

NEITHER MAGHREBI NOR BLACK

As one of the interviewees said, there are three kinds of people in France with non-European *faciès*: Maghrebi, Blacks, and everyone else. While, as seen in the foregoing chapters, Maghrebi and Black are distinct social classifications, each with a readily discernible *faciès* and each associated with stereotypical behavior, the remaining interviewees seem to be a jumble. True, virtually all of them trace their origin to countries in Asia—Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Vietnam, China, Japan, and South Korea—but these are far-flung countries with cultures, languages, and histories that range widely. The *faciès* of these people also vary considerably.

Considering all this variety, does it make sense to discuss these interviewees together? The answer is yes, and for reasons that go to the heart of identity in France. Grounded in the same socially created equivalence between Nature and Culture by which people are readily recognizable as Maghrebi or Black and “readable” as having an assumed nature, the people discussed in this chapter are also “readable.”¹ They are readable first because of what they are not: they are neither Maghrebi nor Black, and thus are free of the harsh stereotyping to which Maghrebi and Black people are subject. As the interviews discussed in this chapter reveal, this is no small matter. Yet they are also readable as not being White, that invisible but pervasive classification in France. Not White, and thus not “French,” is similarly no small matter.

Within this residual social category, there is one distinct classification. This is *Asiatique* (equivalent to “Asian” in today’s English): a person recognizable by his or her East Asian *faciès*. Like people of the other classifications, *Asiatiques* are associated with

a geographical origin and assumed behaviors. All of the remaining interviewees are truly “none of the above.” By their appearance, they are not “French,” but they are not readily classifiable. This will prove to be significant.

Finally, a note about assumed origins. All of the classifications in this relational system of social classification are linked to certain “origins.” *Origines* was a recurring theme among the interviewees. Maghrebis are said to originate from the Maghreb (Northwest Africa); Blacks from sub-Saharan Africa (some more immediately from the Caribbean); Asians from East Asia; and the rest from elsewhere outside Europe. While millions of “French” people originate from other parts of Europe, this distinction fades over time.

It is time to turn to the interviewees. Not seen as “French,” the interviewees in this third group express many of the same concerns as the other interviewees. Who am I? How am I treated? Do I feel accepted by “French” people? What practical issues must I confront in French society? Their answers to these questions turn out to be very different from those of the interviewees classified as Maghrebi or Black.

VINCENT

I was scheduled to stay with Vincent on 1 May, a national holiday in France, and he invited me to arrive early and join him and friends for lunch. My prior Airbnb host was kind enough to drive me to Vincent’s home in the heart of a well-maintained town.

The scene that greeted me couldn’t have been more inviting. Vincent lives in a sun-drenched apartment with enormous windows and double-height ceilings. When I arrived, he and his two guests were wrapping slices of ham around stalks of white asparagus as they sipped wine. Everyone was dressed casually but stylishly; Vincent wore a crisp New York Knicks warm-up jacket. While Vincent appeared to be of South Asian origin, the couple he had invited—the wife is a colleague of his in the IT department of a large French company—was recognizably “French.” We moved on to lunch: the asparagus-ham combination served with bread, more wine, salad, and a sumptuous dessert, all accompa-

nied by the fast-paced, spirited conversation typical of such occasions in France. Vincent was particularly outgoing and jovial, serving as the perfect host. Although he readily agreed to participate in my project, I suspected that his interview would be short and unspectacular, illustrating how comfortable life could be for someone who has embraced French norms enthusiastically.

After the lunch dishes were washed and goodbyes said to Vincent's friends, we sat down at his dining room table, and I turned on the recorder. What followed surprised both of us. For more than two hours, Vincent recounted a painful story of unremitting *intégration*—he used the word more than a hundred times—that started with his grandparents and continues today. He burst into tears after the first ten minutes and was often misty-eyed. Throughout the interview he seemed physically deflated, far from the hearty host he had been at lunch.

Vincent's family originates from the former French micro-colony of Pondicherry on the southeast coast of India. Both of his grandfathers were officials in the colonial government and, he believes, considered themselves French. Although both sides of his family were physically similar to others in that region, with dark skin and straight, black hair, they were part of the local colonial elite. "There was the culture, too," he explained. His grandfathers were Catholic and French-speaking, but also French in orientation. According to family stories, they played *pétanque* (a metal ball-throwing game from southern France), "drank aperitifs every Sunday, and enjoyed French cuisine."

This way of life was disrupted in 1947, when India gained independence from Great Britain. When it became clear that Pondicherry would be absorbed by the new nation of India, Vincent's family was given the choice between Indian and French citizenship. They chose French, and Vincent's father, then eighteen, joined the French army. He was stationed in various French military bases in France, where he "worked day and night" to become a nurse and an officer. His father succeeded, Vincent said, "but had to do battle" every day. In the meantime, he entered into an arranged marriage with a young Pondicherry woman who was also French-speaking and Catholic, and they had two children, Vincent and his older sister. Vincent's parents did their best to fit in among the French military personnel and their families. Despite "the advantage of being Catholic," he

says, they “had to struggle to be integrated, to be accepted, to be acknowledged, everything.” They suffered “a lot of injustices,” even “a false charge of misconduct” against his father. He and his sister witnessed some of these incidents and heard about others. This “hurt us, it marked us.”

After fifteen years of military service, Vincent's father retired as a major, and the family settled in a French village of 900 people, where they were “the only people of color.” Vincent was nine. His parents did their best to integrate themselves into the community, he said,

inviting neighbors to dinner at least once a year, even if they didn't really like them. It was important to make a good impression, to be respectable and educated, to serve a good meal on attractive dishes. It was always part of that effort to be integrated, to act like the others.

Vincent's father worked as a nurse at a nearby factory and in the village, where he faced discrimination in getting patient referrals.

Turning to his childhood, Vincent recalled that “my parents made a firm decision to integrate us into French society.” They imposed “no food restrictions” on their children and, even at home, spoke only French. Vincent felt “100 percent French.” Still, he was sometimes mistreated in school, and he had trouble finding a place with the children of the village. Almost forty years later, Vincent remembers the “extreme humiliation” he suffered in French class at the hands of a “xenophobic” teacher.

Vincent's exclusion from basketball games as an adolescent was so painful that, even now, when he is fifty-one and “all the others have stopped” playing basketball because of age, he keeps at it. “Deep inside me, it's a form of revenge.” Vincent suddenly began to cry again. Regaining his composure, he pushed on:

But now I'm the one who coaches, who plays, even if it's physically hard. I'm faster than them. I think it's tied to that period. I'd never made the connection between *intégration* and exclusion, but I think they're linked together as we speak. This is my journey.

At college, Vincent studied information technology. He recalls “very little” bias there, either among the students or with the faculty. It was a “very pleasant” experience. Less than two

months after graduation, he was hired by the same large company where he still works more than twenty-five years later. "I was accepted" by the IT team, he recalls, and "had no problem" at the company during the first few years. Getting promoted proved to be more problematic. He was denied promotions, he believes, partly because of his union activities "and partly because of race." But Vincent doesn't want to dwell on this feeling of being "a victim, a victim of the system."

Vincent is only romantically attracted to "European" women—"There's no ambiguity about that"—but has been "timid" with them. "It was a problem of *intégration*." He ultimately married a woman he describes as "*Française de souche*," though they are now divorced. They have a son, now twenty-two, who is *métis*. Vincent and his ex-wife share a "French culture," Vincent says, and they raised their son to be French. They gave him a French first name, though his last name is Vincent's and thus distinctly non-European.

Vincent wanted his son "not to have problems with *intégration*." Over the years, Vincent took part in school-related activities, partly, he says, in the "unconscious" hope that his son wouldn't "be treated differently than the others," and that he'd be "considered normal like them." Vincent thinks that he "largely succeeded" in this effort. And while his son "may have seen injustices involving racism that I've encountered," Vincent says, he hasn't faced "too much" of this himself. Perhaps he "had fewer problems because he looks less Indian" than Vincent, and even today his son "may need to make less of an effort" to be accepted.

Vincent spoke at length about his own behavior. He "constantly" presents "a good image" of himself. "There's a little light that's always on, saying 'be careful about how you behave.'" He feels it's important to be "very respectful" toward others, and though "it's not fair," he lives by this rule. Vincent recounted an interaction from just the day before our interview, when he went to get food for our lunch:

When I went to the countryside yesterday to buy the asparagus, I knew to make a good impression on the farmer, to be polite. I knew to greet him, ask about how to cook it and then thank him. And this was just asparagus, with a man I'd never see again.

Avoiding conflict protects him from insult:

Whenever I drive, I don't want others to say, "dirty foreigner," so I never go through intersections when the light is amber. They immediately make the connection with a person's origins, so I know to be careful that people don't have a reason to criticize me. In my mind, I know this.

Despite his difficulties, Vincent says that he has it easier than many other "foreigners on the outside." He works at the management level at his company "rather than as a maintenance worker at city hall. It makes a difference." In sum, "it's easier in my position than for an Indian in a job that's not thought well of." His religion has also helped: "It's easier to be Catholic in France," especially if you "practice it discreetly. It's a matter of *intégration*." Finally, unlike Maghrebis, who "have many problems" and a "very bad reputation," he says, "Indians don't pose any problems in France."

Vincent has also done a substantial amount of community service, like helping unemployed people find jobs. He thinks that his accomplishments "show the others that 'you see my physical difference, but see also that I contribute something to my country, something concrete.' It's my way of responding. I want to be recognized as a counterexample to what others say about foreigners." For Vincent, *intégration* is paramount. He says, you must "make the effort to integrate yourself so you're not put into an ethnic community. For example, I don't spend time with the Indian community." You "have no problem if you're in the mold," if you "blend in." Further:

Education is an excellent way to be integrated. Sports is another good way. I joined a sports club because I wanted to, but it's also very important for *intégration*. You need to be like the others. This is a form of normality that allows you to be yourself. Because if you are integrated you can say what you think. But if you're not integrated and you start talking, it will be taken badly.

The safest approach is to be careful in your behavior and speech.

Despite Vincent's efforts to "integrate" himself into French society, one obstacle cannot be overcome. "Out on the street, they only see the color of my skin. No one sees what I've done with

my life." Indeed, to some people, he's not just "a foreigner on the outside," but a "foreigner." He says, "I must prove to certain people that I'm capable. Foreigners must do more." His fear of being called a "dirty foreigner" and his desire to prove himself different from "what others say about foreigners" remain sensitive issues. He must be especially "discreet," he says, to avoid the "xenophobia" of some people. It's best to be "discreet and still more discreet."

As the interview went on, Vincent thought about parallels between his parents' search for acceptance and his own behavior. Remembering how his parents invited people to their home for a meal, he said, "I wonder whether I'm doing the same thing at my house. It's a pleasure for sure, but I wonder whether, in the back of my mind, it's also a kind of *intégration*." The memory of our lunch hovered in the background.

Finally, Vincent was struck by the experience of being interviewed. He was surprised, though also embarrassed, by the strength of his feelings. He periodically interrupted his own account with asides like "This is the first time I've thought about this" and "It's interesting to talk about these things." He was also struck by the slow progression of the four generations of his family: first his French-speaking, Catholic grandparents who served in the French colonial government and chose French citizenship; then his parents, who were French citizens (his father having served in the French military for fifteen years) and who did everything possible to be "integrated" into the French communities where they lived; then Vincent himself, who has spent his entire life in France among "French" people, and yet feels that he's perceived not a French, but as a "foreigner" who must gain their acceptance; and finally his son, who has a "French" mother and was raised to be French, but still must navigate French society with his tan complexion and non-European last name.

THE OTHER INTERVIEWEES

The great majority of interviewees who are neither Maghrebi nor Black are either Asians (*Asiatiques*) or people who originate from non-Arab countries of Western or South Asia.² These interviewees represent a larger population than one might expect: of

France's 63 million inhabitants in 2011, 1.5 million trace their origins to Asia (Tribalat 2015: 21–22).³

The Asian Interviewees

Eight of the interviewees reported that they are seen as Asians.⁴ Four of them (Henri, Grégoire, Mathieu, and Rémy) originate from the former French colony of Vietnam, while the four others (Yuka, Emily, Paul, and Kana) originate from China, South Korea, or Japan, all countries that have never been French colonies. While these eight people range widely in personality and life experience, virtually all of them pointed to an evolution in French attitudes that has been important to their lives: while Asians used to be disparaged in France, they are now seen positively (see Chuang 2022: 109).⁵

Henri, Grégoire, Mathieu, and Rémy. These men, all of mixed Vietnamese and “French” parentage, trace their origins to Vietnam's time as a French colony. The history is important here. By the 1880s, France had conquered all of present-day Vietnam and incorporated it into a colony known as French Indochina. In 1945, Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence for Vietnam triggered a war with France, which France lost in 1954. The United States then fought its own Vietnam War against a political and military organization known as the Viet Cong, which the US lost in 1975. Since 1975, Vietnam has been a unified, fully independent country.

When Mathieu invited me to take part in his family's “daily life,” as he had written in an Airbnb message, I had no idea of the whirlwind that was in store for me. Mathieu lives with his wife, Kana, and their infant daughter, Madeleine, in a sunny apartment in a well-maintained housing complex for families of different origins. After a quick lunch, Mathieu took me to the local supermarket, which was filled with people of various ethnicities and an enormous array of fresh food, especially fish, fruits, and vegetables. We spent the rest of the afternoon conducting his interview, and the evening relaxing with Kana and Madeleine.

The next morning, Mathieu drove us to a Sunday family cookout in the country, two hours out of town, where I met his relatives and in-laws. Everyone was in high spirits. As soon as

Mathieu's father and uncle heard about my project, they asked—almost demanded—to be interviewed. Back at the apartment that evening, I interviewed Mathieu's father, Grégoire, who joked afterward that he'd "just been to confession." Next, I interviewed Kana (who will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5), followed by Henri, who is Mathieu's uncle and Grégoire's brother. In total, we did four interviews in two days. The rest of my time at Mathieu's home was spent on nonstop socializing and shared meals, like a mix-and-match lunch of cold fish, rice, and sauce, followed by French cheeses. During my few unoccupied hours, I walked around their multiethnic neighborhood, taking in its outdoor market, stores, and cafés.

Henri and Grégoire. Both now retired, Henri and Grégoire were born in Vietnam in 1946 and 1949, respectively, when Vietnam was still a French colony. Their father was a French soldier who was fighting against the Vietnamese in their war for independence, and their mother was a French-speaking and Catholic Vietnamese woman. While they were still toddlers, Henri and Grégoire were sent to live with their father's family in France for security reasons. Their parents followed after France's defeat in 1954, although the family's reunion was brief. Six months later, their father was redeployed to Algeria to fight against Algerians in the Algerian war for independence. The rest of the family remained in France. Henri and Grégoire's father returned upon France's defeat in that war in 1962, but his marriage to their mother did not last.

Henri and Grégoire shared a troubled childhood. Ridiculed as a "*chinetoque*" (an insulting term for Chinese people and, by extension, other Asians),⁶ Henri remembers that he "fought all the time." He was expelled shortly after entering high school. Grégoire's experience was essentially the same:

I don't have good memories from my childhood because I felt different. My mother was Vietnamese, so I had an Asian appearance. I was called *chinetoque*. I didn't like it; it made me aggressive with the other kids. I felt rejected by them. I left school early.

Being called "*chinetoque*" by other kids made Grégoire feel inferior because, as he says, the Chinese were seen as "nearly savages."

Prejudice dogged Henri and Grégoire throughout their childhood. Their father's family never accepted their mother. According to Grégoire, "they treated her very badly because she was Vietnamese" and ridiculed her as a "sorcerer." Their own father was dismissive toward his sons. At least once, Grégoire recalls, his father joked that his favorite aperitif, Ricard, was yellow like Grégoire.

Grégoire recalls watching TV news reports of the American war in Vietnam, when enormous Viet Cong body counts were announced "every day, every day." This "was the time of Rambo," and Grégoire viewed the American soldiers as the "good guys" who "killed the vermin." Thinking back to how he felt as an adolescent watching these news reports, he says, "I was ashamed of the Vietnamese," who were "just peasants in black pajamas. I identified with the Americans," who were like the television cowboys who "I adored."

Both Grégoire and Henri straightened out their lives, they said, first in the French military and then in government jobs. But it was not always easy. When Henri took the examination for a promotion in the post office system, he did extremely well on the written component three times in a row, but he never got the promotion. He finally realized that a member of the selection panel considered his "*faciès asiatique*" a "disqualifying criterion, since the position involved contact with the public." When Henri asked the man why he had given him such a low grade on the in-person component of the promotion exam, the man responded, "You should understand that the administration in France needs to remain White. It's illogical for you to think otherwise, for you to attempt to gain that position."

Henri also faced bias while overseeing children's soccer. Although he was certified to be a trainer, he was repeatedly turned down. "It was always the same thing." He'd be told, "Yes, well, you have the head of a Viet Cong. That will never work with children." And when Henri served as a referee at soccer matches, the kids would call out, "What's with this? Hey, *chinetouque*, what's with this?" After calling a penalty, he'd hear taunts from the sidelines like "Hey, how did your mother make someone like you? Are you sick? Do you have jaundice or what?"

Despite these obstacles, both brothers got married (Henri to a "French" woman, Grégoire to a Vietnamese woman), raised

children, and pursued careers in the civil service. While these years generally went well, some problems with bias persisted, even within their families. Henri says that his son has a “European *faciès*”—three of his four grandparents are “French”—as well as a French first and last name. To maintain appearances, his son would not allow Henri to walk him to elementary school because, Henri explained, “he didn’t want his friends to see me, with my Chinese face.” Only his son’s (White) mother would be permitted to do this.

Both Grégoire and Henri reported that attitudes toward Asians in France have improved in recent decades. “When I was a child,” Grégoire said, “a Chinese person was someone who hadn’t evolved. Now China is a rich country, the Japanese are rich. They are as evolved as us. Now we play on the same court. It’s completely different.” Similarly, Henri reports that people now think that Asians “don’t make noise; they’re seen as very intelligent.”

At the end of his interview, Grégoire waxed philosophical. He likes to think “positively” and “wants to forget” the insults he may hear even today. Looking back on his nearly seventy years of life, with his happy marriage (he and his wife certainly seemed happy at the Sunday cookout), his children, and his grandchildren, Grégoire said, “I’ve had a good run in life. I’m very happy.”

Mathieu. Mathieu, my Airbnb host and Grégoire’s son, has lived a different life from his father and uncle. By the late 1980s and 1990s, when Mathieu was growing up in France, Vietnam’s status as a colony was long in the past. So, too, were Vietnam’s war of independence with France, and even its war with the United States. In the meantime, the status of East Asian countries, first Japan and then China and Korea, had risen on the global stage, along with their growing economies.

Now thirty-eight, Mathieu was born in the same French city where he lives today. He grew up in a multiethnic neighborhood with Maghrebis, Whites, and a few Blacks, and even though “many people” called him “the Chinese kid” because of his “different *faciès*,” he says, it was “just a joke.” He experienced no prejudice at the nearby university he attended. Mathieu has “never doubted” that he is completely French.

Having received a degree in physical education, Mathieu now runs his own business, training children in Tae Kwon Do, the

Korean martial arts sport. After dating a Maghrebi woman for a number of years, he married Kana, who had come to France from Japan when she was in her twenties. Mathieu has traveled to Vietnam a number of times, becoming more comfortable there with each visit. Still, his sense of being French “hasn’t changed,” he says. “In fact, it might have been reinforced.”

Almost alone among the interviewees, Mathieu expressed an ideological approach to French identity. As far as he is concerned, if “you see yourself as French, speak French, and adhere to the values that underlie the language, then you’re French.” Being French is thus entirely distinct from physical appearance, religion, birthplace, or even where one was raised. I asked Mathieu whether the millions of people who subscribe to the National Front party’s slogan “France for the French” would agree; indeed, whether they’d even consider him French. “No, they aren’t talking about me,” he responded, even though he has spent his whole life in France. But Mathieu is not troubled by this since they’re “a minority that just shouts.”

Rémy. Rémy is unrelated to Mathieu and his family. A friend of an Airbnb host in a city elsewhere in France, he lives in a handsome house near the village where he grew up. As soon as we arrived, his wife ushered us into his study, which is filled with memorabilia and photos from the career I would soon hear about. Rémy looked to be about seventy, but he is extremely vigorous, bursting with energy, and he speaks in a loud, authoritative voice. His wife served us a tray of beverages and left the room. The interview began.

Rémy’s father grew up in colonial Vietnam in a well-to-do, French-oriented Vietnamese family. In 1940, his father left for France to work as an interpreter between Vietnamese factory workers and the factory’s management in a small French village. There, he met and married the daughter of a local “French” farmer and had three children, including Rémy. His family lived in a tiny house near the factory. (After the interview, Rémy gave me a tour of the village, pointing out his childhood home and the remains of the factory.) His father consciously adopted French values and customs, including Catholicism, and Rémy was raised to be “a true French person.”

In 1955, Rémy’s father contracted tuberculosis and was placed in a sanatorium, while the rest of the family was put in preven-

toriums. Rémy was released in 1957, but this was premature: he, too, had contracted tuberculosis, so he was also put in a sanatorium. Both of his parents died. The family had been “smashed apart,” he recalls, and “each person had to fend for himself.” Rémy was thirteen.

After he was released from the sanatorium, Rémy threw himself into judo, diving, and other sports to demonstrate that he was neither contagious nor a weakling. Still ridiculed as “*chinetogue*,” he jumped at the chance to join the military. His “French” grandmother told him, “After you’ve done your military service, they won’t be able to treat you like the little Chinese boy.” At his army intake, he recalls, “I hid my malady, I never said I was tubercular.” He served as a commando-parachutist in the army.

“I’m completely French,” Rémy said more than once during the interview. Even as a teenager, he refused to accept insults: to anyone who might call him “little Chinaman,” he stood ready to “break his face.” This didn’t entirely do away with the “racism” of others. Teachers “intentionally mispronounced” his (rather simple) Vietnamese last name. Later in life, if he was called “Chinese” he responded in his unaccented French, “I served France, I served in the army. Did you serve France?”

After completing his army service, Rémy married a “French” woman from his village and got his career underway. He joined the National Police and moved up, becoming a combat instructor at the National Police training academy. He also became an expert in martial arts, including judo (in which he earned a black belt), Tae Kwon Do, and boxing. During the following years, he was able to gain several promotions because, he said, promotions were based “on exams, not the color of one’s skin.” Ultimately, Rémy became head of the entire academy’s physical training program. In 1979, he had the honor of preparing the National Police for its first-ever participation in the Bastille Day parade along the Champs-Élysées in Paris. By the time I interviewed him, he had retired to the comfortable home where we met for the interview.

Rémy ended the interview with an anecdote. Recently, he and his grandson were watching the Bastille Day parade on television when the national anthem came on. “We stood up and put our hands on our hearts, even though there was no one there to see us. It was just him and me there.” Rémy concluded, “That’s

the message I pass along to my grandson: this is our country; these are our values.”

Yuka and Emily. Yuka and Emily, who live in different cities and do not know each other, have nearly identical backgrounds. Each is about thirty. Each grew up in China, then came to France to study engineering, and remained in France. At this point their lives went in different directions. Yuka immersed herself in French life, became fluent in French, married a “French” man, and now lives like the “French” people in her small town. Emily, by contrast, bore down on her engineering studies and, since her graduation, has held a succession of highly technical positions in the corporate world. She has been successful, but in the meantime has had limited contact with French people outside of her studies and her job. Emily is not fully fluent in French.

Yuka grew up in Shanghai. “From early childhood,” she says, “I wanted to live abroad.” After three years at a Chinese university, she moved to France, where she threw herself into intensive language courses, lived with an older French couple, and socialized with French people. At the university where she studied engineering, Yuka became friends with the French students around her and had French boyfriends, including the man who later became her husband. When she and her husband visited his family for their first Christmas together, Yuka says she “drank a lot of red wine with his grandfather.” By the end of the evening, his grandfather declared that though “I have a Chinese face, I was really French.”

After she got her first degree, Yuka switched to biology with the goal of becoming a veterinarian—“it was always my dream to work with animals”—but this didn’t work out. In the meantime, she and her husband had a son, settled in a quiet town near the university where they had met, and adopted five cats and a dog. In her work, Yuka turned to “something completely different,” hand-sewing children’s clothing and selling the clothes online. Although heavily accented, her French is excellent.

Continually upbeat—her enthusiasm didn’t flag during any of our conversations—Yuka has never felt bias in France. Today, people in town recognize her as she walks the family dog, goes out with her son, and bikes around town. She feels that she fits in this community. “If there’s a problem, we talk it over.” Being called “the little Chinese girl,” although a common occurrence,

has never bothered her. Nor does the slogan “France for the French.” “It’s dumb, that’s all.” She thinks that the National Front political party uses it to prey on less educated people, many of whom “are having problems or may be out of work.” Yuka feels herself to be neither French nor Chinese, but that doesn’t matter. “Why should there be any borders?” she asks.⁷

Emily followed a different path in France. On the advice of her introductory French teacher, she took a European name—her Chinese name is Shihan Zhang—but she was more interested in technical studies than in joining the social life around her. Emily quickly earned two master’s degrees in engineering and began working at a French infrastructure company. Since then, she has mostly devoted herself to work. Although her French is still limited, she experiences few language problems because her job involves “lots of numbers.” Feeling “well-respected” and “well-integrated” at her company, she now leads the technical team of an entire project. She did not report workplace bias. If anything, she said, she feels a “positive discrimination” because “large companies need to hire foreigners to show that they are international” and to “hire women” to rectify the low percentage of female engineers in their workforce. Being Chinese has also helped, she thinks, since people think that Chinese people “work hard.”

Emily lives on her own in a high-rise apartment building in the city. During a pizza dinner nearby, she wondered aloud whether she should keep working as an engineer. She has never studied anything else or done anything else. And at the end of her interview, she also wondered about her decision to come to France. Since her arrival in France, China has made such progress in civil engineering that “by now or soon” it “will no longer need France.” If she were to return to China in a year or two, she fears she’d be viewed as “incompetent.”

Paul. I met Paul at the downtown apartment where he lives on his own. He was eager to be interviewed, so, within minutes of my arrival, we sat down on his living room sofa, and I turned on the recorder.

Paul’s life has been marked by the radical split between his East Asian appearance and his French identity. Born in South Korea of Korean parents, he was adopted from an orphanage at the age of four by a highly educated “French” couple who brought him to France. Paul grew up in the Latin Quarter of

Paris, where his parents raised him to be French. He says he felt both “100 percent French” and “White” even as a child. “It was only when I saw my reflection in a shop window that I realized that I was different from the others.” He attended an elite Parisian high school, where his “high-quality French” was perfected.

After graduating from high school, Paul joined the French army, where he trained to be a helicopter pilot. He married a “French” woman and had two children with her, though they are now divorced. Now forty-three, Paul remains an army helicopter pilot.

Paul has no doubt about his identity. “When it comes down to it, me, I’m a White in my head. I hang around with Whites. I have very, very few friends who are Asian.” And once people hear his name (“I have a French family name and first name”) and hear his unaccented French, he thinks they see him as French. In any case, he says, current French attitudes toward Asians are far from critical:

In French people’s minds, Asians are well-integrated. They’re more easily accepted than Maghrebis and Africans. They are discreet and respect other people’s cultures. Racism against Asians is very, very, very rare. French people have nothing against Asians.

Although he reports “no problems with prejudice,” Paul says that there are more “racists” in the military than in other lines of work. Colleagues openly joke that he’s a North Korean spy. Paul laughs to show that these jokes don’t bother him, believing that “mocking yourself is the best defense.” Rather than living in the small town near his army base, he chose a nearby city he described as “cosmopolitan,” with people “of foreign ethnicities.” This was where we met.

At the end of the interview, Paul summed up his feelings: “My parents adopted me as a young child, but I also adopted French culture, 100 percent. In my soul I’m totally French.”

Interviewees of Western or South Asian Origin

While the interviewees who trace their origin to non-Arab countries in Western or South Asia—Iran, Turkey, India, and Pakistan—are diverse in their cultural backgrounds, the perceived

commonality of their *faciès* has proven pivotal to their lives in France. All of the interviewees in this group have dark or “bronzed” skin, black hair, and brown eyes, and yet none of them reported being mistaken for Maghrebi or Arab. Thus, while these interviewees share a *faciès* that is immediately recognizable as distinct from the *faciès* of “French” people, it is also recognizably distinct from the *faciès* of the (much disdained) Maghrebis. This physical distinctiveness, which these interviewees consistently pointed out, is central to how they feel they are seen by “French” people.

Vincent, who was profiled earlier in this chapter, falls into this category. The other interviewees in this group are Shayan, Fatih, Usman, and Nima.

Shayan. Although both Shayan and his wife Christine have spent their lives in the same city where I visited them, they have different social identities. Christine comes from a longtime “French” family with, as Shayan put it, a “*Français de souche*” family name. A “brunette with green eyes,” Christine grew up Catholic. By contrast, Shayan’s parents came to France from Iran when they were young adults, and they have an Iranian family name. Shayan was raised as a Muslim. Describing his own appearance, he told me, “My hair is black, my eyes are brown, and I have a dark complexion.”

Now thirty-three, Shayan spent much of his interview describing how he had gained acceptance among “French” people. His story began with a family where the process of *intégration* was underway even before his birth:

From the time I was born, my parents never spoke Farsi with their children. It was French, French, French all the time. Internally, they thought, “I want my children to succeed in life, and their life will be in France.” As a result, I don’t speak Farsi and my French has no accent at all. There’s never been a moment when I felt anything other than French.

And while people thought he had a non-European origin, he was not tainted by the “negative connotation” of being seen as Maghrebi because he does not have “a Maghrebi *faciès*.” (Although Iran is an overwhelmingly Muslim country, only a small percentage of Iranians are Arab.) Instead, he said, “I have an international face.” Because French people are unfamiliar with Ira-

nians, Shayan thinks, they couldn't tell what he was. "I seemed like a bit of everything: Spanish, Italian, Indian, Lebanese."

Shayan "dressed like the Maghrebis" and "hung around" with them in junior high school, but this changed in high school. He began to distance himself from the Maghrebi kids because he didn't want "to be associated with a community that was seen badly." He changed the style of his clothing and paid attention to his speech. To his mind, many Maghrebis born in France "aren't French" because they "don't care about" integrating themselves into French society. By contrast, he said, "I'm in France, so I speak French, a French that's rich, that's beautiful, a French that's well-written and well-spoken."

Religion was also an issue. Though Shayan once considered himself both Muslim and French, he began to move away from Islam in high school. French people, he found, "don't distinguish between Muslims and Maghrebis." By the time he finished college and entered the business world, he had abandoned all Muslim dietary rules. Shayan is now a manager at a midsize French company. At business dinners, "it's difficult to integrate yourself if you don't take part." When a client starts talking about what wine to order, "you can't just drink a Perrier." This hasn't posed a problem for him.

Shayan and Christine got married a year before the interview. While they both wish to raise their children as "totally French" and give them French first names, they disagree about the last name to choose. Christine thinks that they should have her French last name. While Shayan recognizes that carrying his Iranian last name could be a "constraint" for them, he feels that having a French last name wouldn't make a big difference. If their son (he took the example of a son) secured a job interview in part because of the French first and last name on his résumé, his "dark complexion, black hair, and brown eyes" would be evident at the interview. A "racist" would still reject him in favor of a less-qualified "blond with blue eyes," Shayan said, or even "a Pole," because that person would be seen as "a true Frenchman."

Shayan's job interview scenario suggests an enduring limit to acceptance. Even after abandoning the Muslim practices of his upbringing, learning to speak and live in completely French ways, marrying a "French" woman from a longtime "French" family, and then raising their children to be "totally French,"

Shayan anticipates that their children could face discrimination because, though *métis*, they would still not have a “French” physical appearance.

Fatih. Fatih and I met in the afternoon at the small but modern apartment he rented out. He was dressed in crisp shorts and a pastel Ralph Lauren polo shirt, appearing athletic and confident, just like the junior corporate manager that he turned out to be. A far more complex person soon emerged.

Fatih's interview went into the evening and continued the next morning. His parents were Muslims from Turkey. Now thirty-three, Fatih was only three years old when he and his mother joined his father to live in a village in France. He valued both Turkish and French ways while growing up—“I didn't need to choose between the two”—even though “French” people could be “cruel” when he declined to eat pork. Fatih also recalls his “frustration and anger” and a “feeling of injustice” when, as a teenager, he was stopped by policemen because, he believed, they saw him a “foreigner.”

Academically gifted, Fatih was placed in the science track of a high school in a nearby town, where the great majority of students were “French.” “In high school, there were teachers who had a very false image of foreigners and were sometimes very mean.” He came to realize “that the world is difficult, that there are barriers,” and that he'd need a “passport for leaving.” For him, that passport “was a diploma.”

Fatih studied mechanical engineering at a regional university that was “very French.” Like the few other “foreigners” there, Fatih says, he had problems with faculty members. One extremist whom he had seen with a right-wing political group was assigned as his mentor for a year-long project. Although this professor “validated” the assumptions underlying the project Fatih planned to conduct and approved his progress “at each stage,” after almost nine months of work, Fatih discovered that the assumptions were erroneous. When he reported this to the professor, the professor just “laughed.”

Fatih finished his engineering program, but then switched to international business management. “I met people and had experiences I'd never have had.” This included learning a number of languages, including English, Spanish, and Russian. After getting a master's degree in marketing, Fatih gravitated to the

large city where he lives today in order to work in a more “international” environment. But even there he feels limited. A superior suggested that he change his name to something “simpler, something easier to remember.”

Fatih believes that he doesn’t have a “Maghrebi look,” and he consciously cultivates a European physical appearance. Smoothing his hair’s natural curliness and keeping his skin less “bronzed” than before, he says, he now looks “Mediterranean,” perhaps “Greek, Spanish, Italian.” He wears “designer brands for their quality and cut.” Still single, he dates a wide range of women.

Religious issues are now complicated in France, Fatih thinks, because “religion has become very politicized.” Some people say that “if you’re a Muslim, you can’t be French.” Fortunately for his business career, Fatih drinks alcohol, though he still abstains from pork.

Near the end of the interview, Fatih summed up a life of feeling, at his core, rejected by the people around him. The gulf between how he thinks about himself and how he is treated is deeply discouraging:

I grew up in France; it’s as if I were born here. I have friends here, the culture. It’s hurtful that I’m from here, but people don’t really accept me. I feel rejected even in my own country. It’s frustrating. Sometimes I’m depressed by this, though more often I’m angry.

Still, there’s nowhere to go: “I feel French; I belong here. My life is here.”

Usman. I visited Usman and his family at their house in a handsome suburb, up a long and winding road with flowers spilling out of every front garden. Now forty-seven, he is a co-owner of a high-tech start-up, and his “French” wife is a historian. They have two energetic and likable sons. My two days with Usman and his family were packed with spirited conversation, meals with him and his wife, trips around town, and, of course, his interview.

Usman grew up a world away from where he is now, in a remote, devoutly Muslim area in northwestern Pakistan. The son of a non-believing professor and personally unreligious, Usman nonetheless maintained appearances by praying at the local mosque on Fridays. He attended college elsewhere in Pakistan,

got an engineering degree, and then worked at an international firm in Islamabad, the country's capital. When he was twenty-three, Usman was offered a scholarship for advanced study in France. Although he spoke no French and had never been outside Pakistan, he seized the opportunity. In France, he got a master's degree and doctorate in telecommunications. Since then, Usman's fast-moving career has brought him into contact with high-tech companies and tech specialists in the United States, Israel, and elsewhere in Europe.

Much has also happened socially during the twenty-plus years he has been in France. In the beginning, Usman says he felt "different from, and I'm not afraid to say this now, inferior to Europeans." Pakistanis are inferior to Europeans "at least in our perspective." The European students around him "seemed a lot like each other," particularly in "skin color and habits." They seemed to be at a higher "level of culture." Even though "the Italians and Spaniards" in his French class were "as much foreigners as me," Usman felt like a "true foreigner" and "less legitimate" than the European students.

Usman had to deal with the "massive cultural barrier" he sensed between himself and the European students. He also felt that "it was normal for the others to reject me." When someone is an outsider, Usman explained, "there's the us and there's the them. It's a sort of combat. When you go somewhere, you're not yet legitimate, the others are more at home than you." These feelings continued even though he experienced no outright rejection, either at the university or in town.

For Usman, the goal was "to arrive at being at home in their home." To do this, he "made an extraordinary effort" to "erase all differences" between himself and the European students. While he couldn't change his skin color, he says, he did everything possible "to be like the others," indeed, "to be more French than the French" (literally, *plus royaliste que le roi*, that is, "more royalist than the king"). He learned French, of course, but he also changed his style of clothing and learned how to dance, something he had not done in Pakistan. He drank alcohol and threw himself into romantic relationships with European women. Before long, he had succeeded in integrating himself into French society. Indeed, many of his friends, he recalls, "said I was too much like the Europeans."

In his physical appearance, Usman has been mistaken for an Indian, Brazilian, or Mexican, but never for a Maghrebi. He has also never been turned away from a bar or nightclub, even though, on the two or three occasions he went with Maghrebis, his Maghrebi companions were not allowed in. People don't think of him as a Muslim, either. Usman isn't surprised. Darker than a European, he still doesn't have the *faciès*, accent, or name of a Maghrebi or, more generally, of an Arab. And because he drinks alcohol, eats pork when others do, and never prays, nothing in his behavior suggests that he's Muslim.

Today, Usman doesn't "identify as French," but he doesn't need to. His wife is "French," he says, and "my children are French. People like me don't need to feel different and inferior." Indeed, Usman now feels "a little superior" to most French people. "Over time, I've established myself here, I've integrated myself. I've succeeded in certain ways. I'm more accomplished." Economically, at least, France is a "tired" country. Perhaps one day, Usman says, he and his family will move to a country where his technical and entrepreneurial skills can be put to better use.

Nima. Nima and I got to know each other at his favorite restaurant a couple of days before my stay at his Airbnb apartment. We spoke about his life, his politics, and my project for more than two hours. Later that week, we conducted his interview at the apartment, digging more deeply into his life.

By his own account, Nima has always charted his own course. Born in 1949, he grew up in a middle-class family in Tehran, Iran, when oil exports were making the country wealthy. After getting his college degree, he worked as a journalist at the country's progressive, high-circulation newspaper, and, as a Marxist, he was active in left-wing causes. "It was a good life." Nima never thought of leaving Iran until he won a scholarship for graduate education in France. At twenty-seven, he moved to a small city in France, where he studied sociology.

Although Nima had planned to return to Iran after getting his doctorate, the 1979 Iranian revolution forced a change. He couldn't return because he had been a journalist and left-wing political activist in Iran. Having already received the two levels of a French master's degree and started work on his doctoral dissertation, Nima decided to keep the dissertation unfinished in order to maintain his student visa. Meanwhile, the Iranian

embassy in France refused to renew his passport because he was “a non-believer, a revolutionary, an undesirable person.”

Nima had to forge a life in France. By the time of our interview, he had been living in the same French city for more than forty years. He had married an Iranian woman there, had two children, and gotten divorced. Since giving up his studies, he has run various small businesses, including a garage, a butcher shop, a food store, and a bakery. “I’ve always worked. I’ve had employees and trained apprentices. That’s my contribution.”

Nima has almost never encountered overt bias. Early on, when a small shopkeeper brusquely told him, “You’re no longer in the jungle,” he thought that the shopkeeper must be having a bad day. “It didn’t hurt me.” There he was, in a rather small French city that was more like a “village,” and the “jungle” he’d come from was the large, cosmopolitan capital of an oil-rich country. As a Marxist, he doesn’t feel racism as a hurtful rejection, but rather as a tool used by the dominant class to maintain fissures among those they dominate.

Over the years, Nima learned to speak the French “of someone educated.” He has also found it easy to conform to French behavioral norms—a style of dressing, a way of interacting with others—because they don’t substantially differ from the norms of educated people in Tehran. He’s done all this to avoid being “marginalized,” but not to be integrated:

I don’t like this term “*intégration*,” since it always has “assimilation” as a hidden agenda. I don’t want anyone to assimilate into the dominant social environment. Each person should have his own personality, his own character, his own historical, cultural, and familial bonds. Thus, for me, *intégration* is a bad way of talking, with dominance as a hidden agenda.

Having always been, in his words, a “producer” rather than a “user,” Nima doesn’t feel beholden to France. Recently, when he was criticizing the political situation in the country, the person with whom he was talking said “Don’t spit on the hand that feeds you.” Nima rejected this outright: “France has not fed me. I have fed France.”

Those who declare “France for the French,” who speak “ideologically” of “the White race, the country of the Gauls, blah, blah,” only make Nima angry. These are “inhumane ways of thinking”

that some people use to “justify their rejection of others” and to assert their “rights” over them.

NEITHER MAGHREBI NOR BLACK: RECURRING ISSUES

While the people discussed in this chapter come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and have pursued different lives in France, their interviews show that they deal with many of the same issues relating to acceptance and discrimination.

Acceptance in French Society

As seen in chapters 1 and 2, Maghrebi and Black interviewees reported stereotypes among “French” people regarding their purported inferiority, antisocial behavior, and backwardness. They are thought to live profoundly non-French lives in run-down housing projects in the poor *banlieues*. Even though none of the Maghrebi and Black people I interviewed conform to these stereotypes, many reported a lack of acceptance among “French” people.

The people belonging to the third category of interviewees spoke of a different experience, in large part because they are not seen as Maghrebi or Black. Interviewees of Western or South Asian origin made a point of saying that, despite their dark or “bronzed” skin, black hair, and brown eyes, they are not mistaken for Maghrebis or, more generally, Arabs. In Fatih’s words, he is “fortunate not to look Arab or African, since people are meaner toward them.” Similarly, the Asians are not mistaken for Maghrebis, and no one in this third group is mistaken for being Black. There are enormous advantages to not being seen as Maghrebi or Black in France. The demeaning stereotypes of these groups are inapplicable.

Then there is the issue of religion. As was the case with the Maghrebis, almost all (four out of five) of the interviewees of Western or South Asian background trace their roots to countries that are overwhelmingly Muslim. Indeed, their countries of origin—Iran (Shayan and Nima), Pakistan (Usman), and Turkey (Fatih)—are known for a politicized, often anti-Western strain of

Islam. But despite this, these interviewees reported that Islam plays little or no role in their interactions with “French” people. And while their behavior in social settings does not suggest that they are practicing Muslims (though Fatih declines pork even as he drinks wine), this does not explain why they feel little or no discomfort among “French” people. After all, Maghrebis who are completely secular find that the very assumption that they are Muslim is unsettling for “French” people. Ayoub, a completely non-religious Maghrebi, feels that he is being “tested” each time he is offered alcohol or pork.

The Asian interviewees reported that Asians have a generally positive reputation in French society today. To be sure, they fall within a distinct classification, hence the label “Asian.” And those who are old enough to have experienced the France of the 1950s through the 1970s were ridiculed at the time as “*chinetiques*,” a term for Chinese people, who were thought to be “nearly savages” by the French at the time. But the same interviewees report an extraordinary evolution in the stereotype of Asians in France. According to them, Asians are now seen as well-behaved, smart, and hard-working. They are also viewed “very positively,” Grégoire said, because they “don’t make noise and are seen as very intelligent.” The younger generation of Asian interviewees (Mathieu, Paul, Yuka, and Emily) have only known this positive image.

The emotional advantages of not being Maghrebi or Black are considerable. Speaking of Maghrebis, Grégoire said, “People mock their parents, their families. They suffer. I put myself in the place of a young Maghrebi. He doesn’t feel pride, he doesn’t feel positive.” Blacks may also feel badly about themselves. Grégoire recalled seeing billboard and television appeals to feed the starving children of Africa: “There were these campaigns against hunger in Africa. The children there were emaciated. Automatically, a Black is someone who’s hungry. It must be very hard for Blacks in France.”

Although now seen positively, the interviewees of this third category are thought to be similar to Maghrebis and Blacks in other ways. They are seen as having a non-European *faciès* and, with that, non-European origins and associated behavioral traits. Many of them also have non-European last names, and some have non-European first names. Virtually all recognize that

many “French” people do not see them as truly French. Some of them go further. Although Vincent and Fatih grew up in France, they both feel they are seen as “foreigners.”

Discrimination

Just as the interviewees of this third category feel a greater degree of acceptance among “French” people, they reported less discrimination than the Maghrebi and Black interviewees.⁸ But discrimination is not absent from their lives. Vincent and Fatih both experienced such incidents during their education. Fatih spoke of the fate of other so-called “foreigners” at school: though some of these students were “very strong, very gifted,” they were undermined by “teachers or administrators who did what they shouldn’t have done.” And those who made it to university found that “certain professors intentionally put a stick in the wheel” of their efforts. Many dropped out.⁹

A few interviewees also spoke about mistreatment by government employees. Frequent police stops—a major issue among young Maghrebi and Black men—were also a problem for Fatih. Even Usman, a well-dressed professional, has been treated differently at passport control. Arriving at a French airport with a British colleague, he alone was drawn aside and questioned. The lesson for him was plain: “I have a French passport, but not a French face.”

As with Maghrebis and Blacks, the most frequently cited type of discrimination involves employment. While Vincent’s Indian last name did not stand in the way of getting a job, it was apparently a problem when he sought a promotion. As he put it, there’s “the facade and then there’s what people really think.” Henri feels that his *faciès* blocked his path to promotion three times in a row. But despite the milder employment discrimination reported by people of this third category of interviewees, all of them have gravitated to the same occupational niches as the Maghrebis and Blacks: information technology (Vincent, Shayan) or other marketable fields (Usman, Emily, Fatih); running their own businesses (Nima, Mathieu, Yuka); or a career in the government civil service (Grégoire, Henri, Rémy, Paul).

Fatih saw how discrimination works from the inside when he served on a hiring committee at his company. “There’s a lot of

prejudice," he said. "Recruiting depends a lot on appearances. There's always a barrier, especially for positions with direct contact with clients." And even if someone who is not "French" is hired, he added, "it takes a long time for others to accept you."

Henri—who, decades ago, was told point-blank that he could not be promoted to a customer-contact position because of his appearance—provided an overview of today's situation for Asians:

If I were looking for a job now, I'd still have problems, but fewer, perhaps because Asians are seen better in France these days. It's easier for Asians, not like for a Black or someone with an Arab *faciès*. Even one with a French name, it would be hard for him.

To Be Seen as "French"

As with Maghrebis, people of this third category can start being seen as "French" after a generation or two, if they wish to, as long as later generations look European, have European names, and, for people of Muslim origin, put aside dietary restrictions. Henri's son exemplifies this process. Henri grew up in France, and because of his "French" father, is *métis* and has a French family name. He married a "French" woman, and so his son is three-quarters "French" in physical appearance. This allowed Henri's son to present himself as "French" like the other students at his elementary school—but only if he was not seen with his father, who has, in Henri's own words, a "Chinese face."¹⁰

Similarly, Vincent spoke about his son, who has Vincent's non-European last name and is a mixture between Vincent and his "*Française de souche*" ex-wife in his appearance. As far as Vincent can tell, this has brought his son only part of the way to acceptance. Vincent's son needs to make "less of an effort" than he does. Although his son is the fourth generation in the family to be French citizens, Vincent said, "it takes time" to be accepted.

Finally, Shayan spoke about his future children with his "French" wife. Even if they raise their children to be completely French and give their children his wife's last name, they will have a discernible non-European physical appearance. Shayan fears that discrimination may result. In sum, the transformation

process of becoming French—not French in your own mind, but French in the eyes of “French” people—is incremental.

This said, at least three of the Asian interviewees feel that they have won the right to be seen as French. With half of his physical appearance being “French,” Rémy points to his life history in support of this claim: he was born in France and raised to be purely French, served as a commando in the French army, and had a distinguished career in the National Police. He will confront anyone who suggests he’s not French. Paul, who has a fully French name and was raised by his “French” adoptive parents to be exclusively French, feels that he is “100 percent French,” even “White.” People on the street may not see him as French, but he believes that they would change their mind once they learn his name and hear his unaccented language. Finally, there is Mathieu, who has spent his entire life in France, is *métis*, has a fully French name, and proudly adheres to French values. But even for these interviewees—Rémy, Paul, and Mathieu—a broader social reality remains. Each one of them knows that they are not French in the eyes of millions of French people simply because they do not have a European *faciès*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONALITY — VINCENT VS. USMAN

Comparing the profiles of Vincent and Usman in this chapter can be confounding. On the surface, the two men seem similar. Both are well established in their communities and professions, live in handsome homes, and fully participate in French society. The Vincent known to his “French” guests at our holiday lunch must be the same person whom I saw then: an expansive host serving characteristically French food and wine, full of good cheer and ready to banter about any topic. During my stay at his home, Usman was much the same.

Still, their backgrounds differ markedly. Vincent’s grandparents were part of the French-oriented colonial elite, and his father was an officer in the French army. A third-generation French citizen, Vincent has always lived in France among “French” people, and he has worked with the same major French company in the same French town for the last twenty-five years.

By contrast, Usman grew up in Pakistan, a relatively poor country that was once a British colony. He did not arrive in France until early adulthood, and then only with rudimentary French and a feeling of cultural inferiority. Usman promptly abandoned everything from his own world, remaking himself as quickly as possible to be “more French than the French.” While this was successful, he still speaks with an accent.

And yet, of the two, Vincent is the one who is so unsure of his place in French society that he stops at amber lights to avoid being called a “dirty foreigner.” Vincent is the one who is always trying to make a “good impression” on “French” people, the one who feels he must show that, unlike what “they say about foreigners,” he contributes to France. Meanwhile, Usman has no doubt that he fits into French society. Confident, even brash, Usman feels “a little superior” to most French people.¹¹

This book’s review of issues faced by each of the three groups of interviewees, spanning chapters 1–3, is now complete. It is time to shift focus to issues that cut across these groups. First, among all types of interviewees, how pervasive are feelings of inferiority? How deep are the fears of rejection? Second, what kinds of people have the interviewees of all categories pursued for romantic relationships, marriage, or long-term partnerships? Does a characteristically “French” person hold a particular allure for the interviewees? Finally, among interviewees of all categories of people, what is it like to be a Muslim in France? These broad-based issues will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

NOTES

1. See the introduction to this book for more on “readability.”
2. The one exception is Florence, who came from Colombia as a young adult. She is not discussed in this ethnography for two reasons: because she chose to speak about painful family and gender issues throughout her life rather than the issues central to this book, and because many people assume she is from elsewhere in Europe (specifically Spain or Portugal). At one of the few moments when she spoke about her place in French society, Florence said that people “don’t have prejudices toward me like they have with Arabs.”

3. The actual number is higher because, in keeping with French legal constraints, data collection went back no further than the generation of immigrants' children (see Tribalat 2015).
4. Just as Black is a social construct, as noted in chapter 2—"[b]eing black is neither an essence nor a culture, but the outcome of a social relationship" (Ndiaye 2008: 69)—there is no Asian essence or unified culture. The family origins of people seen as Asian span a swath of East Asian countries with more than two billion inhabitants and a vast array of cultural traditions.
5. Chuang (2021: 9) points to the relative paucity of studies about Asians in France. While there have been many studies of racism and discrimination, he says, relating to people "from the overseas territories or from postcolonial immigration (Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa)," few have focused on people originating from South and East Asia.
6. While "*chinetique*" initially referred to someone from China, the term has been applied to anyone with an Asian physical appearance. It "is often used in an abusive way for people who have slanted eyes" (Chine informations. n.d.).
7. The morning after our interview, Yuka and her husband asked about my project. As we spoke, it appeared that her husband hadn't thought much about issues confronted by people of non-European origin in France. He also had little sense of France's colonial history; as previously noted, the history of French colonialism is "patently neglected" in France's national school curriculum (Bancel and Blanchard 2017b: 161). He did not know that Vietnam had once been a French colony or that Vietnamese people had fought a war of independence against the French. He had only a vague sense of France's history in Algeria or its war of independence.
8. The interviewees' experiences are consistent with the statistics generated by the monumental Trajectories and Origins study (see Beauchemin et al. 2010: 2 and Figures 1 and 2).
9. See Aeberhardt et al. 2015: 585, as discussed in chapter 2, concerning the economic consequences of "teachers' conscious and unconscious stereotypes" about such students.
10. Three French social scientists argue that the concept of "passing," so familiar to Americans, could be usefully employed to describe this process in France (Bosa, Pagis, and Trépiéd 2019).
11. A comparison between Shayan and Fatih, men with similar life histories who are both profiled in this chapter, also illustrates the importance of personality. Why is Shayan sure that the more he lives like a French person, the more he'll be accepted, while Fatih is equally sure that, no matter how much he conforms to French norms, he will always be seen as fundamentally different?