FOUR

FEELING INFERIOR, FEARING REJECTION

As interviewees recounted throughout this book, simply having a non-European *faciès* subjects a person to stereotypes, bias, and discrimination from many "French" people. But how do the interviewees feel about themselves? Have they internalized these demeaning attitudes and behaviors? Do they feel inferior to "French" people? Do they fear being rejected by them? While these issues have already been discussed on an individual level, they have not been considered across the range of people interviewed for this book.

There is much to say. The first section of this chapter is an extended profile of Karim, showing the complexity and pain of one person's experience. This is followed by a discussion of a phenomenon that an interviewee called "colonialism in the head." The next section discusses the broader feelings of inferiority among many people who trace their origins to former colonies, together with the corresponding feelings of superiority they perceive on the part of many "French" people. The scope then broadens further. Among all the interviewees who originate from former colonies, how prevalent are feelings of inferiority or a fear of rejection? Who suffers from these emotions throughout their lives, and who grows out of them? The same questions are then asked about the handful of interviewees who originate from countries that had not been colonies. A striking contrast emerges between those with a colonial background and those without that history.[1]

This chapter concludes with a section about the interviewees who spoke about the stereotypes, bias, and discrimination they face, but who have not internalized those experiences; that is, people who do not feel inferior or fear rejection. How

do these people maintain their self-respect and navigate their way in France? How do they forge productive and mostly happy lives?

KARIM

Karim met me at the end of his workday and drove us to the small village where he lives on his own in an old farmer's cottage. Made of wooden logs and beams, his house is snug and homey. We turned to making dinner, with Karim manning the stovetop while I chopped vegetables at the kitchen table. The outcome, thanks to him, was the classic French beef stew *boeuf bourguignon*, the perfect dish for a cool fall evening.

We started the interview right after dinner. Now fifty, Karim began with an anecdote from his early childhood, when his family still lived in a Moroccan village. One day, a "small French construction entrepreneur who needed workmen" appeared and, after explaining his proposition, returned to France with the men who agreed to go, including Karim's father. His father was placed in a village in the middle of France. This worked out well—"he was the best mason in the area"— and his family joined him four years later. This included Karim, who was then seven, and his siblings. As time went on, other children were born in France.

As he thought back on those early years in France, Karim recalled, "We were the first foreigners in this little village. I learned later that there'd been a meeting to decide whether they'd accept us—this astonished me—and the village elder opened the door." Although "some of the neighbors weren't happy," they "didn't show it openly." At the Catholic school where the family's children were placed, the nuns "took special care of us" and permitted "no racist insults. It was a very good period."

"During my childhood," Karim continued, "I was lucky never to have had problems with direct, frontal racism." This might have been because he was tall, but a bigger factor was the nature of the community. "It was a small village, so there couldn't be any confrontation. That wasn't possible." Karim's family was "well integrated" into village life—"not just integrated, but assimilated," even "swallowed up." The children fit in (today, one

of his brothers is a volunteer firefighter in the village), and they left behind many of their parents' ways. Karim abandoned the Ramadan fast and other Muslim practices.

Unlike now, "when thirty or forty percent of the village votes for the National Front," Karim reports, and "people express insults openly, back then it was shameful to be racist." Still, he felt a condescending attitude from the people of the village: "We were inferior beings." It was as if these people thought, "They're pleasant, the little Moroccans, the little chihuahuas. They're like a nice pet who's inferior but not mean." He felt this attitude "in their looks, their words, their intonations, all that. We were marked by this."

During these years, Karim recalls being "polite, nice, and docile," and careful "always to make a good impression." This was not just an act. He was "timid" and, he says, "stayed in my corner, risking less and less." Most of all—here, Karim hesitated and cleared his throat—he "lacked confidence." I asked what he thought of himself at the time. "That I was less intelligent than the others, that I wasn't capable. This really sank in."

Karim was struck by the importance of these early years. "I've never thought about how that period marked the rest of my existence." Holding back tears, he pushed on: "I've always wondered whether I'm intelligent. I've had that doubt for a very long time." When he was growing up, apart from "my family and the nuns at school," the people around him, Karim recalls, "didn't give me confidence. It's for sure that this brought about a lot of the things that I am, that my brothers and sisters are."

Perhaps because his mother pushed her children to succeed—"All the time she'd say, 'You must work at school, you must be good at school to have a profession, to have a good life.'"—Karim went to middle school in a nearby village, then high school in a nearby town. This went well, though he felt a void at times: "Was there a moment when they taught my history to me? No, not one. Not at school. They only spoke of the history of France, of the French people, a lot of the lies that schools continue to perpetuate." The reality of France's "colonial history, of the countries, the people who were there" was never mentioned.

Karim completed some college courses, followed by technical studies. He financed his education with part-time and

summer jobs, where he encountered attitudes far from the inhibiting norms of the village in which he grew up. "In the world of manual work," he said, recalling the jobs he had at the time, "the racism was visible." His coworkers occasionally called him "the *bougnoule*,"[2] even "the *nègre*." His supervisors were "overtly racist."

At twenty-four, Karim got a diploma in information technology and was hired as a technician at a governmental research center. He has worked there ever since. He said little about this experience during the interview, even though it has occupied the past twenty-five years of his life, except to note the demographics of the research center: "I look around. There are loads of *Français de souche*, but not many people like me." This is especially the case in "very high positions." Still, Karim received a rarely awarded promotion four years ago, and he feels that bias did not enter into the process. "There was a panel of six people who didn't know each other. Racist stuff wouldn't have been accepted."

Turning to his love life, Karim said, "I'm attracted to women who are different from me." This started with "blondes." Over the years, he has dated a variety of women, but none of these women have been Maghrebi. His two long-term relationships, he made clear, were with "*Françaises de souche.*" He had children with each of these women, though he is now single again.

During the interview, Karim kept coming back to his efforts to fit in. He had done everything, he said: "I think in French ways, I have European values, I defend French causes." Karim is a French citizen, and, though he was born into a Muslim family, he has never been religious. He became, he said, "more French than the French," but even this wasn't enough:

> One day, you wake up and realize there's been a deception, you realize that French people won't ever truly accept you. It's a terrible thing to realize. It's unjust. It's unjust to have thought you had to be like that to belong, but in the end you realize that you'll never, ever belong. You remain forever different in the eyes of others.

And so, even though Karim says he has fully "assimilated" himself into French society, it has been a "false assimilation."

When all is said and done, "I know I'll never be accepted by the French."

This realization has eaten into his sense of identity. "If the question is whether I feel French, the answer is no. I feel like I have no country." He likened his place in France to someone who's been caught shoplifting at a store and knows that whenever he returns to the store he'll be under suspicion. And though Karim has never done anything wrong, he said, "I feel this way myself. It's necessary; it's normal. It's a feeling coming from other people. You feel it, you feel it inside. And so, you must always show that you are someone, that you have some value." Recently, he decided to focus less on trying to fit in:

> I'm becoming less French than the French; it's a waste of time and energy. I'm letting that fall away. Little by little, I'm paying attention to myself and other people. I'm involved in organizations that help migrants and at work with defending people like me who aren't researchers. A lot of things.

I asked Karim whether he thinks that he's seen as French. No, he responded, "I'm a foreigner. That's on my face." And because his physical appearance will never change, his place in France won't either: "A foreigner remains a foreigner forever." I asked whether it would be different for someone who, unlike him, was born in France. Not at all. Even though his younger brother was born in France, Karim said, "he's a foreigner." Indeed, even "my children are foreigners."

Struck by that last statement, I pointed to the photograph of a cheerful-looking boy on his mantelpiece. The boy is the youngest of his children, he explained. Like all of Karim's children, the oldest of whom is twenty-seven, the boy has spent his entire life in France, has a French first name and, he says, a "*Française de souche*" mother. Indeed, his son is "mostly White." So, I asked, isn't he French? Aren't all his children French? No, they can't be, because they "have kinky hair and are *métis*." They're all "foreigners." It's "impossible" to be French, he said, if you're not White.

Exhausted, we finished the interview at about midnight. When I asked Karim for a final comment, he said, "It's good, what you're doing. It's very, very interesting." The next morning, he drove me back to town and went to work.

"COLONIALISM IN THE HEAD"

An early interviewee, Tsiory, told me that he suffered from "colonialism in the head." While the psychosocial effects of colonialism have been extensively discussed since at least Frantz Fanon's 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Tsiory spoke about it as an experience that arose directly from his years growing up in Madagascar. As it turned out, Tsiory was far from alone: although only one interviewee mentioned Fanon or any of this literature,[3] quite a few spoke about their own experiences in similar terms.

I met Tsiory at his small but carefully maintained apartment in the *banlieue* of a city. Tsiory, who is physically slight, lives on his own. When we sat down at his dining room table, he was so quiet and uncomfortable that I thought that the interview would go nowhere. I was wrong. As soon as I turned on the recorder, a lifetime of emotionally raw experiences started pouring out. His account continued through the late evening and resumed after breakfast the next morning. When the interview was over, he returned to near-total silence.

Tsiory grew up in the capital of Madagascar, a former French colony off the southeast coast of Africa where some people, like him, are of Malayo-Indonesian rather than African origin. Now twenty-nine, he moved to France eight years ago to study information technology. After finishing both an undergraduate and a master's degree in IT, he sent out hundreds of résumés, but received few responses. He finally accepted a job far beneath his credentials as a desktop computer technician. He would not let himself wonder whether his foreign name and appearance hampered his job search, he explained, since "this wouldn't be good. I might start hating people and I don't want to be like that."

Working at the same job today, Tsiory follows a strategy of putting himself in an "inferior position" relative to his French coworkers: "Even if I know a subject better than someone else, I make him think I'm less than him. I never contradict him. My strategy is to make him feel superior to me, to feel that he's already beaten me. That's my goal." Tsiory lowered his head and shoulders to demonstrate how he acts "to disarm them."

We turned to his life in Madagascar. Though the country has been independent since 1960, he said that people

> are still colonized in the head. You see, when a White person comes to Madagascar, he's seen as something altogether different, like a god. We say "Yes, yes, yes" to whatever he says. In Africa, at least in Madagascar, we're independent, but we're still colonized.

Laughing uncomfortably, Tsiory added, "even I'm colonized in the head." When he came to France, he "considered Whites superior to us," and, even now, "when I see a French person, I consider him superior to me."

Although he will become a citizen in a year, Tsiory will never be French, he says, because French people are "White, White, White." He wonders how people from Madagascar with children born in France "explain to them that the French will never, ever consider them French." If he ever has children, he said, "I'll explain this, that they're not French for the French, that they're only French legally."

Other interviewees also spoke about colonialism. François (profiled in chapter 2), who grew up in Gabon, was candid about his opinion of colonialism: "I don't have a negative opinion of it." France, he said, brought "television, the Industrial Revolution, the automobile, et cetera" to Gabon. But the French also brought their skin color: "France is the White man." The Gabonese ethnic group that first encountered the French, the Myenes, "wanted to be like the Whites," and they succeeded. "People say the Myenes are the Whites" of Gabon. They see themselves as "superior," treating people farther inland "as savages." François is Myene.

Like those around him, he says, François thought that Whites were "superior," and he wanted to absorb "the culture that came with colonialism." He wanted to "act like the Whites and speak like the Whites, to belong among them." François's profile shows how this desire still eats at him, more than twenty-five years after his arrival in France.

When Daniel (also profiled in chapter 2) was growing up in the Ivory Coast in the 1990s and 2000s, he knew that "it was France that had colonized us." This wasn't all bad, he believes, since French people "brought what Africans didn't know" and "taught us so much." But even decades after the Ivory Coast had gained independence in 1960, "we were submissive, we always felt inferior." Ivorians thought that French people are "more intelligent

because they know a lot. "When they spoke," he recalls, "everyone listened, everyone was quiet, because this was a French person speaking." People felt they should be "submissive" to French people to "receive things"; they thought that "if you behaved properly," you might "gain their benediction and be blessed by them." But Daniel grew out of this way of thinking after he came to France, where he realized that "everyone is equal." Remembering how people felt back in the Ivory Coast made him laugh.

Abbas has a decidedly negative view of colonialism and its aftereffects. Although the colonial era was hardly mentioned during his childhood in Senegal, he said that some people knew that "the French had come to colonize us, to reduce us to slavery and to pillage our wealth. At base, we knew that they were our invaders." He believes that the colonial experience also resulted in people having "an inferiority complex" toward the French. Even relations among Senegalese people reflected this. "French was the language of those who dominated us," so people who spoke it well had "an air of superiority." Dressing in the French style—"in a suit and tie and all"—had the same effect.

For Djibril, who also grew up in Senegal, the fact that the Senegalese "were colonized by France plays a big role psychologically between the two peoples." Complicating this, he believes, is the fact that "France is still very much tied to its former colonies." Djibril calls the resulting feeling of "inferiority" among many Senegalese people "the African complex."

Tsiory and Black interviewees like François, Daniel, Abbas, and Djibril were not the only ones who traced feelings of inferiority to colonialism. Mohamed described his native Morocco as "a country that had been colonized by France." And while Morocco had been "colonized under very difficult conditions, with many victims and much exploitation," Mohamed said, Moroccans "idealized" France and were "fascinated" by it. "Unconsciously, we felt inferior to the West, which was stronger, more intelligent, and better organized. It was a collective mindset. We didn't have a good opinion of ourselves. We had a feeling of being a nothing, of mediocrity."

I asked Mohamed how he felt about the differences between Europeans and Moroccans while growing up in Morocco. Thinking back, he spoke of the cowboys-and-Indians movies he loved

as a child: "I didn't ask why they were one way and we were another, but I was fascinated." Laughing at the memory, he continued, "Me, I hated the Indians and loved the cowboys. The cowboys never did wrong. I thought the Indians were savages, barbarians. I was always happy when the cowboys exterminated those cruel Apaches, those savages. I wanted to be like the cowboys." Such feelings weren't limited to cowboys. "We wanted to be like them, to have White friends, Europeans, et cetera." When Mohamed later saw White tourists, "there was a fascination with their physical appearance. Also, they spoke another language, the language of civilization. It was everything."

Finally, Usman (profiled in chapter 3), who came from the former British colony of Pakistan, talked about the psychological effects of colonialism. "It's always tied to the colonial connection. Even though we weren't a colony when I was born, there was always a connection with the distant Europeans, the people who are strong, of our recent history, the inaccessible people." He lowered his hands to illustrate Pakistani feelings of "civilizational inferiority." Although he came to France feeling this way, Usman outgrew it as he excelled academically and then professionally.

After coming to France, Usman dated only European women. He explained why. "If you look at history, we were formerly colonized by European people, so the fact of being close to them, to be one with them is a kind of success." The wall that colonialism had created between him and Europeans was breached in the act of sexual intercourse: "I was able to go beyond that barrier to become one with . . ." Usman stopped himself there, but he returned to the memory a minute later. Sighing, he said: "To cross that barrier, ahhh."

It is hard to report Usman's account without recalling the beginning of the chapter "The Man of Color and the White Woman" in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986 [1952]). Having grown up in the French colony of Martinique, Fanon describes the experience of sexual intercourse with a French woman: "By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man" (63). As will be seen in chapter 5, Usman was not alone among male interviewees in his desire for "French" women.

THE COLONIAL MENTALITY IN FRANCE

Since the interviewees who explicitly attributed feelings of inferiority to colonialism—Tsiory, François, Daniel, Abbas, Djibril, Mohamed, and Usman—spoke about the former colonies in which they grew up, one might assume that "colonialism in the head" is limited to life in former colonies. Not so, according to many interviewees. As Tsiory's and François's experiences make clear, this feeling can live on among people from former colonies who have moved to France. But it is not limited to such people. According to a number of interviewees, this attitude is also common both among people who trace their origin to former colonies but who grew up in France and among "French" people, who feel superior to such people.

Before turning to what these interviewees reported, it is worth recalling that the colonial experience is still fresh in the family histories (if not the conscious awareness) of people in France today. Most French colonies did not become independent until the 1950s or early 1960s. Three of the interviewees (Grégoire, Henri, and Rémy) were born when their country of origin (Vietnam) was still a French colony. And all of the other interviewees who trace their origin to former French colonies have parents or grandparents who lived there when their countries were still colonies. They would thus have been among the "natives" of so-called French Indochina, French Antilles, French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, and the French Maghreb. Some of the interviewees' grandparents would have lived their entire lives in those French colonies, under the control of France.

Much the same is true for today's "French" people, except that they were on the flip side of the colonial experience. Although many "French" people benefited from colonialism without leaving France, others lived in France's colonies for years. These included soldiers, administrators, settlers, missionaries, businesspeople, and many of their family members. Nearly a million *pieds-noirs* (French citizens of European origin) were living in Algeria when it won its independence in 1962. The vast majority fled to France. In sum, millions of "French" people today grew up with parents or grandparents who had participated in the French colonial enterprise. And even those who were not personally involved in colonialism would have learned of France's

"civilizing mission" among "inferior" peoples through newsreels, magazines, exhibitions, and other media.

It is not surprising, then, that a number of interviewees pointed to the role of colonialism in their relations with "French" people. At least two identify as Maghrebi. Lina believes that the disdain she experiences in France "goes back many years to colonialism." Karim thinks that "there was always the position of inferior-superior" between his family from Morocco and the French villagers around them "because we had been a protectorate."

Interviewees seen as Black also spoke about the influence of colonial attitudes on "French" people today. Jean, who has spent his entire life in France, traces French images of Blacks to "the colonial past of France. All the things they did." And Abbas thinks that the sense of superiority he sees among many White people "comes from the history they're taught." This history is like the history "told by the winners of a war," he says, and "the winners of a war never tell a history that doesn't suit them." French people are told that France "went to Africa to civilize Africans because they were savages."

According to Abbas, it is neither innocent nor accidental that this colonial-era attitude persists today. "French" people, he said, "hold on to a good memory of colonialism to avoid being ashamed. They think the actions they took in Africa were to help us. They don't see colonialism as a way for one people to enslave another people, to impose their will upon another people." Not being "French," Abbas cannot know exactly what such people think of Blacks, but he offers a guess: "Maybe between their history of French colonialism in Africa and what they see in the media and newspapers, they imagine that they're superior to Africans, psychologically, intellectually, and in ability."

Djibril spoke in much the same way. **"**French" people, he said, have a "vision of Blacks, a vision they have from colonialism." For them, "there's a connection between the fact that we were colonized by France" and the feeling that "Europeans are superior." He thinks that this is significant for how Blacks are treated in France today. "There are people who still have a vision of slavery, of colonialism. They don't want to leave this behind. They don't want to give up this domination. That's why they try to keep us on a very low level."

If French assumptions of superiority may be grounded in the colonial experience, Thomas thinks, assumptions of inferiority among some people of colonial origin in France may likewise derive from colonialism. Thomas reported that many French-born Blacks "feel inferior" to Whites and "are submissive" toward them. He gave an example: "If a young Black man who was born in France, who grew up here, comes into contact with a young White man of the same age, he'll feel inferior. You'll see it in the way he speaks, how he speaks in a very formal and polite way." To explain where these feelings came from, Thomas turned to the experience of prior generations in sub-Saharan Africa, when Black people were subjugated to French colonial control:

> In France that continues to play a role in people's minds. Why do Blacks feel inferior? This is automatic. It's very hard to find the source. Maybe it's historical. The grandparent lived this way. He transmitted it to his child, who retransmitted it to his grandson. That's how it follows down the generations.[4]

France's involvement in the slave trade for more than two centuries and its enslavement of Black people in its Caribbean colonies through 1848 was discussed at the beginning of chapter 2. Just as this history may underlie feelings of superiority among "French" people today, it may underlie feelings of inferiority among Black people. Blacks in mainland France whose families came from Martinique, Guadeloupe, or Haiti are the direct descendants of people who were owned and worked by "French" people. As noted in chapter 2, Jean was "ashamed when they talked about slavery" in history class: "Ow! It really weighed me down." Similarly, Black people whose families came from Africa may see themselves in accounts of slavery. In history class, Clément recalled, "I identified with the Blacks in chains. People of my origin were the ones who'd been enslaved" by people like the White students around him.

While these accounts suggest that all types of people in France experience "colonialism in the head," one thing is certain: feelings of inferiority and a fear of rejection were important concerns for many interviewees. But how many? Among these people, do these feelings last a lifetime, or do they change over time? And how many of the interviewees do not experience

these feelings? How do such people handle the stereotyping, bias, and discrimination that they experience? These questions must still be answered.

FEELING INFERIOR, FEARING REJECTION—WHAT THE INTERVIEWEES REPORTED

Although each interviewee is unique, their accounts can be clustered into four groups. Among those who trace their origin to countries that had been colonized by European powers—the great majority of interviewees—many feel deeply inferior to "French" people, fear rejection from "French" people, or both. These interviewees are discussed in section (a) below. A few other interviewees, discussed in section (b), were beset by these feelings when they were young, but have since grown out of them. Section (c) switches the focus to the interviewees who originate from countries that had not been subject to European colonization. Finally, in section (d), all of the interviewees are reviewed to determine how many do not harbor feelings of inferiority or fear rejection, and to understand the methods they use to maintain their equanimity.

In reviewing the interviewees' accounts, it is important to remember that the feeling of inferiority and the fear of rejection are closely intertwined. Some of the interviewees, like Jean and Tsiory, dwelled on their feelings of inferiority, though they also reported fearing rejection because of their perceived inferiority. Others, like Samuel and Asma, spoke more about fearing rejection, though their fear is grounded in the perceived superiority or greater social power of those who would reject them.

(a) *Those Who Feel Inferior or Fear Rejection*

Both Karim and Tsiory, who were profiled early in this chapter, experience intense feelings of inferiority or fear of rejection. They are hardly alone.

Ibrahim, who has not yet been profiled, came to France from Algeria when he was eighteen. Since then, he says, "I've done everything to integrate myself" into French society. At the ceremony where he and others received their French ID cards,

they were told, "You are now French. You are no different from other French people." This thrilled him, but he discovered that it wasn't true. He continued to face bias, discrimination, and demeaning scrutiny in stores, bars, and nightclubs. Following the 2015–16 terrorist attacks in France, he felt "stigmatized" and pressured to "justify" himself. By the time of our interview, the misery of feeling rejected was complete. "It's as if I had a lover who left me." Today, Ibrahim lectures his five-year-old son, who speaks only French and has never been outside the country, that he is not French but Algerian.

Many of the interviewees profiled in chapters 1–3 also suffer from feelings of inferiority or a fear of rejection. Three of them are Blacks, all profiled in chapter 2, who grew up in France:

- Throughout his childhood, Jean had an intense desire "to be White" or at least "succeed like the Whites succeed," and experienced an equally intense shame that he could do neither. While he has recently (and only tentatively) shaken off this feeling of inferiority, a fear of rejection remains keen.
- Since childhood, Lucas has felt that he's "not in the category" of White people. Concerned that they will put him "into a caste," he has decided that "I'll be the one to put myself into a caste." Although both he and his parents have always lived in mainland France, he identifies as Guadeloupean.
- Clément spent his adolescence in a largely White neighborhood, where he often felt "different in the eyes of others." He sensed "a lack of belonging" and sometimes felt "rejected," "ashamed," or "angry." Although less intense today, these feelings have not disappeared.

At least five other interviewees profiled in chapters 1–3 report problems with self-respect or fear of rejection:

- Samuel has sought acceptance from "French" people since childhood, but, despite his professional success and life in a well-off, downtown community, he still feels excluded because of his Maghrebi appearance.

- Although François lives "like French people" and has had a series of "French" romantic partners, he still feels excluded because Blacks are "always foreigners."
- Olivier has adopted the "clothes, accent, way of speaking" of "French" people, speaks "perfect French without any accent," and has only "French" friends, but he can do nothing about his Maghrebi *faciès*. As a result, he feels, "people consider me inferior to a French person."
- Asma, who is of Maghrebi origin, has always had "only French friends" and a "French mindset," lives according to French norms, and married a "French" man, but has never been able to "live as an equal" in France. This, she says, is because "people here are idiots, they're completely racist."
- Finally, Vincent has feared rejection his whole life, even though he is a third-generation French citizen and an IT professional in a French company. At each turn, he says, "I must prove to certain people that I am capable. Foreigners must do more."

While all these people have successfully integrated themselves into the norms of the "French" people around them, the process has been emotionally fraught. Olivier explained what it's been like for him: "To have to integrate yourself is submission. *Intégration* lets me survive," he says, but it's an act of "submission, absolutely."

(b) *Outgrowing Feeling Inferior and Fearing Rejection*

Four of the interviewees felt inferior or feared rejection when they were young but have grown out of these feelings over time.

Ariel, a Black woman who has not been profiled yet, grew up in Madagascar. When she first saw a White person, she thought that he was a "superior being." She continued to feel this way because on TV Whites lived in a "technologically superior" world. Their "technological superiority was a sign of an intellectual superiority." But her sense of French superiority started to erode when she learned of strikes and dysfunction in France from the TV news. And when she came into contact with French high

school students, she was struck by how unimpressive many were. She began to think, she says, that "I could be their equal."

Ariel went to France for college, where she studied information technology. She soon discovered that the French students were "far from perfect," both personally and academically, and began to wonder how she could have "idealized White French people." But even after getting both undergraduate and master's degrees in IT, she was unable to get a professional-level job. Since, she said, "it was out of the question that I'd take a job as a technician with my master's," she worked at a pizzeria until she found an appropriate position in another city. She has worked as a tech professional ever since.

Ariel married Charles (another tech specialist, profiled in chapter 2) and has a three-year-old son. Now a French citizen, she considers herself French, though more a "citizen of the world." The fact that followers of the right-wing National Front party might think that she isn't French doesn't bother her, because "their France doesn't really exist." Today, "France belongs to the world." She is also unbothered by bias: whatever others may think, she says, "I don't attach any importance to racism." Throughout her interview—indeed, throughout my two-day stay with her and Charles—Ariel was the soul of confidence, laughing at whatever she found absurd.

While listening to Ariel, I thought of Tsiory. They are about the same age (Ariel is thirty-four; Tsiory is twenty-nine), they both grew up in Madagascar, they both went to France to study information technology, they both got undergraduate and master's degrees in IT, and they were both unable to get a professional-level position. But the similarity ends there. While Tsiory is reclusive, meek, and always deferential to "French" people, Ariel is outgoing and confident. Tsiory took a job as a desktop computer technician, while Ariel bided her time until securing a professional-level position. Today, Tsiory is still a laptop computer technician, pursuing a "strategy" of extreme deference, while Ariel made a career in IT among other IT specialists, unfazed by French bias.

Struck by how these near-identical backgrounds led to completely different adult lives and attitudes toward "French" people, I told Ariel about Tsiory's feeling of "colonialism in the head."[5] Ariel was incredulous: "He thinks that? What a shame."

The other interviewees who have outgrown childhood feelings of inferiority or fearfulness of rejection have already been profiled. Henri and Grégoire (profiled in chapter 3), the sons of a "French" father and Vietnamese mother, grew up feeling deeply inferior in France during the 1950s through the 1970s. The decades since have brought major changes. Beginning in the 1980s, each got married, had children, settled into civil service jobs, and ultimately retired. During the same period, they say, the image of people seen as Asians improved significantly. Although bias by some "French" people continues, today neither Henri nor Grégoire feels inferior or fears rejection.

Growing up in France feeling shunned as a "foreigner," Nassim (also profiled in chapter 3) worked at becoming "more French." He ultimately "passed the exam" of becoming "more French than the French," but even this didn't bring true acceptance. He then turned back to his Maghrebi and Muslim origins. Although, he says, "this made me socially less acceptable in France," he is no longer afraid of being rejected.

Four interviewees remain. Although different from each other in original culture, personality, and career, Daniel (profiled in chapter 2), Philippe (chapter 2), Mohamed (chapter 1), and Usman (chapter 3) experienced a similar evolution in their feelings about themselves. Each grew up in a former colony feeling inferior to Europeans, each moved to France as a young adult, and each discarded the feeling of inferiority within a few years of arriving in France. Daniel, a factory team leader from the Ivory Coast, discovered that he could learn whatever French people know and work harder than most of them. As far as Daniel is concerned, he is their equal. Philippe, a law graduate from Guinea, shook off his feeling of inferiority after studying the writings of Frantz Fanon. Mohamed, a social worker from Morocco, spoke of a growing "intellectual and psychological maturity" during his years in France: "I now see people as they are, not as French or the like." Asked whether he feels inferior today, Mohamed responded with a flat "no." Usman, who felt "inferior" to Europeans when he arrived in France from Pakistan twenty-five years ago, put his mind to fitting into France and advancing in the world, ultimately getting a PhD in telecommunications and achieving professional success. Now a high-tech entrepreneur, he admits to feeling "superior" to most French people.

(c) *Interviewees of Non-Colonial Origin*

While the great majority of interviewees, including all of the Blacks and all of the Maghrebis, trace their origin to countries that were once European colonies, eight other interviewees trace their origins to countries that had never been colonies, even if they went through periods of yielding to European economic, political, or military power. Since these people are also of non-European origin, studying their experiences presents an opportunity to eliminate the factor of outright colonialism. Do they feel inferior to "French" people? Do they fear being rejected by them? Each interviewee must be reviewed to find out.

Three of these interviewees trace their origins to non-Arab, yet predominantly Muslim, countries in Western Asia. These are Fatih (Turkey), Shayan (Iran), and Nima (also Iran). Though all were profiled in chapter 3, each had more to say on the issues of inferiority and rejection. Fatih has never felt inferior because of his background. Even as a child in a French village, he says, "I felt proud" because of the "education from my parents." Today he remains proud of Turkish values, such as care for family "and the right way to behave."

Although Fatih has never felt inferior, he has feared rejection much of his life. When he was young, he needed to decline pork at French friends' homes even though it was "poorly seen." He recalled, "moments of discomfort, that's for sure. It was frustrating when people rejected me." Although milder today, Fatih's fear of rejection remains a part of his life. "In my heart, it remains complicated. It's hard to explain." Fatih recounted incidents at work when his foreign name or his avoidance of pork came to the fore. "I was frightened that people would be insulted. They could have taken it badly." When he declines pork at business meals, people's reactions can be "hurtful." Still, fear can turn to indignation: "Sometimes it was depressing, but it was more anger than depression."

In Shayan's profile, he described a lifelong effort to participate in the "French" community around him. Born and raised in France, he made sure to act like the French people around him, so that "no one ever said anything like that about me." During his interview and our time together, Shayan never spoke about feel-

ing inferior, but a fear of rejection hovered in the background: "I wanted never to be among those they pointed a finger at."

When Nima left Iran forty years ago to attend graduate school in France, Iran was so oil-rich that "it was lending money to France." From the start, he says, "I had a pride in myself, a self-confidence." Nor has he feared rejection. When French people "acted in a dismissive way toward me, I didn't feel it. I mastered their rejection of me. It created a feeling of pity toward them. It didn't touch me at all." Their behavior "made me angry, but it never hurt me."

The remaining five interviewees, all Asians, originate from countries that had never been European colonies. They are Emily (China), Yuka (China), Eric (China), Paul (South Korea), and Kana (Japan). Since all are now in their thirties or early forties, they have only known the time (as recounted in chapter 3) when these countries were growing economically and French attitudes toward Asians were improving.

All three of the interviewees from China came to France in their early twenties for advanced engineering studies. Emily (profiled in chapter 3) spoke about feelings of inferiority when growing up. "Chinese people were dominated by kings for thousands of years." In Chinese culture, she said, there's this feeling "that government officials, or the state, or the king are superior." In France, her success at elite engineering schools and then at large civil engineering companies, she says, made her feel "more confidence in myself." At no point did Emily speak about fearing rejection.

Yuka and Eric, the two other interviewees from China, had less to say on these issues. As her profile (also in chapter 3) reports, Yuka has been comfortable with French people from the start. Nothing she said suggested a feeling of inferiority or a fear of rejection. Eric, who has not been profiled, has kept to himself since coming to France. His graduate studies were conducted in English rather than French, and he rarely went into town. After gaining a research doctorate in engineering, which he said failed to prepare him for a real-world job, he has been unable to find regular employment. He reported no feelings of inferiority, and though there have been times he felt that French people acted rudely toward him, he has been annoyed rather than fearful.

The remaining interviewees can also be discussed briefly. Kana, who has not been profiled, came to France from Japan to do graduate studies in museum studies. After getting a master's degree, she worked briefly and married Mathieu (who was profiled in chapter 3). Kana is now a full-time mother in the multiethnic neighborhood where the family lives. At no time during the interview or the two days I stayed at her home did Kana say anything suggesting a feeling of inferiority or fear of rejection. Finally, there is Paul (profiled in chapter 3), who was adopted from a South Korean orphanage by a French couple when he was four, brought back to France, and raised to be French. He reported no feelings of inferiority, and despite jokes concerning his Korean appearance, he does not fear rejection.

This overview of the eight interviewees who trace their origin to countries that had not been European colonies reveals a distinct pattern: unlike many of the interviewees who trace their origins to countries that had been colonies, not one feels inferior to French people. The difference between them and the interviewees with colonial origins largely disappears when it comes to rejection: a quarter of them spoke of fearing rejection, although in less intense terms. These are Fatih and Shayan, who have a particular concern: each wants to avoid alienating "French" people by flagging his Muslim background.

(d) *"I Know My Own Value"*

Despite the number of people who experience continuing and, for some, debilitating feelings of inferiority or fear of rejection, a striking fact arises when one surveys the interviewees as a whole: the great majority of interviewees who reported demeaning stereotypes, bias, and discrimination directed at people like them did not report having internalized these experiences. They do not feel inferior or fear rejection from "French" people.[6] Thus, despite the low regard shown by people who are unquestionably French—behavior that seems intended to keep them at a lower social level and, some would say, intended to undermine their sense of worth—most interviewees do not feel inferior to such people. Similarly, despite behavior that seems intended to keep people like the interviewees from being fully accepted—including the refusal to treat even French-born, fully integrated peo-

ple with non-European *faciès* as truly French—most do not fear rejection.

This absence of, or refusal to harbor, feelings of inferiority or a fear of rejection is found among all types of interviewees: among men and women; among the young and old; among those who grew up in France and those who grew up in their countries of origin; among those who originate from former colonies and those who originate from countries that had not been colonized; among Blacks, Maghrebis, Asians, and others. Many interviewees were categorical about their own sense of value. Although Thomas has experienced what he calls "intelligent racism," or behavior he thinks is intended to make him feel inferior as a Black, he says, "I was hurt, but I was never, ever, ever ashamed." Similarly, Djibril, whose efforts to succeed in France have been sidelined and who remains underemployed, says, "I don't feel inferior to anyone. Everyone is equal. It's for you to decide what you're worth."

The disjunction between experiencing acts that signal rejection and the internal fear of rejection is illustrated by Youssef, an interviewee who has not been profiled yet. Now forty-six, Youssef grew up in a village in Morocco. Although his mother was nonliterate, she was "preoccupied with her children getting a good education." Youssef ultimately went to a Moroccan university, where his courses were taught in Arabic. Although he spoke only "a little French" by the time he graduated, he decided to move to France to do postgraduate studies. He hoped to realize his "intellectual dreams" and to pursue "a life of research."

In France, Youssef "made an enormous effort to learn French, to learn, learn, learn all the time." He only socialized with French people. As he recalls, "my ambition was to integrate into the intellectual world in France, to understand the thinking and philosophy of France, which for me was also universal." By living with French people, he also hoped to "feel French" and absorb "the heritage, particularly the culture, of this country." Although born into a Muslim family, he says, "I wasn't religious. This helped me to integrate quickly into French society, and one day to become a French citizen with the same values as a native-born French person." As the years passed, Youssef got both a master's degree and doctorate in sociology, married a French woman (from whom he is now divorced), had children with her,

and became a French citizen. He became not merely a citizen, he says, but one "who's at ease as a citizen."

But many French people are not at ease with Youssef. Laughing uncomfortably, he described how his "Arab mug" makes women pull in their handbags and telephones and keeps him from entering certain restaurants. He feels "tension" in the public transportation system, and some people change seats to get away from him. In cafes, some people stare at him "bizarrely." But despite all this—despite knowing that he can be rejected "at any time"—Youssef's sense of belonging is unshaken. The people who snub him, he says, "don't know that I'm as French as they are, that I'm in my own country."

How do the dozens of interviewees who do not feel inferior and do not fear rejection deal with the frequent disparagement they report experiencing from "French" people and the French media? How do they maintain their feelings of equality and belonging? While the profiles in this book provide answers on an individual level, recurring patterns appear when these interviewees as a whole are considered. The most frequently cited strategies can be briefly summarized:

Maintaining high-prestige levels of language, behavior, and lifestyle. As reported throughout this book, the interviewees live like the "French" people around them. For some, like Elise, Anna, and Mathieu, this has come naturally; for others, like Youssef, Olivier, and Shayan, it has required years of effort. But however this is achieved, many interviewees become, as Nassim, Usman, and Karim all described themselves, "more French than the French."

Working harder, advancing educationally, and excelling in a field that rewards marketable skills. Chapters 1–3 are filled with accounts of sustained work, university degrees, and the pursuit of excellence in fields that reward demonstrable skills. One need only think of Salma, Rania, Isabel, Marie, Amina, Ariel, Charles, Usman, and Emily. Some interviewees even use bias to their advantage. A teacher's "disdain" for Thomas's abilities because he is Black "gave me motivation," he said. "It made me work two times, three times harder than the others." He succeeded in getting the IT diploma that the teacher said was out of reach, and then two more. Later, when a company supervisor failed to give him a promised promotion, Thomas threw himself into master-

ing a new field, real estate investment and management, where he could make his own success.

Going against the stereotypes. Interviewees defy stereotypes in various ways. Amina said, "I always have a classic appearance, always super-well-coiffed, super-well-dressed," rather than a look "that fits into the prejudices." Disgusted by such insults as "dirty Arab" and "dirty race," Lina maintains an impeccably clean home and dresses elegantly. Ridiculed "as a little Chinese boy," Rémy became an army commando-parachutist, a martial arts expert, and a combat instructor at the national police training academy. Daniel has shown French people "that we Africans are not what they think" by "getting the job done" as a factory team captain. Abdel spoke politely with a "neo-Nazi" at a bar to convince him that some "Arabs" don't act badly. Isabel excelled academically and professionally, proving—as her father said Blacks must—that "I'm intelligent. I'm not what you think I am." Charles has repeatedly done the same, from the time a White math teacher disparaged the Black students in his high school class through his years as an IT consultant.

Being firm in the face of bias. As their profiles make clear, Lina, Rémy, and Amina will not tolerate behavior suggesting that people like them are not equal to everyone else. Zhora's life shows how challenging this can be. She began defending herself in the workplace when she was cleaning offices to support her education—she went to her boss for redress for being called *bougnoule*—and, decades later, she still defends herself, as she did recently at a conference. She has been equally firm in her personal life. When her mother-in-law disparaged Maghrebis as "*bougnoules*," Zhora told her, "Mother, don't ever say that in front of me."

Refusing to accept the role of "victim." As reported in their profiles, Amina, Philippe, and Thomas each refuse to accept the role of "victim." Anna feels much the same way. While a friend of hers complains that "being Black is always a handicap," she won't dwell on bias. "I refuse to see this as a fact of life, since you can't live in a country if you think that everyone sees you poorly." And while Emmanuelle believes that "racism will always exist in France," she insists on maintaining an "open spirit." She has "learned to live" with racism, she said, "because you don't have a choice. If you're always angry at these injustices, it hurts the most."

Not dwelling on the possibility of bias in everyday life. Although he is convinced that "French society is very racist," Charles refuses to see racism in daily events, like "the silly example of being served second at a Starbucks, after a White," to focus on the more pressing obstacles in life. Thomas provided a detailed explanation of why he refuses to think much about bias. After being denied a bank loan five times despite a solid business plan, he thought that "perhaps if I were White, they would have given me the loan," but he refused to dwell on this possibility, because "in the end, who'd pay the price for this?" Thomas thinks that "holding on to your hatred, your anger, won't help you advance," and you'll miss out on the "people who'll put out their hand to help you."

Abdel takes this attitude one step further:

> If I greet someone and he doesn't respond, it never crosses my mind that it's because I'm an Arab or I'm a Muslim. It's automatic for me. Each time something like this happens, I say to myself that the person is grumpy, that he's having a bad day, or that he's just mean by nature.

Although Abdel said that bias "never crosses my mind" on such occasions, the phrasing of his account ("I say to myself") suggests a coping mechanism. He continued, "I don't even hate him, since that would be unhealthy for me."

Accepting reality while making your way in life. The French-born daughter of Arabic-speaking parents, Fouzia learned French in school and set about integrating herself into the community around her. She finished high school, trained and worked as a nurse, and raised a daughter. Although there was always "an atmosphere, an ambiance" of anti-Arab bias, she did not let it derail her. Eleven years ago, a household accident left her a quadriplegic. Now, when Fouzia leaves her apartment, "it's the same. There are the looks at you, it happens with a handicapped person as with an Arab. There are schemas in people's heads. There are prejudices against handicapped people as with Blacks and others. You can feel different." But with her quadriplegia as with anti-Arab bias, Fouzia accepts reality and gets on with life.

Not letting right-wing politics undermine your identity. The National Front party long used the slogan "France for the French." Markus, a young Black man who has spent his entire life in

France, is untroubled by people who subscribe to this way of thinking. "Their vision is limited to a category of French people," he said, those "of the 1940s" who were in France before the wave of immigration that came later. But "the true French people" of today, Markus feels, includes people like him. Sami, meanwhile, has pity for people who have a narrow view of who belongs in France. They must be saddled with "a feeling of inferiority, maybe because other people succeed." Although Fouzia finds the National Front slogan "hurtful to hear" because its supporters really mean "France for the *Français de souche*," she feels that people with a different "physical appearance" like her can also be French.

Growing up feeling worthy. This is not a conscious method of dealing with prejudice, but an aspect of certain people's personality and life circumstances. It is evident when one compares the many interviewees who grew up in France and have faced the same stereotypes, biases, and discrimination. While some (like Samuel, Karim, Jean, Clément, and Vincent) have felt inferior to "French" people since childhood, others (like Thomas, Markus, Elise, Anna, Nour, Abdel, Paul, and Mathieu) have always felt good about themselves. Differences in economic and social class must also play a role—life has been easier for Elise and Paul than for Samuel and Jean—but this alone does not explain the difference. One need only compare Thomas, who grew up poor, with Clément, who grew up in more comfortable circumstances.

Fortified by these ways of protecting themselves from hurt and self-doubt, many of the interviewees would agree with Emmanuelle's declaration that, despite the prejudices she faces, "I know my own worth."

CONCLUSION

According to various interviewees, feelings of inferiority and the fear of rejection can be traced to the history of European subjugation of non-Europeans in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Those who grew up in the former colonies say this explicitly—thus, "colonialism in the head"—but much the same is reported by those who grew up in France. They see the history of colo-

nial domination at work both among people of colonial origin and among many "French" people, who apparently feel superior to them. That none of the interviewees of non-colonial origin feels inferior suggests that the tie to colonialism is not imagined. Even Fatih, who originates from a poor country (Turkey), who grew up poor in France, and who fears rejection by "French" people, does not feel inferior to them.

Given the interviewees' many reports of ugly stereotypes, biased behavior, and discrimination, it is remarkable that the majority have not internalized these attitudes, and that they are not beset by feelings of inferiority or fears of rejection. This may have much to do with who the interviewees are: people who have been successful enough to offer a room in their home or a separate apartment for rent through Airbnb. Most are university educated and have been able to secure work well above the menial level often thought appropriate for them.

The issues discussed in this chapter are complicated and nuanced. Still to be discussed is the deeply personal world of romantic desire and choice of spouse or long-term partner.

NOTES

1. As noted in the introduction, the terms "colony" and "colonialism" are used in this book to encompass various forms of control. In the case of France, these included colonies, protectorates, territories, and the onetime *départements* of Algeria.
2. This highly insulting term for "Arab" or "Maghrebi" was discussed in chapter 1.
3. This was Philippe, as discussed in chapter 2.
4. Pap Ndiaye (2008: 363) provides the historical context for this point: Africans who come to France from former French colonies have "national and familial memories [that] have been marked by colonization."
5. In keeping with my interview protocol, I did not identify Tsiory by name or city.
6. While there is no simple binary dividing line at play here, the following interviewees reported stereotypes, bias, or discrimination against people like themselves, but did not report ongoing feelings of inferiority or fears of rejection: Mohamed, Philippe, Emmanuelle, Sami, Youssef, Abbas, Isabel, Anna, Mathieu, Salma, Khira, Nour, Zhora, Charles, Daniel, Marie, Markus, Amina, Abdel, Ariel, Fouzia, Achraf, Djibril, Aya, Lina, Thomas, and Hiba. Many of these interviewees nonethe-

less sense a feeling of superiority among "French" people and/or a readiness on the part of "French" people to disparage and marginalize people like them.