocco, she was a university student in France when she met and married a “French” student and started a family. Now fifty-nine, she proudly proclaims, “I’ve changed nothing, I remain myself. I’ve always said I’m Moroccan, to everyone and up to the present. I’m also Muslim and will remain Muslim until my death.”

But Lina’s life has been more complicated. When members of her family back home opposed her marrying a European man even though he would become Muslim, she decided never to return to Morocco. She told them, “You’ll never see me again.” During the years that followed, she raised her children to be both Muslim and French. Lina is a French citizen, “speaks very well,” and lives in a well-off neighborhood near the center of town. Since her former husband was a successful businessman, she was able, she says, to “indulge my taste for luxury.” She has virtually no Maghrebi friends.

Lina’s pride in maintaining a Moroccan identity has helped her deal with what she sees as racism all around her. French racism, she said, “goes back many years to colonialism,” when “the Arab countries of Northwestern Africa were colonized by

France." Sometimes store personnel refuse to respond to her greetings. "On the street, in supermarkets, I see the look, the hatred." Although she once "almost cried," she now stares right back at them. "I return their hatred until they lower their eyes." When she hears "dirty Arab" or "dirty race," she thinks about how "Arabs are a thousand times cleaner than the French." (As I had already noticed, her apartment was impeccably clean and orderly.) With a bitter chuckle, she added, "I know that the French are hyper-dirty."

Since many "French" people see only a person's "physical appearance," Lina says, she's seen as the "swarthy foreigner." And for them, "a foreigner remains a foreigner forever." To deal with such people, she turns racism on its head: while conforming to *haut bourgeois* French norms, she remains proud of her Moroccan identity. "Racism exists, but it doesn't touch me."

Salma. Salma was my Airbnb host during both of my trips to France before this project began, and she invited me back to her home once it was underway. During my later visit, I interviewed her for six hours, and she lined up two other people who were interested in participating. She remains a good friend of mine.

Now in her mid-forties, Salma grew up in an elite family in Morocco that was essentially unreligious, one that lived "more like Europeans than Moroccans." In her early years, she attended private French-language schools where many of the other students were European. Salma came to France almost thirty years ago for her university education, ultimately completing the level just below the doctorate in business. She became a business consultant and a French citizen. She is careful with her clothing: "When I go out, I have a European look, with good taste."

Even in France, Salma lived in a "cocoon" that protected her from prejudice. Now amazed at her naivete, she recalls, "I heard the word 'racism' for the first time in my life when I was twenty-eight." That changed in short order. Having some free time, she began to do volunteer work with the organization SOS Racisme, putting her management skills to use. As Salma explained, SOS Racisme worked to protect "victims of racial discrimination" by, for example, sending applicants for housing who were identical except for being "French," Maghrebi or Black, and then litigating the differential results. "It was another world, as if I had arrived at the planet Jupiter."

Salma was soon volunteering full-time for non-profits, particularly SOS Racisme and Ni Putes Ni Soumises (Neither Whores Nor Submissives). During her five years as the head of her city's Ni Putes Ni Soumises chapter, she organized volunteer support systems, such as temporary housing, employment opportunities, psychological services, and occasionally lawyers, for women who had fled their homes because of beatings by older brothers and husbands. She was often in her city's notorious *banlieue*, a world far away from her comfortable central-city neighborhood, getting to know "the people and their problems." After working "seven days a week, every week" for eight years, she realized that she had reached her limit, that her health and finances were near the breaking point. She wound down her responsibilities and went back to business consulting, forming a company of her own.

During one of our conversations, I told Salma that a number of the "French" people I had met around town had told me not to set foot in that city's *banlieue*. They said there was nothing of interest there, and, with its drug dealing and violence, it was too dangerous to visit anyway. While I was buying a house plant for a friend, a downtown florist told me that he had never been there; indeed, that he'd never think of going. Salma offered to take me on a tour of the *banlieue* and we went there at least twice, stopping at cafes and the like. Once we drove into the notorious public housing project on a hill, encountering young men hanging out in a dead-end driveway we had entered. Salma greeted them matter-of-factly and we continued without incident.

After resuming her business consulting career, Salma became conscious—for the first time—of the prejudice she encountered as a Maghrebi and a woman. Sometimes she is overtly challenged by "French" men at training sessions. Rather than yielding to their intimidation, thereby accepting an inferior position, she presses forward with the material she is there to teach. If still challenged, she holds her ground, asking, "Do you want competence or do you want a French person? If you want a French person, well, I'm the wrong one for you." As "the equal of anyone and everyone," she won't be bullied into subservience.

Achraf. I met Achraf through Salma. Now sixty-three, Achraf has been "in a more or less privileged milieu" his whole life. He was raised in a commercially successful family in a well-off neighborhood in Tunisia that had both Tunisian and French peo-

ple and came to France for university studies. Already fluent in French, at ease with French people, and completely unreligious, Achraf says that he fit into the university's social world of partying, drinking, and dating. After getting his degree, he married a woman "from a traditional French family, pure French and bourgeois," and went into business for himself. From the start, he did business with all types of people: "Europeans and Jews from North Africa," as well as "Indochinese, Syrians, Armenians."

Achraf and his wife settled in a small French town where, he said, "I was very well received, very well accepted." Perhaps because he had the means, "no one ever posed the question" of his origins. Already managing his family's real estate holdings in Tunisia and his own holdings in France, Achraf invested in restaurants and other businesses. During our interview, he looked like any successful "French" businessman on his day off—with a high-quality sports shirt and smooth, carefully combed hair—except for the darker hue of his face.

Achraf spoke candidly about his reception by the local social, political, and business community. A successful entrepreneur, he easily "integrated" himself into this world; indeed, politicians and others "eagerly" seek his opinions on various issues. But "I'm no fool," he said twice during the interview. "There are people with the same name as me, but not the same financial means—people in the ghetto, living in government housing projects—who have problems."

Although he became a French citizen decades ago, Achraf says he's never thought much about whether "I'm Tunisian or I'm French." He has his business interests in France, and "an inheritance, houses, and land holdings" in Tunisia. He goes to Tunisia, only a short plane ride away, every year. Meanwhile, he and his "French" wife raised their three daughters to be simply French. Now adults, they don't speak Arabic, don't go to Tunisia, and have no background in Islam. *Métisse* and raised in well-off circumstances, they've "never had a problem" fitting in.

(c) *Pursuing a Slower Path in French Society*

What about the Maghrebi interviewees who have not sought to be seen as French, like those profiled in section (a), or developed a strategy to excel in French society, like those pro-

filed in section (b)? The answer is simple: they have pursued a slower path in French society, working in modest jobs, marrying other Maghrebis, and raising children not so different from themselves.

Khira. Like many of the interviewees, Khira lives in the suburb of a city, but in circumstances altogether different from the dirty and ramshackle housing projects where Maghrebis are assumed to live. Khira's house was neat and well maintained. She lives on her own, though one of her adult daughters, also an Airbnb host, lives nearby.

Khira's parents came to France from Algeria in 1954, when she was four. Though she spoke Arabic with her parents, who never really learned French, Khira "spoke French very well" from an early age. The family was not very religious. With "light" skin and "non-kinky hair," she says, "I'm not very *typée*." And while "French" children occasionally called her insulting names, "I didn't feel inferior" since "I'd learned in geography class that I was a member of the White race."

Although Khira had hoped to become a journalist, she entered into an arranged marriage at age sixteen to a Maghrebi man, and had four children in quick succession. She raised them at home, then trained to become a secretary. During the decades that followed, she encountered discrimination in getting hired and, once hired, she never achieved parity in salary (as discussed later in this chapter). Now in her mid-sixties and retired, she is more religious than when she was growing up, praying five times a day and fasting during Ramadan. This hasn't altered how she's seen by others. Indeed, because of how she speaks, dresses, and looks, people are occasionally surprised by her origin. Khira's identity is clear in her own mind: "I've always been both Algerian and French."

Her children have spent their entire lives in France. They are fully French "in their clothing and ways of acting" and are not "too *typé*," she says, because her former husband is not *typé* either. Nevertheless, their first and last names are Algerian. Khira thinks that they feel French, but she does not know whether they are seen that way.

Hiba. Although Hiba has had a challenging life (both her husband and sole child are disabled), she was full of verve during our time together. She laughed often. It was only when she spoke

of the sad times in her life or the prejudices some people have shown that her voice dropped and her eyes misted up.

Hiba was born in Morocco. When she was seven, she and her mother moved to France to join her father, who had gone there in the 1960s to do menial labor. They settled in a government housing project, and she learned French at school. She had “frizzy hair,” unlike the “beautiful hair” of the “French” girls at school, she says, and “white skin, though a little tan.” Although she had dreamed of becoming a journalist or UN interpreter, her father decided that she would study sewing at a vocational school.

At eighteen, Hiba entered into an arranged marriage with a Moroccan man. They had a son, who her mother raised while Hiba took care of the four children of a “French” family. Scrimping and saving, she was able to buy the apartment that became the Airbnb where I stayed—“It’s my baby!”—and then the small house where she and her family live. Now forty-seven, she works for individuals, mostly taking care of their families and managing their small real estate properties. Though a devout Muslim, Hiba fits in since she behaves “like a French person.”

When she hears the slogan “France for the French,” Hiba feels that “I’m excluded even if I’ve lived here 150 years. I’m on the sidelines. The problem is that this is my country. I can’t do otherwise.” She thinks that there has been “more racism” in France since the 2015–16 terrorist attacks. People on the street sometimes say “dirty Arab” or “stupid ass,” and “frankly, I hear the neighbor behind me even today” saying these things. “It’s bizarre. I’m French, I’m in my country, sincerely,” but, when all is said and done, “I’ll never be accepted.”

Much like Zhora, who suspects that people can tell that her brother isn’t really “French,” Hiba thinks that Maghrebis cannot transform themselves in just one generation. “You can’t be like Spanish or Italian people.” Even if your skin is relatively light, as Hiba’s is, and you are baptized, you still must “change your whole identity.” You have to “change your name, drink and eat pork like a real Christian, and marry a French person.” You have to “change everything, renounce everything. You have to renounce the name of your parents, your origins, who you are.” But after all this, she says, even if you “erase everything, you’ll never get in. Among true French people, it’s always, ‘Ah, he has origins.’ That’s not erased.”

At the end of the interview, Hiba spoke about her adult son, who has spent his entire life in France, but whose names, both first and last, are distinctively Arab. I asked whether he feels French. No, "he'd never say he's French." He'd say, "I'm an Arab, and I'll remain an Arab, since they don't accept me as I am."

Sami. Now fifty-five, Sami grew up in Tunisia. After graduating from high school, he settled in France, where he earned a diploma in electronics and opened a repair shop in an ethnically mixed town near a large city. He has lived and worked there for the last seventeen years. The community has all kinds of people—"Africans, Tunisians, Moroccans, and Algerians, plus the French not far away"—and his clientele includes all of them. He repairs their electronic devices, like smartphones, and has good relations with everyone.

Sami is "Tunisian, not French," and though he has the right to become a French citizen, he has no intention of doing so. Sami first married a woman he described as "Algerian," even though she was born in France, and they had two daughters. They divorced, and he is now married to a Tunisian woman who lives in Tunisia. He goes there often. He is also a devout Muslim and regularly attends the local mosque. Taking a break from our interview for his evening prayers, he was kind enough to invite me to join him there.

Sami's two daughters, now twenty-one and nineteen, were born in France and educated in French schools. They now live with his ex-wife. They are "French by nationality," he says, but "do not feel French French. They are Tunisian." They speak Arabic as well as French, have both Tunisian and French passports, and spend each summer vacation in Tunisia. Living in the same multi-ethnic community as Sami, they are rarely insulted, though "some people are aggressive" with the daughter who is veiled.

Sami thinks that "racism has increased in France" since the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his right-wing National Front party, but that such politicians, he says, "don't make me afraid. What can they do? We live in a country of rights. People who would do racist acts are sick, that's all."

I ended Sami's interview by asking if there was anything he wished to add, as I did with each interviewee. The following is an excerpt from his response:

Foreigners build France; France was built by foreigners. There were thousands of Moroccans who died during the war in France, for France. French people don't want to admit the positive things that foreigners have done. French people also don't want to admit the negative things that they've done. They killed a million Algerians in Algeria; they killed thousands in Tunisia. They have not recognized all the wrongs they committed in foreign countries, the colonization, the Maghrebi countries they colonized. All the wealth they seize back home. Tunisia, I think, doesn't get even five percent of the profits. France doesn't want to change the contracts. How can they say that the foreigners must go home when their wealth comes here? They live with it. They need to reflect on this.

THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF BEING MAGHREBI IN FRANCE

Over and over, interviewees described the high price they pay for being seen as Maghrebi in France. Even those who feel fully integrated say they must deal with the many consequences of being Maghrebi. These include the social costs of this identity—including harsh stereotyping, public humiliation, and discrimination in employment and housing—and, for some, severe psychological stress.

The Social and Economic Costs of Being Maghrebi

Many “French” people see Maghrebis in stereotypical ways. According to the interviewees, Maghrebis are thought to be thieves, drug dealers, and drug users. Those who do not abstain from alcohol are thought to be heavy drinkers. Maghrebis follow “strange” customs. Husbands are said to beat their wives and to force them to be veiled. Men, especially young men, are seen as dangerous. Maghrebis are thought to be “invaders” in France who scam the country's generous social welfare system. Summing this up, one interviewee put the image of Maghrebis pun-
gently: they're seen as “scum, thugs, pieces of shit.”

Many of the interviewees think these stereotypes hold some truth when it comes to the impoverished Maghrebis, especially

young males, who live in the rundown public housing complexes in the *banlieues*. While Abdel believes that “if I’d grown up under those circumstances, I’d have ended up the same way,” he says he’s “always the first to be annoyed” by young Maghrebis “from the ghettos” who “swear to God while drinking alcohol, who insult women and hit people.” He understands why “there’s been an increase in crazy racism” in France. For Samuel, “the worst thing is when I see young Arabs in the subway or on the street saying anything they like, doing anything they like, like insulting French people, breaking things, and yelling.” Olivier complained that “with them it’s always a mess. They live like the racists say.” Indeed, Olivier admits that he has “a tendency to be racist” toward those people.

Other interviewees expressed a more nuanced view of Maghrebis in poor neighborhoods, perhaps because they had once lived there. Both Zhora and Khira grew up in poor, largely Maghrebi *banlieues* and both remain proud of their parents and the other decent, hard-working people who live there. Although Zhora’s parents weren’t literate in any language and originally spoke no French, they wanted to fit into their new country. They insisted that Zhora and her siblings succeed in school and educate their own parents: “You will learn French at school and teach us when you come home.” Khira’s parents, who were also illiterate and did not speak French at first, raised their children to be proud of themselves, despite the family’s poverty and the insults from some “French” children. Having “never felt inferior” to “French” people, Khira pressed forward with her own life and, as an adult, with raising children to be full participants in French society.

Unfortunately for the interviewees, many “French” people apply their stereotypes of Maghrebis to people like them. Samuel “can understand their attitude” because they “don’t distinguish between me and them. Physically,” he says, “I look like them.” And so, “we’re the first victims of all the offensive things they do.” Olivier complains, “Because of them, society considers me inferior to French people. When I’m speaking with a French person, I immediately feel a doubt, a kind of judgment.”

A few interviewees spoke about how the harsh image of Maghrebis has entered into their own ways of thinking. Riding the subway at the time of the 2015–16 terrorist attacks, Samuel found himself “terrified” at the sight of “a Muslim, a brother,

bearded,” with a sack on the floor. Olivier says, “Even I, I have reservations, to be honest, a different feeling when I see Jean-Marie than when I see Youssef, Ali, or Mohammed. There’s a difference, even I feel different” about such people. Ironically, Olivier’s real name is Ali.

Terrorist attacks attributed to “Arabs” and “radicalized Muslims” have only made things worse. Mohamed remembers watching news reports of the 11 September 2001 attack on New York’s World Trade Center with other university students from Morocco, thinking, “This is going to be blamed on us.” After each of the 2015–16 attacks in France, Ibrahim felt “stigmatized” and forced to “justify” himself. People asked Elise, the investment banker, “Why do you do this?” Even today, Samuel feels he’s seen as a “potential terrorist because of my physical appearance.”

Feeling that they’re seen to be like the Maghrebis of the housing projects—that they’re “put in the same sack,” as some of the interviewees phrased it—they try to distinguish themselves in various ways. Many talked about the importance of speaking “good” French and behaving “as one should.” Samuel was reminded of how clothing affects people’s reactions. “Just yesterday,” he remembered, “I was wearing an old T-shirt and old pants because I’d been doing some cleaning and I realized that I was seen as someone from the *banlieue*.” Olivier said that he’s especially polite when he’s in a “French” neighborhood, saying, “Please, if you don’t mind” and the like to avoid being “seen badly.”

Although the interviewees do not act like the Maghrebis of stereotypes, many fear being humiliated in almost any public place. Ibrahim and others reported being turned away at bars and nightclubs, even as the “French” people around them are admitted. Many interviewees feel that, when they enter a store, the staff treat them like potential shoplifters. “One can become paranoid being followed in stores,” Mohamed said, but “that’s the reality.” Karim complained that “they don’t see my diploma in a store.” Cashiers often refuse to respond to Lina, even after she has repeatedly greeted them politely. Youssef, Mohamed, Samuel, Karim, and other Maghrebi men talked about women pulling their bags and phones close to their bodies on the street or in public transportation.

Ayoub recounted a particularly painful experience that began when a “French” man kept insulting his friend at a local bar.

Ayoub finally stepped forward, saying, “Stop this shit or I’ll really explode.” The French man left, but returned with a policeman, claiming that Ayoub had said he had a “bomb that would explode.” Ayoub was taken to the local police station. Although there was no bomb, for the next ten hours, he was interrogated by various police officers who tried to get him to admit he had threatened the man with a bomb. Ayoub stood by his denial and was finally released. But because of France’s continuing state of emergency, Ayoub explained, he had no right to call a lawyer and afterwards could not seek redress.

When Abdel was a teenager, he was often stopped and frisked by the police. “The moment I went into town with my friends, if I was wearing a baseball cap and with my Arab head, Bam! I was stopped. Immediately.” When Nassim started driving at eighteen, “the police stopped me all the time,” he says, while “my French friends said that they were never stopped.” As will be seen in chapters 2 and 3, Abdel and Nassim were not the only interviewees who endured frequent police stops based, they think, on their appearance; Lucas (who is Black) and Fatih (who is of Turkish origin) reported similar experiences.

Police bias in these police stops, known as *contrôles des identités*, has been demonstrated through statistical testing.¹⁰ In 2007, the Open Society commissioned a study that found that “Blacks were overall six times more likely than Whites to be stopped by the police,” and “Arabs were 7.6 times more likely.” An “equally important determinant . . . was the style of clothing worn by the stopped individuals. Although those wearing clothing typically associated with French youth culture (including ‘hip-hop,’ . . .) made up only 10 percent of the people available to be stopped, they made up 47 percent of the people actually stopped” (Open Society Foundations 2009: 10).¹¹ Other studies from the same time period resulted in similar findings (see Lozès and Lecherbonnier 2009: 35–39).

Discrimination in Employment and Housing

Discrimination in employment was a recurring theme in the interviews. Many interviewees have had trouble securing jobs commensurate with their qualifications, and a few have gone years between jobs. When they get a job, some are paid salaries

far below those paid to “French” people at the same level. A few have encountered overt insults at work.

Interviewees confront a major problem when they apply for a job: the résumé. In France, résumés routinely include the person's name, photo, and address. The significance of this was explained by an Airbnb host I had assumed to be Maghrebi. She had posted no photo of herself (a way Airbnb hosts who are not “French” avoid bias from prospective guests), and both her first and last names seemed Maghrebi.¹² When I arrived at her apartment, I was proven wrong: from a longtime “French” family, Selma has pale skin and long, smooth hair. But my mistake was actually a common one: as she explained, many “French” people also assume from her name that she is Maghrebi. She realized that this could pose a problem a few years ago, when she was applying for jobs. Fearing that this name on her résumé would make potential employers think she's Maghrebi, Selma attached a photo so “my name wouldn't count against me.” The photo leaves “no doubt,” she said, that she is “French.” Otherwise, her résumé “would have gone into the trash.”

Selma's fears are not imagined: a number of Maghrebi interviewees talked about their résumés going “directly into the trash.” Early in his career, Nassim discovered how quickly this can happen. Hoping that his excellent French and choice of clothes would improve his chances of getting the posted position, he personally delivered his résumé to a company's hiring office. A few minutes after he'd left, he realized that he had forgotten to say something and went back. But it didn't matter: “They'd already thrown my résumé into a trash basket.”

Khira was once assigned to an employment counselor to help her find a job. Frustrated by her lack of success, the counselor allowed her to listen while she spoke by phone with a potential employer. On the call, the employment counselor described her as fully qualified for the job, as well as professionally oriented and dressed (“yes, she wears heels”), but with Khira's obviously Maghrebi name, the counselor couldn't even get her an interview. Hanging up, the counselor told Khira, “I'm sorry, but I wanted you to see how this happens.”

A number of interviewees are stuck working at menial jobs. Even after receiving both a bachelor's and master's degree, Mohamed had trouble finding a job above the level of farm hand or

restaurant kitchen help. An employment counselor advised him to seek such a job anyway because that was the kind of work he had done as a student. This hurt Mohamed, he recalled, because it “suggested that I wasn’t up to doing more.”

Even when they were hired for one or another job, many interviewees encountered problems. The detailed profile of Zhora at the beginning of this chapter illustrates how bias can dog a person throughout her career. Zhora feels she’s dismissed as a *bougnoule* even today, more than thirty years since she started working at a government office and even after she has reached a paraprofessional position through passing civil service exams.

Once she was finally hired, Khira worked for many years for the same employer. Even though this went well, she said, “I was paid less because I’m a foreigner.” (In fact, Khira has lived in France since she was four and has been a citizen since 1992.) She periodically requested the same salary as the “French” people in her position, but without success. This salary differential stung most when she discovered that a “French” woman at the same level was paid substantially more than her, indeed, “six hundred euros a month” more. “One feels betrayed not to be given the respect one deserves,” she said. “I wanted to cry.”

When Asma began a job in a nursing home, her direct supervisor told her, “Starting tomorrow, I will call you Nicole.” When Asma asked to be called by her real name, her supervisor refused, explaining, “All those Arabs, those Maghrebis, they’re a little dirty. They have lice.” On the surface, Asma’s current supervisor is the opposite. “He’d never say anything intolerant about Maghrebis.” Still, he treats her differently from the “French” employees: “He doesn’t even say hello,” she is sure, “because I’m an Arab.” Her doctor has authorized a medical leave because of her emotional stress, but Asma feels she must quit.

Finally, there are the problems encountered by the few Maghrebi interviewees who have risen to management positions. A college graduate with experience in school administration, Nour was hired by the local commuter train company to supervise a team of “controllers” who enter buses to check for passengers who have not paid the required fare. Among the employees of this company, “there are many, many who are racist.” Once, when a subordinate discovered a fare-beater, he called out to her, in front of the other members of her team and the pas-

sengers on the bus, “Hey, here’s a cousin of yours.” Although the company management sided with her in a complaint she filed about the incident, Nour said that such behavior “hurts me sometimes.”

Housing discrimination is also a problem. When Ibrahim was looking for an apartment from a government agency, he requested one that would be near his job, but was only offered an apartment in an overwhelmingly Maghrebi community far away. Similarly, Mohamed “called about an apartment and was given an appointment to see it,” but a problem arose after he gave his (Maghrebi) name. The landlord “called back the next day to say that the apartment had been rented.” Mohamed then asked his wife, who has a European name, to call. “When she asked if the apartment was available, the answer was yes.”

One may wonder whether the interviewees’ feelings of discrimination correlate with the actual incidence of discrimination in France. While this issue is outside the scope of this ethnography, it merits at least a brief discussion. The landmark Trajectories and Origins study by the French national research institutes INED and INSEE¹³ provides the necessary statistical information. Regarding employment discrimination, the results of this study “suggest that the respondents’ felt and reported experiences are in fact correlated with ‘objective’ indicators of inequality” (Meurs 2018a: 80). They also reveal a higher level of perceived discrimination from people like the interviewees: “the more attractive, in theory, a respondent’s profile, the more positively they respond to questions on feelings of discrimination” (105). This applies to both the chance of being hired and average wages earned by people of comparable qualifications (80–106). “Descendants of parents from the Maghreb” reported approximately 12 percent more employment discrimination than people in “the mainstream population.”¹⁴

The Trajectories and Origins study also covered housing issues (see Pan Ké Shon and Scodellaro 2018). While housing discrimination is less often reported than employment discrimination, it remains a problem for immigrants, especially from Africa, including the Maghreb (Pan Ké Shon and Scodellaro 2018: 161). And while the children of immigrants from Europe “have become invisible”—just one generation removed from immigration, they “can no longer be distinguished from the mainstream

population”—this is not true for children of immigrants from elsewhere (162). Among Algerians, “reported discrimination does not decrease significantly from one generation to the next,” and the situation is only slightly better among the children of Moroccan and Tunisian immigrants (162).

The Psychological Costs of Being Maghrebi in France

A number of interviewees reported anxiety relating to issues of identity or acceptance. Statements already quoted in their profiles capture these feelings. Zhora said, “I don’t feel I belong in my own country; I don’t know who I am.” Samuel despairs for people like him: “We look for a place for us, but there is none. We are lost.” Following each of the 2015–16 attacks, when Nassim felt he had to show “French” people that he’s not a terrorist, he “experienced a physical reaction” because he “was stressed, very stressed.” And although Olivier and Asma make a point of living like “French” people, their Maghrebi appearance makes them feel excluded. “The last thing that could be changed is my *faciès*,” Olivier said, but he knows he cannot do this. And because Asma isn’t “a blonde with blue eyes,” she knows that she can’t “live as an equal” in France.

Maghrebi interviewees who were not profiled in this chapter also expressed distress. While both Ibrahim and Mohamed both feel excluded by French society, each feels particular concern for their young children. Ibrahim is so sure his children “will never be accepted in France” that he lectures his oldest, a son who’s only five and speaks only French, “You are not French, you are Algerian.” Choking up, Ibrahim said, “I cry,” but he feels that it’s better for his son to learn this lesson now than when he grows up and faces what Ibrahim has experienced. Mohamed thinks that when his toddler gets older, “French” kids will shun him because his “skin is too dark.” This worries him: “My son was born in France, he’s being socialized in France.” He has to feel French. “If he’s not French, then what is he? It’s enough to make a person schizophrenic.”

Karim, who will be profiled in chapter 4, claims that he has done everything to be “assimilated” into French society—becoming “more French than the French”—but to no avail. “It’s unjust to think you have to be like this, but in the end you’ll never, ever

be accepted. You will never be a part of it." And so, he says, "I feel like I have no country."

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, the Maghrebi interviewees are firm believers in *intégration*. They speak "good" French, champion French values, live in middle-class communities, and dress and act like the "French" people around them. They wholeheartedly participate in French society, and, to the extent that discrimination does not block their way, they live and work with "French" people. Most have degrees from French universities. Many have married or partnered with "French" people and raised their children to be French. Two of the interviewees are the children of these relationships. All of the women interviewees are independent in thought and action. Even Islam does not distance the interviewees from French values: many are unreligious, and even the practicing Muslims are vigorous adherents of *laïcité*.¹⁵

Yet even the interviewees who have spent their entire lives in France and consider themselves French do not feel that they are seen that way. Despite all she has done through the decades, Zhora is not accepted as French: "My identity is on my face," she says, and even today many "French" people see her as a *bougnoule*. Although Samuel has had a successful career in the French entertainment industry, speaks and behaves like the "French" people around him, and lives in a well-off downtown neighborhood, he feels that "French" people will never accept him because of his *faciès*. There are two types of people in France, he explained, "the Arabs and the French," and "an Arab in France is a potential terrorist." Abdel, who is *métis* and says he is "culturally French"—he grew up in a bourgeois "French" neighborhood and attended private schools with "French" children—is nonetheless seen as an "Arab" because of his "Arab *faciès*" and Maghrebi first name. Fouzia attended high school and nursing school with "French" students, worked for decades among "French" doctors and nurses, bought an apartment in a "French" neighborhood, and has had a daughter with a "French" man, but she still feels a divide. For many people, France "is a

history of religion, of continents, and of *faciès*." For them, Fouzia says, she is not French.

As this chapter has shown, even for people like the interviewees, to be Maghrebi in France is to face chronic bias, discrimination, and ugly stereotypes. Still, it could be worse. The next chapter addresses the experience of being Black in France.

NOTES

1. Algeria also had a substantial indigenous Jewish population. From 1870 until Algerian independence (apart from the years of the Vichy regime), the French government accorded French citizenship to most of these Jewish Algerians.
2. This number does not capture all people of Maghrebi origin because, in keeping with French statistical practice, it represents only the first two generations in France, i.e., immigrants and their French-born children (Simon 2008: 12). Of the 3.8 million cited here, 1.9 million originate from Algeria, 1.4 million from Morocco, and 0.5 million from Tunisia (ibid.).
3. "Arab" (*Arabe*) is often used interchangeably with "Maghrebi." Thus, Maghrebi interviewees—even those of Berber origin—frequently refer to themselves as Arabs or report hearing "French" people refer to them or others in this way. "Arab" appears to be used for various discursive reasons, though a common theme involves insult (as when a "French" person says "dirty Arab") or the harsh way they feel many "French" people view them (as in "I'm an Arab, and I'll remain an Arab, since they don't accept me as I am"). See Ruscio 2020: 27–30, which details stereotyping and disdainful use of *Arabe* going back to Charlemagne.
4. Two days after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, Amedy Coulibaly, a French-born man of sub-Saharan origin, attacked a kosher supermarket in Paris in the name of ISIS, killing four people and taking fifteen hostages.
5. While millions of Muslim women around the world wear a veil or a scarf covering their hair, this isn't dictated in the Qur'an or most hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), and many Muslims do not consider this a religious obligation.
6. While this chapter focuses on Maghrebis, there are Arab people in France who do not originate from the Maghreb. Only one of the interviewees who has lived in France more than a few years fell into this category. Now in her sixties, Leila grew up in western Syria, worked for a "French" family in Lebanon, and then moved to France when they did. Leila's non-Maghrebi origin has not factored into her life in France. Indeed, she married a Maghrebi man and has lived in much the same way as the Maghrebi interviewees.

7. Later in her interview, Zhora said that “*bougnoule* was not originally about the Arabs,” and she was right. Evidently derived from *bou-gnoul*, “black one” in the Senegalese language of Wolof, *bougnoule* was used as a derogatory term for Blacks during the colonial era (see Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, Portail lexicale, Lexigraphie, “bougnoule.” <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/bougnoule>, retrieved 9 December 2022; Ruscio 2020: 50–51). None of the Black interviewees mentioned hearing this term directed at them, though one non-Maghrebi interviewee did. Paul, who is of Korean origin, reported that “a xenophobe once called me *bougnoule*. That’s a term used against Maghrebis, not Asiatics,” he said. “It made me laugh.” But see Ruscio 2020: 52–53, reporting its use for Vietnamese and Chinese people.
8. This is not to say that they are seen as *Français de souche*, people who can credibly claim generations of French identity.
9. According to various researchers, it’s less a matter of forgetting France’s colonial experience than suppression or even aphasia. See, e.g., Verges: 2014; P. Silverstein 2018: 1–10; Bancel and Blanchard 2017b.
10. Punning on this term, Abdel and others call these stops *contrôles au faciès*.
11. Abdel experienced this himself. When he was dressed like “someone of the ghetto,” he was stopped “loads of times,” but, he adds, when “I’m dressed in a suit, I won’t be stopped by the police. It’s simple.”
12. Complaints of discrimination by Airbnb hosts—including the refusal by some French hosts to rent to Maghrebis—reportedly caused Airbnb to require hosts around the world to sign a non-discrimination agreement. See “Airbnb. Plus d’un million de personnes n’ont pas voulu signer une charte de non-discrimination” (2020).
13. These are the Institut national d’études démographiques (INED) and Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE). Conducted throughout France in 2008–09, the Trajectories and Origins project employed 566 interviewers and administered nearly 22,000 questionnaires (Simon, Beauchemin, and Hamel 2018: 1).
14. If only because of France’s legal constraints on the collection of statistical information relating to race (as discussed in the introduction to this book), the Trajectories and Origins study used rough proxies for such social categories as Maghrebi, Black, and Asian. For example, the “descendants of parents from the Maghreb” did not extend to all their descendants, but only to one full generation, i.e., only the French-born children of Maghrebi immigrants. Similarly, “the mainstream population” encompassed everyone in later generations, including people of such social categories. The same proxies were, by necessity, used for Blacks (the proxy being people who came from sub-Saharan Africa or the overseas departments and their children) and others, including Asians and others originating from Asia. Further, statistics grounded in original nationality—the people from one or another country and

their descendants, whether or not limited to one generation—do not capture the categories actually used in social life. As an expert on such statistics notes, “The gap between statistical categories and the terms used in everyday discourse is huge” (Simon 2008: 12). Concerning these issues generally, see Simon 2008.

Another study, using a different set of data and a different methodology, focused on differentials in the employment rate between French-born people with at least one parent who had been born in North Africa versus French-born people (of whatever background) whose parents were both born in France (Rathelot 2014). Much like the Trajectories and Origins study, it concluded that the employment differentials “should be mostly attributable to [the former group’s] ethnicity, and not to differentials in residential location or observable characteristics” (136).

15. See above and, more extensively, chapter 6.