

French Is, French Ain't

Boundaries of French and Maghrébin Identities

I went back to England and I became what I'd been named. I had been hailed as an immigrant. I had discovered who I was. I started to tell myself the story of my migration. Then Black erupted and people said, 'Well, you're from the Caribbean, in the midst of this, identifying myself with what's going on, the Black population in England. You're Black.

—STUART HALL, "OLD AND NEW IDENTITIES, OLD AND NEW ETHNICITIES"

France is not a race. It is not a religion. It is values!

—BRUNO LEMAIRE, FORMER FRENCH MINISTER OF FOOD, AGRICULTURE, AND FISHING

Mourad, a thirty-year-old of Algerian origin, moved to Paris in the early 2000s for his doctoral studies in sociology at Sciences Po. He grew up in Tours, near the center of France. He lives alone in the seventh arrondissement, a bourgeois neighborhood not too far from the Eiffel Tower. Neither of his parents went to college, so it will be a significant accomplishment for him to get an education at one of the world's best universities.

When I first met with him at the university café in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood, he described what it means to be French:

There's the theory and there's the practice. . . . There was a French philosopher named Renan who said that every day you have to want to be French.¹ You accept living together. It's a community of the future. . . . For me, being French is a desire, a desire to live together despite our origins. That is the theory, but in practice being French when you are of immigrant origin . . . of Swiss or Swedish or British origin, there isn't a problem. You're viewed as French, and no one talks about integration. However, if you're of maghrébin origin, that's different. There are barriers. And in the eyes of others, you see that you are not always considered French.

Though Mourad acknowledges that he is a French citizen, there is a difference between citizenship and the degree to which he personally can identify as French, and have that identity accepted by others. All nonwhite immigrant-origin individuals find themselves in the same position; their white counterparts, despite their immigrant origins, identify as French citizens and are accepted as such. We spoke further about the degree to which Mourad feels he can successfully assert a French identity: “Yes, I feel French, I want to be French, but what’s certain is that in the eyes of others, we are not always seen as French. That’s the hardest part. . . . If I say yes, I am French, I am French. But I cannot get into a nightclub. If I submit my CV [to apply for employment], I get no response. I’m discriminated [against in] housing. [They tell me] I’m not French.”

His otherness is thus assigned. France tells him he is not French and denies him cultural citizenship because of his maghrébin origins. He and others like him do not feel they fit within the boundaries that define a French person, and they find it difficult to negotiate a status that is both maghrébin-origin and French. White citizens clearly have no such difficulty. The invocation of ethnic origin by Mourad and other members of the second generation reflects the boundaries they draw around French and maghrébin identities, as well as the influence of French Republicanism on boundary-making processes.

I discuss below the dual identity of the middle-class North African second generation, which is at once both French and maghrébin. I examine how its members define what it means to be French, and how their perceptions of French identity, and the boundaries around it, are shaped by their own experiences of racial and ethnic marginalization. I examine their insider-outsider status and the salience of their maghrébin origins in their self-identification. Most respondents claim a French identity, but they vary in the degree to which they assert their North African origins. Identity is relational and therefore influenced by how others regard one’s claims to it. The rejection of such claims is tantamount to exclusion from the mainstream.

I further unpack the cultural complexity of French identity and its racial and ethnic nature. What does it mean to be French? Can one become French? How can one signify or perform “Frenchness” to others? Because others question whether they belong in France, members of the middle-class North African second generation employ various strategies to assert and justify their French identity. Individuals will point out that, having been educated in France and having spent their entire lives there, they are no different than other citizens. Or they will demonstrate their acceptance of French Republican ideology, even if Republicanism in practice places them on the margins of French society, whatever their accomplishments and despite their middle-class status. For all that, the North African second generation sees itself as part of France’s racial and ethnic hierarchy.



FIGURE 2. Covers of two French newsmagazines, *L'Express* and *Le Point*, with features about what it means to be French, at a Parisian newsstand in 2015. Photo by author.

French Republicanism determines how individuals are identified—as French or foreigner. French citizenship or having been born in France do not ensure one's acceptance as French. Children of Maghrébin immigrants formulate their identity in accordance with French Republicanism, yet in their interaction with whites, they experience discrimination and marginalization. Their white counterparts use race and ethnicity to reassert the symbolic boundaries separating insiders and outsiders. American identity is imbued with racial and ethnic meaning, complicating the efforts of racial and ethnic minorities to effectively assert it as their own (without adding a prefix, as in “African American”). Yet in France it is no different. Ethnic categories are not codified by law, and it remains difficult for racial and ethnic minorities to effectively assert a French identity. National ideologies constrain identity options. In the United States, the census defines racial and ethnic categories, whereas in France, Republican ideology does not allow the census to measure race and ethnicity. In a society that does not acknowledge multiculturalism, “doing race/ethnicity” is a negotiation of the private rather than the public sphere (Khanna 2011).

Though identity politics in France and the United States differ, children of immigrants in both countries are pressured to identify according to their ethnic origins rather than base identification on nationality. They are still under an “immigrant shadow” that frames second and subsequent immigrant generations (Zhou and Lee 2007). The title of this chapter is a nod to Marlon Riggs's 1994 documentary, *Black Is . . . Black Ain't*, an examination of the diverse notions of what it means to be a black American.² In referring to this title, I highlight how all individuals operate within boundaries of different identities, whatever the heterogeneity within the North African second generation. Demographically speaking, France is quite diverse,³ but the definition of who is accepted as French is quite narrow.

DEFINING FRENCH IDENTITY AND MARKING ITS BOUNDARIES

About 67 percent of respondents reference French Republican values, including those exemplified in the French motto *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, when they define what it means to be French. Many respondents were well versed in the tenets of the Republican model and quick to invoke them. Mourad and other middle-class children of North African immigrants distinguish between cultural and legal dimensions when defining French identity, for they are included in the first and excluded in the second. Which is to say that the social locations of many children of maghrébin immigrants are tenuous. When individuals invoke the cultural dimensions of French identity, they reference values, customs, traditions, and practices, as well as the racial and ethnic underpinnings of each of these. Other common definitions include speaking French perfectly, sharing a common destiny

and history, and having spent most one's life in France. As Linda, who is of Algerian origin, points out, being French "is not just a plastic card. . . . It's not just being born in France. . . . It's about values and a spirit, a culture, not just the legal things." "Frenchness" thus is not equated with citizenship but involves "cultural markers of birth, ancestry, and accent as well as residence" (McCrone and Bechhofer 2010, 921). These cultural markers are sustained by race, ethnicity, and religious distinctions. French identity is defined by whiteness and the exclusion of immigrant-origin individuals tied to its colonial empire.

Nadir, a thirty-six-year-old Algerian-origin journalist who lives in Seine-Saint-Denis, is one of many respondents who invoke race and ethnicity as marking whether someone is French. "Many people think being French, it's being white, eating pork, going to mass every Sunday morning, being Catholic and so on," he explains. "But . . . for me, being French is simply working in this country, paying taxes. It's just living here." By framing being French in this way—that is, focusing on the legal or technical definition—Nadir actively resists and challenges the racialized nature of French identity, where being white means being French.

Zara, though she acknowledges feelings of difference, believes that participation in everyday life in France qualifies her as French: "Being French is being a citizen, meaning behaving in a citizenlike manner . . . and having the power to decide what happens, via the vote, for example. Being French is having a voice in France, being heard in France, because unfortunately, even with French residence, you are not necessarily treated as if you [are]." Although Zara is marginalized as a "visible minority" (Ndiaye 2008), she nonetheless sees being French as a core, inescapable element of her identity. She does not believe her North African origins should disqualify her in this regard. Rather than defining herself in opposition to French identity, she embraces it.

One winter evening I met Mohamed, a thirty-year-old insurance agent and aspiring journalist of Algerian origin, at the metro stop near the Opéra Bastille. We walked to a nearby café, and en route he asked whether I liked living in Paris and about my overall perceptions of Paris as an African American. He was really fascinated by and curious about my experiences. We sat in the crowded café, sipping glasses of *vin chaud* (mulled wine), and dressed in a suit, Mohamed, a tall, statuesque man with almond eyes and dark brown, slicked-back hair told me: "For me, being French means to believe in the ideals of France, meaning loving France and all its freedoms, the France of the Enlightenment, the France of equality, the France of universal values. She has values that transcend differences . . . that pierce through [them]. You can be black or white or gray, but . . . you share those values. You can be Muslim, Christian, whatever you want."

In emphasizing values that supersede individual differences, Mohamed draws boundaries around being French that include him, and claims a privilege associated with being French. He sees it as an advantage to live in a democratic and

occidental society. As he said in a later conversation: “[Former French president François] Mitterrand once said, ‘We are all from the country of our childhood.’ To me, that means I spent my childhood here, I didn’t spend it elsewhere, and there is no one who can take that from me.”

As he grew up, Mohamed’s parents continually told him that his home was here in France. Because his parents emphasized this, he feels like he has fewer issues with his identity as an adult than other children of North African immigrants. Mohamed grew up in France, just like any other French person, and therefore this is something that is a part of him. Despite the stigma associated with having maghrébin origins, he still feels fortunate to be French, and to have been raised in France. He sees his dual French and maghrébin status as a richness—both constitute his identity—and believes France’s values are what set it apart from other societies.

Aurélien, a thirty-two-year old of Algerian origin who works as a human resources consultant, associates being French with Republican principles of the 1789 *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen* (*Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*). “It’s great French men, great authors, Rimbaud, Hugo,” says Aurélien, who lives with his wife and baby daughter in Paris. “It is an image and a country in which *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, would not be vain words.” He sees himself as embodying both French and maghrébin cultures, yet coming from a *quartier populaire* in the banlieue of Meaux, he feels marked as different by whites.

Yet as Aurélien, Abdelkrim, and others reference principles of French Republicanism in how they define French identity, they simultaneously critique how such principles are implemented in French society. They do not reject Republicanism as an ideology; rather, they feel it does not apply to them. Because they support French Republicanism, many respondents are fearful about *communautarisme* (communitarianism) in France, or the idea that different groups would interact only with each other and not with people of different identities. Many respondents drew a parallel to American identity politics and multiculturalism. Linda, a twenty-one-year-old medical student of Algerian origin, says, “It’s a problem for both [whites and nonwhites], people sticking to people like themselves.” She was once in a relationship with a white man and believes that they broke up in part because of the racist views of her ex-boyfriend’s family. She remembers his father’s obsession with Islam and her Algerian origins. Yet this painful experience demonstrates, Linda says, that “you cannot live in France without interacting with others who are different.”

Similarly, Salim, a thirty-five-year-old of Moroccan origin who lives in Ivry-sur-Seine, a banlieue south of Paris, recognizes the good and bad parts of French Republicanism. Under the French Republican model, he says, “We are all the same,” but he also finds its implementation hypocritical. Respondents thus

critique French society—and often, their own circumstances—within the confines of French Republicanism, but do not establish or seek an alternative framework.

FEELING FRENCH: CLAIMING A PLACE IN FRENCH REPUBLICAN SOCIETY

While racial and ethnic minorities are continually told, both implicitly and explicitly, that they are different from or do not share the values of their white counterparts, they nonetheless reference these same values when defining what it means to be French and see being French as part of their identities. This resembles how marginalized individuals in the United States identify with and relate to the mythologies of being American, such as the American dream, despite their own experiences of racial and ethnic marginalization (Waters 2000; Young 2006).

About 18 percent of respondents consider themselves exclusively French. They privilege their French over their maghrébin ethnic origins in how they view themselves. They acknowledge that they are treated differently from their white counterparts, yet they respond by asserting how they are just as French as any other French person. That is, they follow the Republican model by asserting an identity based on citizenship. They do not believe that their North African origins negate their being French, even if others deny their claims to French identity because of their racial and ethnic status.

Karim, a thirty-five-year-old of Algerian origin, works in Levallois-Perret, a banlieue northwest of Paris, near the seventeenth arrondissement. He was born and raised there and clearly distinguishes between the discourse by which French identity is defined and the reality of who can legitimately lay claim to it. He struggles to do so, for he has repeatedly been told that he does not meet the definition of a French person: “To be French, you must forget yourself a little bit, adopt the behaviors that are imposed on us. There is a path to follow to become French . . . but as a French person of Algerian origin . . . when I’m in France, I don’t feel *French* French. . . . France has to accept all French people as they are, and not as they wish they were.”

Sitting in a café in Levallois-Perret, Karim becomes increasingly animated:

The French really don’t accept us, they tolerate us, that’s all. But I have a million more reasons to be here than [then–French president] Nicolas Sarkozy. . . . In the last few centuries, there wasn’t a shared history between France and Hungary,⁴ right? But between France and Algeria, I mean, we used to be a French colony. . . . But even if I don’t want [to be French] . . . even if I say no, it’s not true [that I’m not French]. It’s a part of me. . . . If not, I wouldn’t be here. . . . [I’ve] said I wasn’t French. But I am French, whether they want it or not. . . . That means . . . we’re really here. But that’s why I say that it would be good if the French [reached out to] us, gave us opportunities. Why

can't I, Karim, Algerian—I'm educated, I went to a French school, I'm not dumber than anyone else—how come, when I apply for a job, they pick a French person and not me? The day that changes, we can say France has evolved, but for now, it's not the case, and we are very far away from that.

Despite the colonial relationship between Algeria and France, and though he is a result of that relationship, Karim is treated as not French. He regularly confronts racism, marginalization, and exclusion. Though the French identity he claims inevitably intersects with race and ethnicity, Karim still wants to assert it, even when others refute that assertion. Rather than developing an oppositional identity, he instead asserts his French status and his place in society, even if he is not always proud to identify as French and others do not acknowledge that identification.

Soumeya, a forty-nine-year-old divorcée of Algerian origin who has spent her entire life in Paris, is one example:

I never pose that question to myself. People ask me all the time what my origins are. So I say I'm Parisian, I'm French. And then they ask me, "But what are your *origins*?" Because you have a name that sounds different, strange. . . . I don't claim an Algerian identity. I'm French. I see myself as French. . . . Some people say, "I'm French of maghrébin origin," but . . . it's stupid to say you're French of this or that origin. . . . We're all humans. . . . No one ever asks someone named Sylvie Dupont what her origins are, even though she [has] them. . . . When people talk to me about Algeria, I always shock them, even my own mother, because I say my country is France. It will always be France.

Soumeya believes she is French because she was born and raised in France. This is the only relevant criterion. She rejects any relationship to her parents' country of origin, and she does not understand why other descendants of immigrants would insist on one. Like Soumeya, many respondents grew up in families that did not emphasize their connections to the Maghreb and, as a result, have a weaker relationship with their parents and with their parents' country of origin.

Soumeya is unwilling to deny her "Frenchness" and considers herself no less French than a white person, even in the face of her differential treatment by others as a North African-origin individual. She maintains that those who question her French identity or refuse to accept it are in the wrong. She believes in French Republican ideology but attributes racism and discrimination to the failure to implement it. For all that, Soumeya can imagine a France without racism where all citizens are equal.

Other respondents claim French identity in the absence of strong ties to any other. Sonia is a single thirty-year-old of Algerian origin, has a doctorate in economics, and owns a home in the northern banlieue of Le Bourget. "Being French is something so deeply inside of me that I cannot separate it out," she says. Sonia's privileging of a French identity stems from her life experiences. Though she has spent her entire life in the Seine-Saint-Denis département, she does not feel

particularly attached to where she lives. Nor is she affiliated with any religion. Sonia felt different growing up in Le Bourget—not from whites, but from other maghrébin individuals. Her parents were literate and fluent in French, which set her family apart from other maghrébin families. As a child, she had more educational opportunities and always excelled academically, which contributed to her sense of difference. Now she has had a successful career working for an association that advocates for rural workers. She has not been to Algeria since she was sixteen years old. “I know it sounds bad, but I don’t feel any affinity for Algeria,” she says. “I have no desire to go back. It doesn’t mean anything to me.” These sentiments may be partially explained by her estrangement from both her parents and her four older siblings. She has not spoken to them in years.

Nacira, a twenty-five-year-old biology teacher at a high school of Algerian origin, connects her claim to French identity with her experiences as a student and teacher. The older she gets, the more she accepts herself as French: “For me, [being French] is really bound to where you did your studies, and I realize that the references that I have are references linked to the French Republic. When I think, I think in French. When I dream, I dream in French. Even if the French system has its faults, it also has its advantages. . . . For me, being French is bound to the education you get in this country. . . . When I teach, I teach how a French teacher teaches, with the same tools, the same resources, etc.”

Nacira references the ontological nature of French identity, which exists from birth and cannot be denied. Her French identity does not, however, preclude a critique of how French Republicanism is practiced, particularly of the inequalities she sees between schools in bourgeois areas of Paris and those in the Seine-Saint-Denis département where she teaches.⁵

Yacine is a thirty-three-year-old of Algerian origin and the divorced father of a seven-year-old daughter. An IT freelancer, he lives in the western banlieue of Asnières-sur-Seine. He, too, links his French citizenship to his educational experience. As a child, he attended what he refers to as a “Republican school.” His socialization there as a French person ties him to his compatriots: “I had the same scholarly training as most French people, so I think we are the same group, in theory. Yes, we each have our own paths, but me, I consider myself as French as anyone else.” Though Yacine grew up as one of the only maghrébin-origin individuals in his community, he never identified as anything else but French. He thus invokes his educational trajectory to insert himself within the boundaries of a French identity. But he acknowledges an anti-maghrébin racism that is particularly acute when it comes to employment opportunities in mid- and upper-level positions, and feels he has been treated differently because of his North African origins.

Loubna, a twenty-seven-year-old of Moroccan origin, laid claim to a French identity when she realized how much her life in France had shaped her. “If I had grown up in Morocco, I would be completely different [as would] my ways of

thinking. . . . So, yes, I would say I am French,” to the point that she distances herself from her Moroccan counterparts. Diana, a twenty-four-year-old of Algerian origin who lives south of Paris with her parents, identifies as French above all else, though her values may differ because of her ethnic origin. “I was born here,” she says. “I grew up here. I speak French. I have Algerian origins, but I definitely feel French before I feel Algerian. When I speak, I’ll speak in French. I can sort of speak Arabic, but not well.”

FEELING MAGHRÉBIN: INVOKING ETHNIC ORIGINS

These citizen outsiders invoke their maghrébin origins as part of their identity in different ways. The distinction between assigned and asserted identities complicates identity-formation processes for the middle-class French second generation. The racial and ethnic hierarchy in France means that that nonwhite individuals are not considered French. A claim to French identity by children of North African immigrants is not accepted. They are denied cultural citizenship and their rightful place as French citizens. In short, the North African second generation has no ethnic options (Waters 1990); it cannot dictate the salience of its ethnic origin to the perception of other citizens. For its members, that salience is critical to how they see and understand themselves in French society and how their North African origins intersect with their French status in defining their identity.

Many children of North African immigrants get their first lesson in what it means to be French when they begin school in predominately white neighborhoods. They learn at an early age that they are not French, a continually lesson reinforced when they reach adulthood. Their differing responses to discrimination and marginalization determine how they invoke their ethnic origins, how they define their identity, and how they position themselves in French society.

The invocation of ethnic origins by the middle-class maghrébin second generation is contextual and varies. Neither this generation nor its middle-class segment is monolithic. That is, there is a continuum and no prescriptive categories. Most individuals identify in a way that acknowledges their French and maghrébin status, highlighting the space between the categories of French and other. This includes adopting a hyphenated and combined identity, viewing oneself as neither French nor maghrébin, or viewing oneself as only maghrébin.⁶ Their relationship to parents and country of origin, as well as to childhood and educational and work experiences, influences how respondents invoke their North African origins.

Inevitably, these contribute to consciousness of one’s ethnic minority status in France, as do interaction with and the mutual influence of ethnic community members, culture, and the state.⁷ This phenomenon is also seen in the emergence

of a Muslim consciousness in the United Kingdom, which challenges existing notions of assimilation and informs identity-related claims-making among British Muslims (Meer 2010), and of DuBois's ([1903] 1994) notion of a minority double consciousness, or the "second-sight" African Americans possess.

HYPHENATED AND COMBINED IDENTITY—FRENCH AND MAGHRÉBIN

Many respondents see being French and having North African origins as coconstitutive elements of their identity. Noura, a thirty-seven-year-old single mother of Algerian origin who works as a nurse's assistant, says: "To be French is to have French citizenship. I don't know if I feel completely French. It's complicated. When people ask me what I am, I say I am French of Algerian origin." Her Algerian origins play the greater role in her daily experiences. Noura is more comfortable with her hyphenated identity in the *quartier populaire* of the nineteenth arrondissement where she lives, than she was when she lived in Deux-Sèvres, a département in western France. Noura describes her current neighborhood as having a "Brooklyn element" to it because there are so many immigrant-origin residents. She identifies as French of Algerian origin because she acknowledges that being technically French—having French citizenship—does not mean others will accept her as French. France, through macrolevel structures and microlevel interactions, "others" people like her.

When Noura's young children experience racism or discrimination, she finds it difficult to explain to them that others do not regard them as French. She told me that her eight-year-old son's teacher is racist, holding the boy's darker skin color against him. Her seven-year-old daughter is spared such racism because her lighter skin allows her to pass as white. To Noura, this is one of many examples that demonstrate the salience of race and ethnicity in how individuals are treated in France.

Of the individuals in this study, about 44 percent have adopted a hyphenated or combined identity like Noura. Respondents identify as French of maghrébin origin, French of Tunisian origin, French of Algerian origin, and French of Moroccan origin. Those constructions mirror the strategy of Asian Americans and African Americans in the United States, whose American identity is contingent upon acknowledging their racial or ethnic origins. But it should be noted that the French part of the hyphenated identity always precedes the maghrébin origin, such as Français d'origine marocaine (French person of Moroccan origin) or Français d'origine maghrébine (French person of maghrébin origin). That in effect foregrounds French identity, obstructing the full fusion of French and maghrébin. In a country that does not acknowledge ethnic origins in identity construction,

some members of the French North African second generation turns to a hybrid identity, or ethnic hybridity (Jiménez 2010), that incorporates both.

When Linda, a twenty-one-year-old medical student who lives with her parents in the western banlieue of Rueil-Malmaison, visits her Algerian relatives every few years, she is made aware of how French she is. “My life,” she says, “would be completely different if my name were Fatima.” Linda identifies as French of Algerian origin, but her name and features do not immediately convey her North African origin. She tells the story of a patient who had to go to another hospital for tests. When he returned, he told her that his stay there was unpleasant, as his roommate was Algerian. Besides being offended, she found it ironic that her patient did not realize that Linda herself was of North African origin.

She grew up in a mainly white neighborhood, and her parents wanted her to fit in with the other children. So she celebrated Christmas, though she was and remains a practicing Muslim.⁸ As an adult, Linda is ambivalent about her position. She is successful and will soon become a doctor. She plans to move to Paris and share an apartment with a friend. But, she says, “I sometimes feel guilty that I have made it when so many others like me have not.”

Some respondents say they occupy separate French and maghrébin cultural worlds simultaneously. Diana, a twenty-four-year-old graduate student in communications with dual Algerian and French citizenship, grew up in Orsay, a predominately white banlieue south of Paris and a more economically advantaged banlieue than most.⁹ She lives there with her parents in an HLM complex supported by the factory where her father, now retired, used to work. “I used to feel closer to the French mentality than to the maghrébin mentality,” she says. “And I think that’s an effect of living in Orsay. . . . There just aren’t many foreigners there. There are many French people. It’s a really nice neighborhood with a high standard of living.”

As a child, Diana does not remember being particularly interested in Algerian or maghrébin culture. But when she entered her teen years, she set out to learn more about it, sought out connections with other maghrébin youth online, and developed a deeper attachment to her origins. Diana is now well versed in her French and maghrébin identity and appreciates how both elements made her who she is: “There are parts of the maghrébin culture that I value, for example, the strong family ties and large families. . . . But there are also parts of French and Western culture that I value, such as gender parity and feminism.”

She now has as many white friends as maghrébin but acknowledges the differing perspectives of the two. Diana considers her parents as modern as those of her white friends’ parents and more modern than the parents of her maghrébin friends. She feels comfortable dating white men and would not hesitate to marry one (two of her sisters married whites). However, she knows that some maghrébin friends do not understand why she would date someone who is of different origin. Though her parents would be happy if she did marry a maghrébin man, they do

not insist on it. “They would have stayed in Algeria if [marrying an Algerian man] were a requirement,” she says.

Diana affirms the French and maghrébin elements of her identity in a context in which North African–origin individuals are defined as nonwhite, and therefore not French, and at the bottom of the racial and ethnic hierarchy. Her lighter skin and name mask her North African origins, which has allowed her to evade, to a degree, the discrimination experienced by her maghrébin-origin friends. One of them had considerable difficulty finding a job after finishing engineering school. Diana does not anticipate the same fate once she completes her studies: her *résumé* does not betray her origins. Though Diana recognizes the prevalence of racism in French society, she has been confronted it less than others like her because she is not as visible as an ethnic and racial minority.

A combined French and maghrébin identity may also be viewed as the simultaneous possession of two separate cultures. Hicham, a twenty-nine-year-old with dual Moroccan and French citizenship who lives in a public housing high-rise building with his parents and three of his brothers in Poissy, puts it this way: “There is a real gap between us, people of immigrant origin, and those who are of pure French origin, . . . and we can understand them because we have this double culture. At home we were raised in a maghrébin way and at school we are educated in the ways of the French Republic.”

As discussed in chapter 3, Hicham and others know how to operate in two worlds. This is comparable to the bridging of different cultural worlds by African Americans through code-switching and behavior-switching (Jackson 2001; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). Here, respondents access different codes in different spheres (home, school, and work) and cultural worlds.

As Hicham grew up, his parents emphasized the importance of the family’s ties to maghrébin culture through annual summer trips to Morocco. They also cultivated in him a love and appreciation for French *laïque* (secular) society, underlining the freedoms it affords, freedoms not available in the Maghreb. Hicham sees the value in being fluent in multiple codes but is nonetheless repeatedly reminded of his difference from others, such as when he was fired from his bank job and his white coworkers were not. Hicham reluctantly accepts the limitations of having to navigate two worlds. His lighter complexion makes it sometimes easier for him to pass as white in public spaces, but his name gives him away as maghrébin.

Soria, a thirty-four-year-old Muslim of Algerian origin, owns a condo in the fifteenth arrondissement and has worked as a human resources director since 2000. She grew to appreciate how maghrébin and French cultures are equally implicated in her sense of self. After an extended trip she took to Algeria at the age of sixteen, she began to assert elements of her Algerian culture. As an adult, she has been involved in many cultural organizations and activist causes concerning maghrébin-origin individuals and immigrants in France. She has organized group

travel to the Maghreb for an association and participated in demonstrations in solidarity with Palestine. Soria makes it a point to assert the maghrébin and Algerian component of her identity, partly to refute misconceptions associated with maghrébin-origin individuals. She rarely introduces herself as French; rather, she claims she is an “Arabe de France”:

Soria: When I introduce myself like that, it's not a rejection [of French culture]. Not at all. But it's obvious I'm French. I grew up here. When people who aren't French, especially Arabs, ask me, I always tell them, “My culture is also French, it's true. I have a double culture, but I express myself in French. Even if I speak Arabic, the language I express myself the best in is French.” And if I travel abroad tomorrow, it will be the French element . . .

Author: So you feel you'll be perceived more as a French person than as an Algerian?

Soria: Yes, exactly, even if I feel intensely Algerian as well.

Soria's attachment to being maghrébin does not negate her attachment to being French and living in France.¹⁰ For these individuals, the one does not negate the other and vice versa.

NEITHER FRENCH NOR MAGHRÉBIN

One winter afternoon, I met Termoul in a café in Les 3 Fontaines, a large shopping mall in Cergy-Préfecture. Twenty-eight years old and possessing dual citizenship, he lives in the northwestern banlieue of Pontoise with his wife and two young children and works in a bank in Paris. He speaks of alienation. “[Second-generation North African immigrants] don't have an identity,” he told me. “No one thinks we're French in France, and no one thinks we're Arab in Algeria.” Travel to Algeria influenced his view of himself as neither French nor maghrébin, but rather an occupant of some space between the two. He visits his in-laws and extended family there annually and wants his children to learn Arabic in their “native environment,” but he nonetheless feels like a foreigner there. And also in France.

About 20 percent of respondents see themselves as neither North African nor French. While gender is not a significant determining factor in any of the other identity configurations, more men than women described themselves in this way. Their sense of otherness leaves them between two cultures.

Or, as Ahmed, a twenty-nine-year-old practicing Muslim with dual Algerian and French citizenship, puts it, “We are sitting between two chairs.” He adds: “I am a manager at my company. I drive an expensive car. I go to a club . . . but cannot get in, and then I return to reality. You are never 100 percent either way. Maybe I am asking for too much, wanting to be both 100 percent Algerian and 100 percent French. But I can't choose between them. I want to combine the best parts of both into something great, but . . . I still feel different.”

Ahmed cannot reconcile his North African and French components. He has attained middle-class status, but despite his success, he feels he does not fit into French society. At the same time, he does not necessarily relate to other Algerian-origin individuals, particularly those who are working-class. Ahmed remains close to his parents and six older sisters, and lives in Nanterre so he can be near them. He has traveled to Algeria to visit his relatives every year since he was a child. One of his sisters has spent most of her life in Algeria with her godparents, and Ahmed believes her sense of self is very different as a result. But Ahmed himself feels he is labeled as “other” in the two cultural worlds he occupies.

Ahmed poses a contrast to Diana, whom I discussed earlier and who identifies with both French and maghrébin cultures, revealing a heterogeneity in how children of immigrants invoke their North African origins. He is well educated, successful, and actively involved in maghrébin organizations, and has close familial relationships and several maghrébin-origin friends and acquaintances. But like Hicham and Abdelkrim, Ahmed had two different and opposing educations as a child—one at home and one at school. And his adult experience in the workplace was one of differential treatment. In contrast to Diana, who claims a combined French and maghrébin identity, Ahmed feels he has none.

Like Ahmed, Mona, who is thirty-four years old and also of Algerian origin, straddles two different cultural worlds. Dual French and Algerian citizenship (she was born in Algeria and immigrated to France when two years old) has made her feel neither French nor Algerian. “It’s just a fact,” she says. “You’re not really one or the other.” She views the two as in opposition to each other. Mona grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in the seventeenth arrondissement of Paris but lives in the banlieue of Épinay-sur-Seine, in the Seine-Saint-Denis département, where it is less expensive. A business manager who works in Paris, she is involved with the same maghrébin networking and business association as Ahmed.

Sofiane, a twenty-six-year-old with dual French and Algerian citizenship, lives with his wife in a *cit * in the impoverished banlieue of La Courneuve. Of his neither French nor maghr bin status he says:

For me, being French is many things. . . . I’m French. I’m also Algerian because I have double nationality. But being French means being included in French society . . . living in this society, being responsible, representing your country, doing everything you can do so that your country does well. For me, that’s what being French is. . . . It’s everyone having the same rights, which is not yet the case here, because when you live in Neuilly-sur-Seine [an upper-class banlieue] or in La Courneuve, it’s not the same thing. . . . I don’t really have an identity, as I was born to parents who are foreigners. When I go to Algeria, they say I’m a foreigner. When I’m in France, they say I’m the son of immigrants, which really means I’m neither French nor Algerian. I’m between the two.

Here, Sofiane claims French identity by referencing the Republican model, which acknowledges his citizenship. But only to a degree, for he does not feel included in

French society, and he attributes that to the failure of France to practice Republican principles. Sofiane feels he has no identity. He travels to Algeria annually, owns two houses there, and enjoys its different way of life. Still, he feels like a foreigner there. His treatment in France is comparable. As a resident of a much-maligned *cit *, he feels marginalized. Residents of La Courneuve face exclusion from French society. "France is one of the most diverse countries in the world, but it has a big problem with racism," he says. "France has a bad history with immigrants. They are happy to use them when they need them but just discard them afterward."

Ahmed, Mona, and Sofiane are thus constantly reminded of their difference. Others do not consider them French, denying their cultural citizenship. And they cannot claim an identity based solely on their Maghrebin-origin status. They draw strict boundaries around what it means to be French and what it means to be Maghr bin, yet they do not fit within them. Unable to define themselves as French or maghr bin, without any sense of belonging, they are people without identities.

ONLY MAGHR BIN

About 5 percent of respondents identify solely as maghr bin, even if they have French citizenship and have spent their entire lives in France. Hamama, a thirty-five-year-old practicing Muslim of Algerian origin, told me, "Just because I was born in France does not make me French. I am not like my parents who immigrated here, who chose to come here. I did not choose where I was born, where I grew up." Though she does not reject French society, she has no affinity for it. Fortunately for her, that claim to a singular maghr bin identity has not been a hindrance. Hamama studies health policy at Sciences Po and works as a hospital director in the western banlieue of Plaisir. Not identifying as French does not inhibit her ability to succeed in French society. Her success is self-evident.

Farid, a thirty-two-year-old with dual Algerian citizenship who lives in the southwestern banlieue of Melun with his wife and two young children, also completely rejects a French identity. When he was very young, Farid's parents would tell him, "You're not French. We live in France, but you're Algerian. There's no difference between your family here and your family in Algeria." Clearly, Farid got the message: "It is impossible, impossible for me to say that I'm French." His parents instilled in him a love and appreciation for Algeria, which takes precedence over any attachment to French society.

BECOMING FRENCH?

THE CONTINUING SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

The example of former French president Nicolas Sarkozy offers a different perspective on the intersection of national and ethnic-origin identities. Born in France to a Hungarian immigrant father and French mother, Sarkozy's immigrant

origin posed no barrier to his presidential campaign or ascension to the French presidency. He had become French and was never considered anything else. Such success is almost unimaginable for an individual of Algerian, Moroccan, or Tunisian origin. He or she would not be considered a legitimate member of the French Republic.

Farid is a thirty-two-year-old of Algerian origin who lives in the southwestern banlieue of Melun with his wife and two young children. He feels that, were Sarkozy to acknowledge his immigrant origins, it would benefit all immigrants and perhaps widen the definition of French identity. Sabri recalled how Sarkozy once likened himself to Obama in an interview, on the grounds that both were second-generation immigrants, though Sabri noted that “the son of a white immigrant is not the son of a black immigrant. It’s not the same thing.”

In this chapter, I have painted the portrait of a group of individuals who for the most part see themselves as French but are continually told they are not. I have highlighted how the middle-class French North African second generation learns of and interprets its difference and responds to its marginalization, a phenomenon first experienced in childhood. In France, North African-origin individuals and other visible minorities are racialized. They occupy the bottom of France’s ethnoracial hierarchy. Such is France’s continual racial project, in which distinctions among citizens based on visible and socially meaningful differences are reinforced.

There exists in France a fear that identity-based groups will desire self-segregation and separation from others, yet as I have shown, individuals of maghrébin origin, viewed by others as different, still wish to be considered French. Their attachment to their maghrébin origins do not negate their attachment to French society. The social separation they experience is not one of desire, but of circumstance. Many middle-class maghrébin-origin individuals are racialized as nonwhite but still see themselves as French. But ethnic origins remain salient, and they are denied a French identity.

Contrasting citizenship and nationhood in Germany and France, Brubaker (1992) states that France has a territorially inclusive principle, or civic notion of citizenship, while Germany’s is based on ethnicity. In theory, French identity is accessible to any citizen. But racial and ethnic minorities, particularly those connected to former French colonies, find that identity out of reach. The experience of this population proves that the symbolic boundaries around French identity are not malleable. Respondents may assert their French identity, and they and they may say they are French when questioned about their background, but that is the extent of their agency. There is a distinction between the identities they assert and the identities they are assigned.

By focusing on second-generation individuals who are racial and ethnic minorities, I show that citizenship does not confer the same benefits on other

populations as it does on whites. Like their immigrant parents before them, children of immigrants experience marginalization. They are denied cultural citizenship and excluded from the imagined community of France, yet members of the North African second generation are faithful to the French Republican model and do not cultivate an oppositional consciousness or identity. Rather, they seek to reconcile how they see themselves and how others see them. Even as they wrestle with what being French means and attempt to determine their place as an ethnic minority in French society, they still wish to claim French identity and be accepted as such by others. In the meantime, they inhabit a marginal social location. The distinction between their assigned versus asserted identities allows these individuals to continue to identify as French—but with a caveat.