Female North African-French students in France: Narratives of educational experiences

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FEMALE NORTH AFRICAN-FRENCH STUDENTS IN FRANCE:
NARRATIVES OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

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The study focused on the narratives of educational experiences of female students of North African heritage in France, and on their success as they see it in the French school system, which states that it is committed to diversity and promoting equal chances among students for academic success in the universities. The study will help to contribute to the growing research on students of immigrant origins and their successes (or lack thereof) in French school systems, asserting a vow to social diversity. I examined the current social educational issues that affect female ethnic minority students in France, as well as issues of religion, gender, immigration and a sense of belonging, self-identity and citizenship, as they emerged within the historical legacy of French colonialism and its influences regarding notions of “the Other.” I wanted to understand how the participants come to philosophize themselves, as they introspectively reflect upon and analyze their personal life experiences and influences to conceptualize what has helped to shape their self-identity. The major themes that dominated the women’s narratives included volonté (self-will), parents stories, and having “another view” or a broader worldview perspective.

Results of the study may provide clearer understanding of the educational and cultural contexts and practices, played out in the participants’ daily-lived experiences, that are
most effective in promoting successful personal attitudes and behaviors. In France today, there are growing tensions as people reconsider what it means to be French. The notion of French identity has been challenged by many things including immigration, consumerism, mass media and France’s changing role in Europe and the world. The European French believe they are trying to assimilate and practice tolerance toward different racial and ethnic groups, such as toward North Africans, who come from former colonies, but the size of the Muslim population (more than five million) and the intransigent Islamic religious desire to have young women continue to wear the traditional head scarves in schools, contribute to keeping them a separate part of society. Because the cultural origins (with emphasis on religion) of the second and third generations North African French population defines the gulf between them and the “native” French population, it will be useful to understand the roles and perspectives of those within it. School systems, with affirmed commitments to multiculturalism and social diversity, like in the USA, may find the results of this study informative.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is ironic that Saint Denis is the patron saint of France, the burial place of the kings of France at the Basilique St-Denis, and one of the most well known inner city ghettos in Paris that erupted with rioting in 2005 and 2007. The once heavily industrialized area was viewed as a political threat when the Communist political party headquarters were there. It was called the banlieue rouge (red suburbs) during the 20th century. In the 21st century it has become the social and political threat of the banlieue chaude (hot suburbs) (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed., 2007). Today, most of the residents concentrated in Saint Denis are immigrants from former French colonies. North Africans primarily, they came to work in the factories of France.

Post-war France needed laborers to help recover, so a cheap, temporary, workforce of migrants from North and Sub-Saharan Africa were recruited to help build the nation. (McNeill, 1998; Cornelius, Martin, & Hollifield, 1994). The French government expected that many of these workers would return to their own homeland, but they did not. Instead, they stayed to raise a family and brought their extended families over.

Housing shortages only worsened with the addition of large numbers of migrant workers and their families requiring a place to live. Throughout the 1950s, large-scale, low-income housing projects were built to solve the problem. In the 1960s, an economic crisis created a high unemployment rate among workers, and by 1974, the government had begun limiting immigration. But many of the men who had come to France to work brought over their wives and families to live with them in France. However, the economic downturn during the 1970s and 1980s made things even harder. Eventually,
these neighborhoods turned into large, isolated slums around the periphery of large French cities like Paris. During the 1960s, *La Courneuve*, like many other suburbs of large French cities such as Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Nantes, Lille, Strasbourg, Caen, Le Havre, Rouen, Toulouse and Nice, was designated as one of the "zones à urbaniser en priorité" (urbanizing priority zones). Construction of large block towers and other *habitation à loyer modéré (HLM)* [low-income housing] developments were constructed for dealing with the population and housing crisis. Some infrastructural improvements such as an extension of the metro to *Saint Denis Université* and the *Stade de France*, which is the national stadium of France, situated in the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis, attempted to help by opening up access space to the rest of city, but that did not fix any of the deeper problems (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th ed., 2007). In spite of attempts to fix the problems, many people like Yazid Sabeg, who worked as a civil servant for a number of years, and now runs his own industrialist finance company, is the son of an Algerian father who came to France in 1952 as a labourer. Sabeg says said that the French have "a real problem" with equating Arabs and Islam with extremism. "I do see racism every day. People's faces change as soon as they see a black or Arab face. In certain circles, the Algerian war continues" (BBC News, 2005). The riots in 2005 highlighted the anger and frustration that many ethnic minorities felt about the discrimination they experience by police and French society in general. Living in poor housing projects, they feel isolated and disenfranchised from the rest of French society. Discussing the social unrest in France, Emma Charlton (2007), a reporter for *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), noted that the roots of the problems go back at least 25 years. In her opinion, the riots in 2005 drew international attention and forced the French to
recognize “the fact that these suburbs have developed into seriously problematic areas, with millions of people who don’t feel they have the same opportunities as mainstream French people do” (National Public Radio (NPR), 2007).

Adding to the controversy was French president Nicolas Sarkozy’s remarks calling the rioters \textit{racaille}, or "rabble,” and threatening to “\textit{nettoyer la cité au Kärcher}” [to clean the city/to clean them out with a power-hose]. And, despite that he has appealed to the state for support in helping Muslims build mosques, and advocated for social reforms such as positive discrimination to help combat the discrimination that challenges the North African-French second and third immigrant-origins generations in order to reaffirm the French idea of equality, he has continued to be controversial.

Renowned for their high immigrant populations, poverty and unemployment, they are referred to in French popular culture as “\textit{Cités HLM}. Many French hip hop artists come from these zones and their songs portray life in these HLMs: "\textit{Si tu es né dans une cité HLM...}” [If you are born in an HLM city...] (Tryo, 1998) \textit{Saint-Denis} is identified as the "93 \textit{département}.” There are several areas designated as « hot zones » within the 93 \textit{département} such as \textit{Aulnay-sous-Bois, Clichy-sous-Bois, Bobigny,} and \textit{La Courneuve}. In popular culture, rappers refer to it in their songs denoting that “if you come from “9-3” you are doomed” (Jacqueline, 2009). HLMs are poor urban areas on the outskirts of large cities also known as \textit{banlieues} [suburbs]. Discrimination in French society and especially from the police, causes resentment among the immigrant populations living in these low-income areas. Even though there have been efforts to invest money into these poor suburbs to help solve some of the problems of discrimination, unemployment and
alienation, little has improved the areas (National Public Radio & The Associated Press, 2007).

Notions of French identity have been challenged by the developing European Union, globalization, immigration and mass popular culture. Concerns are growing among French citizens, as issues of identity, diversity and culture force the French nation to reconsider or reconceptualize what it means to be French. As economic problems and sociopolitical problems increased, immigrants were viewed as a threat to French national identity and security (McNeill, 1998).

Islamic organizations, such as the Muslim Institute of the Mosque of Paris, dating back to 1926, and others have actively campaigned against racism and argued for equality, many of these older organizations were divided along ethnic lines, and lacked a consensus in the Muslim community, further complicating the controversy over French Islam. Adding to this confusion was the past practice of the French government in negotiating with multiple representatives of the Muslim community. Now, negotiations are with the new Conseil Français du Culte Musulman [French Council of Muslim Religion] (CFCM) formed in 2003 as the main interlocutor to the French government (Frégosi, 1999 in City Reports, Open Society Institute, 2007). Many of the newer organizations of young Muslim groups concern themselves with facilitating religious practice. They have been more successful at transcending national and ethnic divides, following a principle of dual allegiance to both Islam and the French nation. Their slogan is “French people, yes; Muslim also.” (Couvrer, 1998).

It is, therefore, encouraging to find that young second and third generation immigrant-origins do find ways to succeed and who want to continue to integrate and
prosper in French society. Among these are the young French women of North African origins in this study who are now or have been students in French universities. Their individual stories shed light on what has helped make them successful.

Despite the fact that more North African women had immigrated to France than men, (Killian, 2006) the problems and issues of minority women were under-represented in the research. In addressing this lack of research on minority women in France, I chose to focus on North African-French women to explore how these women negotiated their home life or family practices and the secularism of school while growing up in French society. I wanted to understand how these women came to construct their own identities, attitudes and practices within these spaces.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to expand the research insight of the educational and social success factors among second and third generation immigrant-origins populations. The study contributes to the increasing understanding on students of immigrant origins and their successes (or lack thereof) in French school systems, but is relevant to any society facing large immigrant populations. Furthermore, school systems committed to multiculturalism and social diversity may find the results of this study illuminating. Through this study, I explored the sociocultural and educational influences on the success of North African-French female university students in France as these students themselves see it. The study sought to understand the role of educational and cultural contexts and practices, played out in their daily lived experiences that most effectively promoted successful personal attitudes and behaviors. In doing so, this is intended to
provide awareness into student behaviors that will help to inform both sociopolitical policies and educational theories and practices in an international field.

The stories of these North African-French female university students, in their own voices, reflect their self-exploration as they articulated their sense of personal and social identity, what they attributed their academic success to and how they perceived their school experiences in France. Having progressed through the highly competitive French educational system to the university level, North African-French female university students have had to demonstrate their ability to succeed and find or make their place in French society. Riots in poor French suburbs like Saint Denis in the summer of 2005 and 2007 exposed how wide the cultural and economic spaces in French society are among immigrants, their offspring, and indigenous French.

Inconsistencies and other shortcomings in understanding why some students succeed while others do not are part of the problem. Much research to date has focused on economics and government policy and surveys. According to the Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, de l’Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, (2006) [Ministry of National Education of Higher Education and Research] and a host of many other researchers (Killian, 2006; Koehne, 2006; Brunner, 2006; Nieto, 2003; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), less in-depth interview-based studies have been done that portrayed the immediate perspectives of those most directly affected, particularly studies that focused on young women in their own voices. This is why the Ministry of Higher Education and Research sought “to promouvoir l’égalité des chances à l’université – to promote equal opportunity and diversity at university levels and to raise the success rates of students of immigrant origins (Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, de l’Enseignement Supérieur et
The Ministry of Higher Education and Research suggested that research involve interviewing those most directly affected – immigrant or minority students. Because there is a lack of research using narrative inquiries into the personal experiences of these students and their educational stories, my study helps fill these gaps by using narrative inquiry to bring the voices and experiences of minority students, in France, into the existing research. In addition, the educational narratives of these North African-French female students may further the use of narrative inquiry in addressing the issues that other young women, similar to these, must deal with as well, the many other sociocultural hurdles they must overcome in order to succeed within the French system.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry as an approach to research became important to me when I met American folklorist Sam Schrager, author of *The Trial Lawyer’s Art* (1999). Schrager, taught ethnography, community and cultural studies, folklore and folk-life stories at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and I worked as his assistant for a semester organizing and copying archived audiotapes of interviews that he had collected for a book he was working on about the life in logging country using the stories he heard from ordinary people. Part of my job was to listen to the interviews in order to categorize and organize them and as I listened to them, I became fascinated by their stories. I had not known that it was possible to study the stories of everyday people’s oral histories as narrative research. I got very excited because I had always loved listening to people tell their personal stories. Even as a young girl, I had found people around my neighborhood and engaged them in telling me their life stories. I came to see that the so-called common, everyday-people all around me, were in some small way or another not so common after
all. Existing in these stories lived common people as heroes, heroines, villains and saints, in quests of miraculous feats against insurmountable odds that their stories revealed about the events in their lives, and especially, how they had personally been influenced or changed by these events. I could see the emotion on their faces as they pondered over the inner reflections about themselves. I learned that the socio-historical backdrop to which these stories gave relevance was the story context or setting that shifted according to how certain circumstances had led to situating their chances and choices in life. However, it was Schrager whose obvious love for this subject opened for me a way to embrace the subject of narrative selves and oral history as a legitimate means of social research.

In presenting the narrative voices of these female, French-born, minority university students, I consider how some of the contemporary manifestations of belonging and self-will work to guide young women in their academic success. We might ask ourselves to understand representations of foreign "others" in our own social and cultural attitudes toward the world. As Bauman (2002, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) asks, "Because history is the endless process of human creation, is not history for the same reason (and by the same token) the unending process of human self-discovery?" (p.1090). Exploring the narrative histories of individuals has this potential to reflect on the recent past to discover the process of self-discovery and in so doing may "disclose or create new possibilities to expand the inventory of possibilities already discovered and made real, the sole human potential that always has been, and always is, already there." (p.1090).

Derrida’s (Malabou & Derrida, 2004, p. 56; Yates 2000) commented about “think travel” meaning that one was to think that unique activity of departing, going far away from chez soi, [one’s home] going toward the unknown, taking all of the risks, pleasures,
and dangers that the “unknown” has in store (even the risk of not returning). His remark seems to describe a state of mind that shapes the familiar as strange and unfamiliar, and the departure from *chez soi* as the figurative/literal leaving behind of one’s former self with its beliefs, values, biases, parochialisms, and taken-for-grantedness in order to deliberately, purposefully experience a culture-shock.

Many immigrants, refugees, and ex-patriots have done just that – leaving behind one home and departing for the unknown, possibly never to return. This takes place both literally and figuratively, in the geographical sense one leaves the land, and in the psychological sense one leaves the culture, even one’s social capital. Never-to-return may not necessarily be in a physical sense of not returning to the area to visit, but in the sense of not being able to return to the same place (values, beliefs, and perspectives) in time that one departs and the self that existed prior to the leaving. As the title of the 1934 novel by the U.S. author Tom Wolfe (1998) said, “You can’t go home again,” even though some of the cultural values and language are retained, the individual perspective changes within the self. Results may leave one feeling like a stranger to both, however what I believe happened with these participants is that they transcended the two individual cultures, thereby negotiated a third perspective that they called *another view*, and which I call a *cosmopolitan* perspective. Much as Derrida believed “being ‘culturally stateless’ meant having more than one homeland, building a home of one’s own on the crossroads between cultures.” (Bauman, 2002, p. 1092 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

My study also provides a useful point of international comparison for the cultural and educational challenges faced by other immigrant populations. Results may contribute to
research and scholarship aimed at improvements in pedagogy, policies and practices with regard to minority populations.

Research Questions

My interest is in understanding the meanings that people construct and how they make sense of their world and experiences. Luhmann's (1995) notion of autopoiesis or self-creation is the best way to describe how narrative inquiry can reveal how the human condition and the human potentialities for self-discovery and self-creation happen in the process of living and learning through accumulated experiences. “Meaning is embedded in people's experiences and [this meaning is] mediated through the investigator's own perceptions“(Merriam, 1998).

My research orientation reflects social constructionist perspectives from Bourdieu’s social and cultural reproduction theory (1977, 1987, 1993, 2001) about how meaning is personally interpreted and constructed through an individual's past experiences. I used Bourdieu’s social and cultural reproduction theories (1977, 1987, 1993, 2001), and critical feminist perspectives of situatedness such as Harding’s standpoint theory (2003) and postcolonial studies such as Said’s (1978) and others (Stora, 2004) as guides to frame a narrative inquiry into the multiple realities of these individuals' lives and roles. These frames helped to understand how the social and cultural reproduction and transformation of individuals’ lives and roles are influenced or reasoned by the present and historical backdrop of social phenomena (Bourdieu, 1977, 1987, 1993, 2001; Harding, 2003; Said, 1978; Merriam, 1998; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

The general research question informing my study was to understand the experiences that these women attributed to their overall academic success. In answering this
question, I explored the narrative stories of nine North African-French female university students as they reflected upon their own personal understanding and interpretations about the constructs of their personal identities as narrated through their lived experiences. My inquiry sprang from three interview questions probing their perspectives regarding such issues as:

1) Where do I belong?
2) Who or what has had the most or least influence on your educational experiences?
3) How have social and political conditions affected your educational experience?

I imagined the three questions as teleidoscopic in the sense that as three mirrored sides of the questions of belonging, influence and socio-political planes reflected whatever the lens is pointed at and turns it into a kaleidoscopic image of patterns, references of perspectives, and situatedness of the lens’ focus. In addition, I considered them as concentric circles having their centers at the same point that categorized the areas of:

1) sense of belonging,
2) educational influences, and
3) sociocultural-economic-political strata.

I envisioned these circles or spirals as centered on the intrapersonal self, seeking an aesthetic symmetry or balance or equilibrium for stability, even in the chaos to find meaning, otherwise, we have no control over our own destiny being at the mercy of fate. Another view was using String theory to imagine the micro in the personal busily making
repairs in the rips and tears in our everydayness struggle to survive, and the macro in the grand laws governing the social constructs that seemingly governed the bigger structural influences. I asked about self-image, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships of importance, education and learning, real-life decisions or dilemmas, accounts of personal changes and growth, perceived catalysts for change or impediments to growth, and visions of the future. I listened as they told me.

For the first question, I looked for evidence of the historical legacy of French colonialism and its influences as regards notions of the Other (Foucault, 1970, 1980; Said, 1978; Butler, 1990). Hegel (1977) was among the first to introduce the idea of the ‘Other’ as constituent in his famous master/slave dialectic. I wanted to understand how these young women came to situate themselves as they reflected upon their personal life experiences, family and environmental influences. How do they recognize or conceptualize what has helped shape their personal ideology? Their beliefs or values beyond that of their parents and society.

The second question probed the value and effects of major influences in their lives: parents, family, friends and teachers who had supported and encouraged them. It explored the practices and events within the family and schools that were most influential in either helping or hindering academic success. I considered Dewey’s (1938/1998) notions of the continuity of experience on the personal and social plane. How do they continuously adapt or re-adjust to their circumstances and where or what or how does their strength or will do they gain their resilience?

Keeping in mind Bourdieu’s (1973) social and cultural reproduction theory through the public education system, the third question explored the past, present and
future national contexts in France that affect (both positively and negatively) the ability for young North African-French female university students to establish a French identity in French mainstream society. For example, the French doctrine of laïcité (secularism) holds that religion should only be part of a citizen’s private life and not have any influence on politics or public life. This seemed impossible, nearly the equivalent of a dissociative identity disorder to me to consider such separateness of the self as split personalities. However, it may obscure the issue when a central question is how to integrate an immigrant population whose defining characteristics are being symbolized by the media as their religious affiliation. Particularly as alluding to them as a foreign enemy in the body politic, invading it and threatening its very survival of everything held dear in the national founding myth. Virtually rendering generations of the sacrifices of fathers, sons, and brothers as profaned. Thus, the overarching policy could, in itself, be an impediment to appreciating multiple perspectives and the search for solutions.

Within the governing cultural, social, and personal beliefs and practices, how do the young second- and third-generation females view their acceptance as having a French identity? The native French say they are willing to accept others and practice tolerance toward different racial and ethnic groups, particularly those who come from former colonies, but the size of the Muslim population (more than five million) and the cultural dissimulations between the two, such as the desire to have young women continue to wear the traditional headscarves in schools, contribute to keeping them a separate part of society. Because cultural aspects (with an emphasis on religion) of the French Muslim population define the gulf between French Muslims and the “native” French population, to answer the third question it helps to understand the way young North African-French
female students see their roles and values within the larger French socioculture. As it turned out they say their roles (if it may be viewed as such) are that of a normal French European student or as a typical representative of French culture and values. Were they a hybrid strain or a transcendence evolving beyond the nation-states founding myths toward a new cosmopolitanism of identity and belonging?
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Historical and Political Perspective

Recent Reforms

Statements made by some of the participants expressed the thought that changes in France were coming, too slowly and not enough, but changes are happening. Nicolas Sarkozy, elected President of the French Republic in 2007, himself a Frenchman of mixed national and ethnic ancestry, appointed several women with immigrant origins to his cabinet. Making good on his campaign promise to balance the positional roles occupied by men and women after decades of women being outnumbered by men in the French government, Sarkozy’s appointments of Rachida Dati, a woman with North African roots, as Justice Minister and Rama Yade, a Senegalese-born woman, as Human Rights Minister were seen as political appointments of national symbols in order to counter accusations of racism and prejudice during the rioting in predominately immigrant neighborhoods in 2005 and 2007. Accordingly, their appointments were a way for Sarkozy to reach out to black and Arab immigrants and their French children. As Interior Minister, his comments insulted many when he described delinquents as "ruffians" and said that crime-ridden poor neighborhoods needed to be power-hosed clean. His tough stance on crime and immigration may have one him the election since many French were afraid of more rioting. One political analyst, Dominique Moisi, (2007) summed it up, “The message [is] if you're a woman, or have North African origins, or come from a disfavored position in society, you can still make it in France."
However, in June 2009, President Sarkozy returned to right-wing loyalists and either replaced or demoted the two women from ethnic minorities in his first government. In what he called the second phase of his administration, he replaced Justice Minister Rachida Dati with Michèle Alliot-Marie, a Gaullist. President Sarkozy’s limited reshuffle was seen as a return to the old traditional formula after his experiment with outsiders and leftists, said Michel Sapin, a former Socialist Finance Minister. The new government marks a return to the more normal spoils system with the promotion of several centre-right politicians who felt badly treated when ignored in 2007.

Sarkozy’s appointments were viewed as experiments with positive discrimination in the ministerial office. Great symbols of Sarkozy’s "ouverture" [opening] to racial minorities, women and youth when first appointed in 2007, the replacement and demotion of the two women is now seen as punishment.

The Minister of Education Xavier Darcos, in 2008 made this statement:

Thus, in France, to talk about the situation I am the most familiar with, obtaining a diploma is undeniably a factor of professional integration, and the higher the diploma, the greater the potential for integration…We therefore need to work on career guidance options to enable each person to obtain the highest possible diploma” (Darcos, 2008).

As a reflection on this point, Alia, a participant in this study who is finishing her Doctorate in International Law, talked about how she was trying to set a good example and to encourage her brothers and sisters to stay in school a little longer, explaining how important this would be to have a better life if they obtained a higher degree. She said,
I think it’s cool and it’s important because it will show the way for others, and prove something to my brothers and sisters. But no, because now I’m 31 and I didn’t finish my studies, and when you ask some younger people, for example my sisters, what do you want to do? [They say,] oh we just want to finish the BAC in two years and find a job. [I say to them,] do you understand that if you stop in two years that it will be only for an administrative or functional job or something in the lower level, than if you go on to a university and get a diploma, then after five years you will be a CAPES?” [a Master’s equivalent]. But if you stop after two years, you will, for the rest of your life, only be in the lower level of an occupation or service? So, it’s only three more years, and then you can begin to do something more professional. But they say no, no it’s too long and we are not like you and so that’s that. Sometimes I feel like I failed because they don’t want to continue. They say, I just want to get a job, get a house, and to get married and have a garden – that’s all. So, it’s surprising to them that at my age, when I could have a car, etc. that I am pursuing this thing…Although they continue saying in my family that they are proud for this doctorate, even if they don’t understand, but it takes so much time and they don’t understand [why I continue to do it], because it doesn’t give [instant] material things (Alia).

Alia’s quote substantiates one of the dilemmas currently concerning the educational reforms that were recently released in 2008 by the Ministry of Education in France. A gap in understanding how best to help French students, particularly those who have immigrant origins, seems apparent. This gap not only relates to succeeding in school, but also in encouraging them to pursue longer studies at university. With that in mind,
however, one of the current reforms introduced by the Ministry of Education includes a new concept called “Civic education.” Darcos, (2008) the current Minister of Education in France, explained what this meant in a recent speech. He talked about how France had to think about “school and university guidance in the more global context of lifelong guidance.” This sounds promising until he mentions that part of the “Civic education” reform is the demand that students “salute and recite the French National Anthem in schools every morning, and to rise when it is being played.”

These new reforms seem to totally lack any sense of going in the right direction in providing “school and university guidance” in an atmosphere of inclusion for French students of diverse origins. Rather, the French educational reforms completely miss the point. Instead of taking an opportunity to find better ways of introducing new critical discourses in the curriculum that foster a sense of multiculturalism and inclusion, such as teaching immigrant histories along with French history (as several participants in this study suggested as a good way to make an effort to include diversity in the dialogue for minority students), the topic of “Civic education” is demanding that all students sing and salute the French national anthem – how preposterous!

**French Educational System**

From an historical perspective, nation-state ideologies institutionalized the citizenship discourse through the education system by structuring policies that imposed conformity with the national identity (Burbules and Torres, 2000). In this view, education is not simply concerned with developing the individual identity but with developing the national identity of citizenship. This juxtaposition between the state and
educational policies is charged with political importance within a national geographical location.

The French education system provides compulsory schooling for children aged six to 16 and a right to education starting at age 3. The Outline Act of April 2005 revised the role of the education system on the basis of similar objectives to those set out in the final declaration of the European Council in March 2000. They entail ensuring equal opportunities and success for all students by establishing a common knowledge base (mastery of the French language, mathematics, a foreign language, information and communication technologies, and humanist culture) and integrating more young people into the working world.

Primary education lasts for five years. Next, middle school lasts for four years. Then, pupils may opt for general, technological or professional education in lycées (high schools) preparing for the Baccalauréat, an exam to qualify for entrance into university, however, unlike U.S. high school diplomas, it is not a lycée completion exam. Three main types of baccalauréat degrees are available: 1. the baccalauréat général (general baccalaureate); 2. the baccalauréat professionnel (professional baccalaureate); and 3. the baccalauréat technologique (technological baccalaureate). Each of these categories encompasses several somewhat specialized curricula. Students may opt for technical or vocational education in lycées professionnels (professional high schools) preparing first for the Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle or the Brevet d'Etudes Professionnelles in two years and then, for those who want to continue, for the Baccalauréat Professionnel in two more years. Lycées also offer non-university higher education courses leading to the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur.
Higher education in France is characterized by a dual system: it is provided in universities (including *instituts nationaux polytechniques*) open to a large number of students, whose programs are generally geared towards research applications and in "*Grandes Écoles*" (Grand schools or "elite schools") and other professional higher education institutions with highly selective admission policies. Whereas most institutions come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research, some "*Grandes Écoles*" come under the responsibility of other ministries. Universities are made up of units offering curricula in academic fields and of various institutes and schools offering courses in Engineering and Technology and special programs in Management, Political Science, Languages and Physical Education. The *Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres* offer training courses for primary and secondary schools teachers, the *Instituts Universitaires Professionalisés* offer technological courses and practical training with an introduction to research and foreign languages. The "*Grandes Écoles*" offer a high standard of professional education in three or more years after two years of "*classes préparatoires*" and the passing of a very selective, highly competitive entrance examination. These classes offer scientific training, teacher training or advanced business studies. Five "*Etablissements d'Enseignement Supérieur Catholique*" prepare for either national, professional, or for church diplomas, while the universities confer national diplomas.

*Grandes Écoles* are considered more prestigious than universities and their selection procedure is highly competitive. The most prestigious *Grandes Écoles*: *École Polytechnique* (called "X"), *École Normale Supérieure* ("Normale Sup") and *École Nationale d'Administration* ("ENA") are initially aimed to train military engineers,
university professors and high ranking state officials, respectively. These schools are smaller, and kept apart from the rest of the educational system. They are based on fierce competition among the students and between the schools themselves. The most prestigious schools give access to the new French elite: the "Grands Corps". (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2007; Crossley, 2003; Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2007; Ben-David, 1992; Sa’Adah, 2003; Aghion, Cohen, & Pisani-Ferry, 2006).

Educational programs in France are regulated by the Ministry of National Education (Ministère de l’Education Nationale, de l’Éducation Supérieure et de la Recherche). At the primary and secondary levels, the curriculum is the same for all French students in any given grade, which includes public, semi-public and subsidized institutions. Another characteristic is the low tuition costs. Since higher education is funded by the state, the fees are very low: the tuition varies from 150 Euros to 700 Euros depending on the university and the different levels of education (licence, master, doctorat). One can therefore get a Master’s degree (in 5 years) for about 750-3,500 Euros. Additionally, students from low-income families can apply for scholarships, paying nominal sums for tuition or textbooks, and even getting a monthly stipend. Separation of church and state was decreed in 1905, but Catholic schools get state funding for teachers salaries, social security costs, and scholarships (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2007; Crossley, 2003; Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2007; Ben-David, 1992; Sa’Adah, 2003; Aghion, Cohen, & Pisani-Ferry, 2006).

Measures to decentralize the Ministry’s powers in the early 1980s marked the evolution of the French education system giving a greater role to departments and regions. The Act of August 2004 increased the powers of local elected authorities when
it comes to education. While the initiatives of local and regional authorities are growing in number, it is still the central government’s responsibility to decide on curricula, educational guidelines, recruitment and teachers’ salaries.

The French system has been currently undergoing a reform, which aims at creating European standards for University studies, most notably a similar time-frame everywhere, with three years devoted to the Bachelor's degree (*licence* in French), two for the Master's, and three for the doctorate. However, the traditional curricula based on end of semester examinations still remains in place in most universities. This double standard has added complexity to a system that remains quite rigid. It is for example difficult to change a major during undergraduate studies without losing a semester or even a whole year. Students usually also have few course selection options once they enroll in a particular diploma. (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2007; Crossley, 2003; Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2007; Ben-David, 1992; Sa'Adah, 2003; Aghion, Cohen, & Pisani-Ferry, 2006).

The French system has been increasingly criticized, and in 2004 two prominent French economists, Philippe Aghion and Élie Cohen issued a report: “Éducation et Croissance” [Education and Growth] to the Conseil d’Analyse Économique (CAE). In the report they state that a very serious crisis exists due to students being neglected financially, and a failure of the mass educational system with too many drop-outs and people who did not get any degree: every year 90,000 out of 750,000. In the universities, young students who are not helped in their orientation are very likely to fail the first year. The drop-out rate at the Sorbonne is 73 percent the first year, 47 percent the second year, and 42 percent the third year (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2007; Crossley, 2003; Bray,
Adamson, & Mason, 2007; Ben-David, 1992; Sa'Adah, 2003; Aghion, Cohen, & Pisani-Ferry, 2006).

What we know about the students of immigrant origins is that many do not easily succeed in the French educational system. But some students do manage to successfully complete the secondary studies and higher education to obtain professional degrees. The French government and Ministry of Education are interested in research to find out what the secondary schools and higher educational institutions can do separately and in partnerships to intercede the needs of these students in order to learn how to support their learning and increase their success not only at the secondary level but at the university level as well. The Ministry of Education and the French government want to increase the diversity of the universities’ populations and in order to do so they must ensure that more minority students are academically successful. (Ministère Délégué à l’Enseignement Supérieur et Recherche, 2006).

**Pedagogy and Practice**

Although the French have initiated councils and special measures to establish neighborhoods of zones d’éducation prioritaires (ZEPs) [educational priority zones, similar to the U.S. classification of inner-city or “at-risk schools], in poor urban areas with a high population of minority students only further stigmatized and marginalized this population, parents and teachers are still concerned with the low levels of academic success in these schools. In fact, a study by van Zanten and Roberts (2000) was sympathetic to the conflicting expectations placed on the individual schools to adapt in poor and multiethnic urban areas in the French neighborhoods. Their report stated that even the working-class parents were now afraid of poor teaching conditions and
ethnically heterogeneous school contexts so they were taking their children out of the public school system and enrolling them into private schools. They wanted to do whatever they could to insure their children had better chances at gaining more social capital.

Van Zanten and Roberts (2000) stated that the French educational system needed to address the changing composition of the school population. An example they gave was how teacher expectations based on upper and middle-class students did not correspond with attitudes and behaviors of working-class students. Despite an increase in working-class students continuing their secondary studies and even progressing on to tertiary education, they “did not find a democratization of education or reduced social inequalities only that there were slight changes.”

Crowley and Naves (2003) reported that the French government initiated councils and commissions to conduct a policy of helping children of immigrant parents find work and encourage youth support systems. The government implemented educational policies to help reduce the disadvantaged educational positions of children of ethnic minority origins. These authors described public measures taken to change the specific schooling needs of vulnerable ethnic students, and they reported on “initiation classes” for primary schools, “adaptation classes” for secondary schools, and the intercultural education of school staff and teachers all done in the efforts to address the academic failure rates among ethnic student populations. Crowley and Naves (2003) reported, as did Limage (2000) and van Zanten and Roberts (2000) that in spite of the official education policy changes, the issue of discrimination was still not necessarily addressed directly.
Limage (2000) did not present the schools, especially the teachers, in a sympathetic light, and argued that teachers were completely unaccountable for student performance or for any racial abuse inflicted upon ethnic students. Limage also accused the French government's issues of national security as over-reacting to the violence in these desperately poor areas by disadvantaged youth, stating that in reality, only a small minority was actually associated with any fundamentalists or terrorists. This study supported some of the same conclusions reached by van Zanten and Roberts (2000), in thinking that although “equality should mean providing everyone with the same instruction…it does little to address the issue of inequality.” Therefore, policies that attempted to solve inequalities by creating these ZEPs. Although conditions had somewhat improved for minority students, they still suffered discrimination, but at least policies were not being developed that increased these inequalities. The French had instituted positive discrimination in the system as a way of addressing these issues. Even some of my participants agreed that changes were slow and not enough, but at least they were coming, and positive discrimination was a step in the right direction to help level the playing field. Yet, it will take some time to determine if it really works.

Osler and Starkey (2005) had suggested that research focus more on the reasons for disaffection than to the symptoms, and they agreed with Limage (2000) who criticized how schools, teachers, and programs did little to address the issue of inequality of ability. This reference of “inequality of ability” was practiced in the U.S. and described how tracking practices were used to sort and group students by academic ability. In so doing, these practices unduly affected Black and low-income students by stereotyping them as less intelligent and low achievers, which in turn created low teacher expectations for
these students, and as a result led to self-fulfilling prophecies (Thornton & Chunn, 1988). Osler and Starkey also agreed with Limage on two other points: 1. institutional racism in schools contributes to academic failure and consequently affects student access to jobs and higher education; and 2. schools and teachers can act as obstacles to children's rights because children's rights may stand in opposition to the rights of teachers. In addition, they shared the concerns about how the media sensationalizes and misrepresents the youth population and violence.

Ogbu (1995, 1997, 2003), writing from his critical focus on inequality in U.S. schooling contexts, pointed out how income levels of families can influence the amount of time and money parents can invest in their children’s needs. He added that minority schools lack better teachers, resources and funding when compared to higher income levels neighborhoods. Ogbu (1995, 1997, 2003) believed that the attitudes and perceptions of the minority group by the U.S. dominant culture influenced the opportunities available to minorities in that society. He also noted that minority students’ attitudes towards school success sometimes resulted in academic disengagement as a way to show resistance to the dominant culture’s racism and prejudice. The schools, teachers and the community need to work together to help young people develop a healthy sense of acceptance in their own identity and in the larger social setting (Ferguson, 2007). Killian (2003) reflected this idea when she noted that second generation children born in France, “complain that there are not enough Arabs on television.” I had noticed that public advertisements and television commercials contained some representations of diversity, especially sports, but there were not many for other areas of society. For example, I did not see very many television commercials or public ads depicting diverse
families, and I did not see any with women wearing veils. I assume this reflected the notions of keeping the public sphere a secular space in French society. Second and third generation North African-French women wish to see depictions of themselves on television and elsewhere to confirm their acceptability in French society, but not as stereotyped outsider-terrorist invaders.

**Immigration, Citizenship and Social Markers**

In the resent French colonial past the French colonial empire began to fall apart during the Second World War, when various parts of the empire were occupied by foreign powers. However, control was gradually re-established and as a consequence, Charles de Gaulle became a national hero.

France was immediately confronted with the beginnings of the decolonization movement. The Algerian War started in 1954. Algeria was particularly problematic for the French, due to the large number of European settlers (or *pieds-noirs*) who had settled there in the 125 years of French rule. Charles de Gaulle's accession to power in 1958 in the middle of the crisis ultimately led to independence for Algeria with the 1962 Evian Accords. The French Union was replaced in the new 1958 Constitution by the French Community. All of the other African colonies were granted independence in 1960, following local referendums.

When considering citizenship, Feldblum (2001) states that the French republican view does not recognize the concept of “minority” or "ethnic.” She warns that although this view seemingly promotes equality, it actually institutionalizes discrimination by refusing to recognize unequal treatment of immigrants. In this manner, the state imposes the dominant cultural values as the popular will of the nation.
The perception among immigrants is that French society has denied its racism, xenophobia and classism. Racial and social discrimination against people with "typically" African or Arabic appearance or names has been cited as a major cause of discrimination. According to the BBC, "Those who live there say that when they go for a job, as soon as they give their name as Mamadou and say they live in Clichy-sous-Bois, they are immediately told that the vacancy has been taken." The non-profit organization SOS Racisme, reported an example of racism practiced by French companies. They sent identical curriculum vitae (CV) - one with a European name and another with an African or Muslim name - and found that the CVs with African or Muslim sounding names were systematically discarded. In addition, they have claimed widespread use of markings indicating ethnicity in employers' databases and that discrimination is more widespread for those with college degrees than for those without (BBC News, 2005).

The indigenous Maghrebins from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia each have their own legacy of colonial history with France (Alba & Silberman, 2002). Different types of colonialism under French rule governed the three countries, and each gained its independence under differing situations. Morocco and Tunisia were under a protectorate policy, while Algeria became a French department (Alba & Silberman, 2002). In 1956, both Morocco and Tunisia gained their independence, whereas Algeria’s civil war and struggle for independence lasted until 1962, and was the most violent among the three countries. Many of the Maghrebins from these three countries had also fought along with the French during World War I and World War II. Later, men from these three countries would be recruited to France to help replace the workforce shortage and to help rebuild the French infrastructure after the war. Moroccans came to France in less numbers than
Algerians did. Tunisians came later and were the smallest population to immigrate to France among the Maghrebin (Simon, 1981 in Alba & Silberman, 2002).

The early Maghrebin immigrant parents from North Africa were stereotypically viewed in France as poorly educated and working class (Alba & Silberman, 2002). Tribalat (1995) reported that second generation Maghrebin students suffered from an unusually high level of social problems, such as early school dropout, unemployment, and deviance. North African immigrant parents were socially and economically alienated in many ways because of the language differences. This meant they were unable to interact with the schools or with teachers to keep up with what their children were doing. In addition, not having had much formal education, they would have most likely felt somewhat intimidated by school administrators and teachers, which would further limit any participation in their children’s academic life.

Alba and Silberman (2002) conducted a study that measured government documents, such as school, marriage, and birth records, looking for social markers such as an individual having two parents without any diploma that could differentiate between French pieds-noirs and Maghrebin second generations. They found that certain social markers could increase the likelihood that an individual was of Maghrebin origin. The term “pied-noir” usually refers to a person of French origin who was living in Algeria during the period of French rule, and who repatriated to France after Algerian independence in 1962. These researchers showed how differences between these two groups indicated the marginalized position of Maghrebin second-generation students in French society.
Benraouane (1998) noted that although the revolution of 1789 was to create a culturally homogeneous nation that superseded regional and linguistic particularism, the emergence of a new ethnic minority in France has been characterized as the ‘Other.’ Lost between two cultures and rejected by two civilizations, the host culture and the culture of origin, was the “typical second generation North African” experience.

Part of the French argument against the multicultural "Anglo-Saxon model,” is that it causes “societal disintegration and ghettoization of minority groups” (Feldblum, 2001). The need for cheap labor that led to the increasing number of immigrant population from North Africa to France also led to the French creating this very situation. In constructing massive, low-income housing projects to ‘temporarily’ house migrant workers that came to work in France, these cités have become inner city islands largely populated with immigrants living in isolated poverty. Hence, the societal disintegration and ghettoization of minority groups, which France criticized the Anglo-Saxon model for reflects the realities of most immigrants living in the banlieues around many French cities.

Three bodies of literature comprise the theoretical bases for the study: Social and cultural Reproduction, Critical theories and Narrative inquiry. In addition, is a brief outline of the French educational system and several government policy changes affecting it. Further, is an historical glance at the sociopolitical background of French immigration specific to North Africa.

framework and concepts of *habitus*, capital, fields and *doxa*. These terms emphasize the role of practice and embodiment in the social dynamics of cultural reproduction, fields of capital and symbolic power. Some of Bourdieu’s theory derives from Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, as well as from the influence of Levi-Strauss, and Althusser. In this study, some of Bourdieu’s key concepts are useful as a framework to probe and analyze the issues of the relationships between micro and macro connections to social structures and power.

2. Critical theories of Postcolonialism (Said, 1978), Critical Feminism such as Standpoint (Harding, 2004) and Muslim/Islamic Feminism (Ahmed, 1992; Ali, 2000; Tohidi, 2001; Mernissi, 2004; Wadud, 1999) are briefly reviewed to provide a broader understanding of alternative perspectives that could also be relevant.

3. Methodologies for conducting qualitative research, which focus on explanations of narrative inquiry approach and analysis for multiple case study design in the overall qualitative frame. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), as well as many others, (Hytti, 2003a, 2003b; Said, 1978, 1985, 2004; Polkinghorn, 1988; Bruner, 1990; Jarvinen, 2000; Boje, 1995) provide an international perspective to explain the narrative aspect of research. The exact methods used in my study and the experience of collecting and analysing the data will be delineated in Chapter 3.

Finally, various political and historical perspectives on immigration and education in France are presented. These consist of brief outlines to provide a background of postcolonial historical French relations with Maghrebin territories and immigrant
populations, and the French educational system, including certain current empirical research perspectives that focus on France.

The literature reviewed here also explicates the value of this kind of international research for students, educators and policy makers in France and in other countries with large immigrant student populations. The data collection and analysis methodologies used were taken from a rich body of information on narrative and qualitative research.

One of the debated issues in sociology is the influence of structure and agency on human thought and behaviour. In this context, structure refers to those factors such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, customs and the personal, which seem to limit or influence the opportunities that individuals have available to them. Agency refers to the capacity of individual humans to act independently and to make their own free choices (Jary & Jary, 1991).

The works of critical theorists in feminism and postcolonialism have also used some of the concepts of Bourdieu’s (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993) social and cultural reproduction theory in which social and cultural traditions are viewed using an interdisciplinary perspective to raise and discuss emergent social and cultural issues that address knowledge construction.

Social, Cultural and Critical Theories

The relevance of Social and Cultural Reproduction, Critical Feminists and Postcolonial theories as well as the outline of French educational contexts and French and Maghrebin immigration history were pertinent to the overall understanding of the sociocultural situatedness of the participants’ in my study. They also informed my analyses of the data, starting with the interviewing process and continuing with exploring
how these young women came to understand and position themselves, as they reflected upon their personal life experiences and environmental influences and how they recognized these as having helped to shape their sense of self.

**Social and Cultural Reproduction Theories**

Social and cultural theorists use the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1973), who employed methods drawn from a wide range of disciplines from philosophy and literary theory to sociology and anthropology to explain his theories of social and cultural reproduction. Bourdieu (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993) developed methodologies and terms to combine both theory and empirical data that attempted to reconcile such difficulties as how to understand the questions of subject agency within objective social structures and how these structures are reproduced.

As a basic background to understand agency within the subjective-objective social structures, we can start by briefly discussing the socialization process of human in developing a sense of self-awareness and self-identity within the experiences of sociocultural interaction. One need only read the cases about feral children who have been abandoned, isolated, confined and neglected to understand how the need for human sociocultural interaction is required in order to develop “normal” human characteristics and a “human” sense of self-consciousness or self-awareness, which situates each individual into a subject-object frame within the social structures. This process is how each individual comes to develop an understanding of their own “looking-glass self” (Cooley, 1902). This term focuses on the ideas that a person’s self-conception or self-judgement is based on the response of others’ objectification. We come to see others’ as individuals with distinct identities and separate subjective needs and goals of their own.
Like Bourdieu, social theorist George Herbert Mead’s (1967) theory of human development fundamentally states that humans operate through a symbolic interpretation of meaning. However, as psychologist Jean Piaget’s (1955) believed from his work in cognitive development, individuals do not passively soak up information, but instead are actively selecting, interpreting and evaluating what they see, hear, and feel in the world around them.

In general, social and cultural reproduction describes the socializing process that mold succeeding generations into the sociocultural norms and patterns that function to maintain itself over time. And as individuals develop a sense of self-awareness they are enculturated into the sociocultural scripts and characteristic customs that band them, not only into the social group (Turnbull, 2002), but into the habitus of the sociocultural, economic class as well (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977, 1987, 1993).

Cultural reproduction characterizes how the social conditions are generated to form certain beliefs and practices that constitute a particular situatedness in viewing reality. Bourdieu (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993) theorized how these cannot be analyzed simply in terms of economic classes and ideologies. As an example, he showed how the apparent possession of taste and ability to appreciate art are closely connected to one’s education and social class status rather than inherent intellectualism (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). He maintained that the design and structure of social and cultural institutions tended to perpetuate the social strata, which privileged the dominant social groups by excluding people who do not have the appropriate background or capital, and that in maintaining this privileged position, they perform this exclusion while giving the appearance of its being available to everyone. Feldblum (2001) made a similar statement.
when referring to the French Republican view of equality under the law for all French citizens, whereas the reality is slightly less equality for ethnic minorities. Bourdieu (1987) argued that the social functions simultaneously as a system of power relations and as a symbolic system, in which minute distinctions of taste become the basis for social judgement. As social theorists seek to understand how the structures of schooling act as an agent of socialization by influencing the reproduction of dominant power relations and class (Ghosh, Mickelson, & Anyon, 2007; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; McLeod, 1995; & Oakes, 1985) Bourdieu’s (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993) social and cultural reproduction theory offers useful conceptual terms to express these structures.

According to Bourdieu’s (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993) social and cultural reproduction theory, each social class has its own cultural knowledge, dispositions, and tastes that are transmitted through the family. He referred to this as the *habitus* to convey how such practices as body movements, language, and cultural tastes are learned and deeply embedded to become natural within an individual’s intrapersonal and interpersonal sociocultural interaction. Bourdieu’s (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993) theory provides a theoretical framework to examine the social transmission of culture and the role of culture in education in general, as well as a frame to focus on the French experience in terms of these participants’ North African-French experiences of culture and education contextualized in a historical, postcolonial and current discourse of French identity. Because Bourdieu’s theories of social and cultural reproduction explain how cultural values and behaviors are socially transmitted, they can help to highlight how the participants in this study negotiated their own identities within the dominant culture and origins cultural practices. Particularly, how Bourdieu’s (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993)
concepts of *habitus*, *doxa* and *hairesis* come into play when participants redefine their own way or transcend these inherited structures or embedded learned behaviors by becoming aware of alternatives or exposed to other opportunities. Using Bourdieu’s terminology can help to explain how these North African-French women were able to overcome various obstacles to become academically successful. The participants conceptualized their own self-identities in spite of the negative clichés or stereotypes projected in the media from the dominant society about minorities. In a sense, they transformed the hybridized sociocultural networks they cultivated into “another view” instead. This other view was more than just a blend of two competing cultures. It was a view that transformed everyone – a cosmopolitan view.

Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice essentially states that through practice, social structures are generated and produced, and that these practices have an observable order. His concepts of fields, *habitus*, and capital are terms used to show the relationships between objective social structures such as institutions, discourses, fields, and ideologies with everyday practices such as what people do, and why they do it. (Webb, et. al., 2002).

In this, Bourdieu questioned the legitimacy of power and social classes outlining how they are created through seemingly legitimate power structures that hold authority to speak for or attribute value to all of the various field positions and social artefacts or products associated with the fields such as accruing economic and social capital associated with the competitions within these fields.

Important symbolic structures such as differences in social classes are legitimized through the various discourses of regulators within these fields. Highly successful competitors are rewarded with the prizes or symbolic capital associated with these
structures, such as gaining some respect and recognition in a field, as well as accruing any economic and social capital. Bourdieu contends that symbolic capital is misrecognized by accounting it to someone's natural or inherent quality, rather than something that a person has acquired through competition, inherited from their family, or learned in school. In addition, concepts of symbolic capital such as social, cultural, and intellectual are a form of capital just as money is recognized as a form of symbolic economic capital (Webb, et. al., 2002). When we consider these concepts to understand the many obstacles that immigrants and their children have to overcome or transform certain means into forms of symbolic capital to gain. The efforts on the part of both their parents and participants’ to transform self-will into the required intellectual capital, enough to rise in social strata is nothing short of remarkable. As an example, the participants of this study spoke of how their fathers moved the families into nicer neighborhoods in hopes of improving their personal lifestyle. The fathers knew that it was important to move away from the heavily populated immigrant banlieues and into better neighborhoods with better schools because they recognized how detrimental it was to their children’s chances to integrate into French society. Doing this would greatly improve their sociocultural capital and ultimately their economic capital.

Educational success entails a whole range of cultural behaviors, including such simple things as ways of walking or talking. Privileged children have learned this behavior from their parents and social connections fit into the educational culture with apparent ease, having parents that are well educated, possessing cultural and social capital, are familiar with the expectations of school culture. Children of unprivileged backgrounds have not had this opportunity of cultural or economic capital to develop
dispositions and manner of thought to ensure success within the educational system, if their parents are illiterate or uneducated, and even if the parents are literate they still may have social and language barriers, with which to contend. Bourdieu regards this ease or natural ability as the product of cultural capital and a great social labor. It equips privileged children with the dispositions of manner and thought, which ensure they are able to succeed within the educational system and reproduce their parents' class position in the wider social system. He refers to these dispositions and manners as *habitus* or certain mindsets and behaviors that are inscribed within a bodily and psychological performance as something that is natural (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977, 1987, 1993).

Part of my perspective and conceptual framework applied Bourdieu’s theoretical ideas of the pervasive role of education in social and cultural reproduction of social classes, especially the ruling and intellectual classes, which reproduce themselves even under the pretence that society fosters social mobility, particularly through education. In his theoretical writings, Bourdieu (1973) employs some terminology of economics to analyze the processes of social and cultural reproduction, of how the various forms of capital tend to transfer from one generation to the next. For Bourdieu (1973), education represents the key example of this process. Educational success, according to him, entails a whole range of cultural behavior, extending to seemingly non-academic features like gait or accent. Privileged children have learned this behavior, as have their teachers. Children of unprivileged backgrounds have not. The children of privilege therefore fit the pattern of their teachers' expectations with apparent 'ease'; they are 'docile'. The unprivileged are found to be 'difficult', to present 'challenges'. Yet both behave as their upbringing influences. Bourdieu regards this 'ease' or 'natural' ability--distinction--as in
fact the product of a great social labor, largely on the part of the parents. It equips their children with the dispositions of manner as well as thought, which ensure they are able to succeed within the educational system and can then reproduce their parents’ class position in the wider social system (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1993; Lane, 2000; Wacquant, 2005; Fowler, 1997). Therefore, in my study I explored how concepts of cultural capital are used and which kinds are recognized in order to foster success. I considered Bourdieu's (1973, 1993) terms about capital to understand how teachers and parents play a crucial role in my participants’ sociocultural backgrounds and how these influence their academic success or failure. Bourdieu (1973, 1977, 1987, 1993) theorized how the breaking out of the habitus and doxa of one’s mindset or class is only possible when an individual can imagine another way or can see the opportunities to do so. Applying this notion of doxa in this study, I consider that the participants were both privileged and underprivileged. Privileged on the one hand, because these women had families that were more open to change than other more traditional families were. Their fathers could imagine a way out of the poverty and backwardness of denying daughters an education. Parents were open to change and encouraged their daughters to have “long studies” (long studies meant going to school, through high school, and on to university studies). Fathers deliberately chose to take advantage of the opportunities available in France and saw it as a chance to break out. They moved their families to better neighborhoods with better schools, thereby hoping to improve their children’s chances of academic success. In addition, this move helped the children to acculturate better into the French society because they were not isolated in the banlieues, separated from the rest of French society. In Bourdieu’s (1977) use of the term doxa, it denoted what is taken for granted in any
particular society. The *doxa* is the experience by which “the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (p. 164). It encompasses what one is able to imagine for one’s self within the confines of a culture or society. Bourdieu’s notion of *doxa* described how it sets limits on social mobility within the society through imposing certain characteristics of the social position, resulting in an unquestioning acceptance of the current status quo as the "sense of one's place", and one's sense of belonging, as normal or natural. Thus individuals become voluntary subjects of those incorporated mental structures that deprive them of more deliberate consumption. (Bourdieu, 1987). *Doxa* becomes a society’s unquestioned and uncontested reality.

In this sense, the participants’ parents could see another way for their children to escape from poverty and outdated traditions of cultural origins that thwarted or denied females an education. In breaking with the origins *doxa*, fathers took advantage of the new *doxa* opportunities that were available in France despite their class level. However, on the other hand, the participants in this study were still underprivileged because they did not have the economic advantages or all of the cultural advantages such as well-educated parents who spoke French fluently and understood the sociocultural script that many middle and upper class French students’ parents’ took for granted. Moreover, to a degree, they still had to deal with the discrimination and negative stereotypes of North African immigrants that persisted in mainstream French society. Fathers moving the family away from the banlieues to improve their children’s’ chances of academic success at school were in effect breaking with the old *doxa* and *habitus*. 
Postcolonial Studies

Postcolonial, cultural and critical theories debate issues such as racism, nationalism, national identity, immigration, Western colonial and imperial histories and the nature of society in multicultural urban areas. Postcolonial theory examines the impact and continuing legacy of the European conquest, colonization and domination of non-European lands, peoples and cultures. Central to this critical examination is an analysis of the inherent ideas of European superiority over non-European peoples and cultures of imperial colonization. Postcolonial theory attempts to reinterpret the colonial experience in the light of developments in postmodernist and poststructuralist thought (Denyer, 2004). As a theoretical approach, postcolonial theory is useful for critical discussion of educational issues that involve migrant and immigrant populations in former colonizing countries like France (Bahri, 1996).

Postcolonial studies grew from Edward Said's (1978) influential critique of Western constructions of the Orient in his 1978 book, Orientalism. According to him (2001a, 2001b), the representation of “Other” is more about the power and control of colonial rule. Orientalism is a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient (Said, 1978). Orientalism termed an image, a sweeping generalization, a stereotype that crossed countless cultural and national boundaries. The Orient was seen as separate, eccentric, backward, different, sensual, and passive. It was depicted as having a tendency towards despotism and away from progress. Its progress and value are judged in terms of, and in comparison to, the West, so it is always the “Other,” the conquerable, and the inferior (Said, 1978). He states that the media and journalism that oversimplify
issues commit another aspect of misrepresentation by the West, creating stereotypical clichés in describing the Arab world as basically dictatorial minority regimes of one sort or another (Said, 2001a, 2001b). His point is that no such thing exists as Islam, pure and simple, because of so many Muslims and different kinds of interpretations of Islam.

In Said’s (1978) opinion, he questioned the underlying assumptions that formed the foundation of Orientalist thinking. Said argues for the use of "narrative" rather than "vision" in interpreting the geographical landscape known as the Orient. This means that an historian and a scholar would turn not to a panoramic view of half of the globe, but rather to a focused and complex type of history that allows space for the dynamic variety of human experience. He says that a rejection of Orientalist thinking does not entail a denial of the differences between 'the West' and 'the Orient,' but rather an evaluation of such differences in a more critical and objective fashion. The person who has until now been known as 'the Oriental' must be given a voice. Scholarship from afar and second-hand representation must take a back seat to narrative and self-representation on the part of the 'Oriental.' (Said, 1981). This is the culmination of Orientalism as a dogma that not only degrades its subject matter but also blinds its practitioners” (Prakash, 1995).

Stora (2004) and Said (1978, 2004) discuss colonial legacy issues of race, culture, language and education, including Maghribin immigrants in French society, and the investigation of French “constructions” of Maghribin identities, from metropolitan perceptions of Islam and ethnic minorities to the legacy and recovery of colonial categorizations of race. In addition, they examine processes by which societies and groups exclude 'Others' who they want to subordinate or who do not fit into their society.
The relevance of this theoretical framework for comparative education research, specifically in France, is to examine the colonial legacy in education as it relates to educational program policies. It is also useful to highlight the hegemony of education research discourses and agendas that may underlie concerns about race, culture, language and identity. The "modern popular ideas of French identity and the homogeneity of continuity of the French nation (raised to mythology) were constructed and disseminated, particularly via the history books of the nascent, secularized education system" (Citron 1985, quoted in Silverman, 1992). This is central to understand how these issues shape education policy, particularly in the context of the resurgence of ethnic nationalisms and conflicts in France.

**Critical Feminism**

Feminism has greatly influenced over the past decades reforms in the Western societies by promoting, not only the values of women’s experiences, but a multicultural educational viewpoint to help individuals develop a stronger sense of voice, mind and self. In France, some questions regarding immigrant origins that face North African-French women involve citizenship status, cultural conformity, gender and marital rights, and secular and religious priorities. Feminist scholars Freedman and Tarr (2000) argued that a gendered approach to the understanding of ethnic minority experiences needed to be developed and articulated in France. They based this premise on the idea that only a handful of research works gave equal space to ethnic minority women or girls. For immigrant origins women in France, integration, nationality and citizenship status are gendered and racialized processes that not only differ from immigrant men but also differ between their experiences and identities as French women of immigrant origins and white

Despite the fact that immigrant women experience both gendered and racial oppressions, they are not without voice and agency. Through demonstrations groups of young immigrant origins French women have formed sociopolitical networks that have coalesced in the past decade in France. One such group is the “sans-papières,” with Madjiguène Cissé, a woman of Senegalese origin, as a leading spokesperson for the movement, which gained international recognition in 1997 through demonstrations in France to highlight the plight of many illegal immigrants and the sexist, racist discrimination from French authorities and police. With her help the movement has gained a wider recognition while forging positive cross-cultural identities with other cooperative groups within French society (Freedman and Tarr, 2000).

**Standpoint Theory**

Standpoint Theory is a postmodern method for analyzing intersubjective discourses that arose amongst feminist theorists, such as Dorothy Smith (1999), Nancy Hartsock (1999), Donna Haraway (2003), Sandra Harding (2004), and Patricia Hill Collins (2009). According to this approach, a standpoint is a place from which human beings view the world; a standpoint influences how the people adopting it socially construct the world. Social group membership affects people's standpoints and the inequalities of different social groups create differences in their standpoints. All standpoints are partial; so, for example, standpoint feminism coexists with other standpoints. Standpoint theory supports what Harding (2004) calls strong objectivity, or the notion that the perspectives of marginalized individuals can help to create more objective accounts of the world.
Harding argues that the relationship between researcher and participant should not be detached, but engaged. Strong objectivity cannot be achieved by removing oneself from the world, but by acknowledging our situated location and being reflexive of our position within it. She argues that the purpose of research should not be to construct grand generalizations, but to work closely with people and enhance their understanding and ability to control their own reality.

“We must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see social life from the point of view of that which is subjugated instead of from the perspective of the ruling order.” (Piatelli and Leckenby, 200, p. 15).

Standpoint theorists acknowledge the many differences that divide women, therefore no one universal women’s experience is apparent (Narayan, 1989). Contemporary theorists argue how individuals are both oppressed in some situations and in relation to some people, while at the same time are privileged in others. Their goal is to situate women and men within multiple systems of domination in a way that is more accurate and more able to confront oppressive power structures (Zinn, & Dill, 1996; Andermahr, Lovel & Wolkowitz, 1997). However, debates continue regarding the opposing perspectives of assimilationism and multiculturalism, which has led to the accusation that feminism is incompatible with multiculturalists policy. The claim is that multiculturalism allows such distinct cultural practices based on religious or traditional practices such as arranged marriage and female genital mutilation to exist within Western societies. Others have argued that these debates stem from Western orientalism and general political reluctance to accept foreign migrants (Berkowitz, 1998).
Muslim – Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism is the form of feminism concerned with the role of women in Islam. In recent times the concept of Islamic feminism has grown further, with Islamic groups looking for support from as many aspects of society as possible, and educated Muslim women striving to articulate their role in society (Humphreys, 2005). It has been, however, mainly upper-middle-class women that have been able to vocalise the Islamic feminist movement, since they have the economic means or security to violate widely held beliefs. (Badran, 2001). The rise of feminism in the Islamic world has been linked to Western influence, with a political and economic attempt to align with western powers and markets promoting Western ideas such as universal suffrage, human rights and access to education. It aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of sex or gender, in public and private life. Islamic feminists advocate women's rights, gender equality, and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework (Ahmed, 1992; Ali, 2000; Nayereh Tohidi, 2001; Fatima Mernissi, 1992; Amina Wadud, 1999). Although rooted in Islam, the movement's pioneers have also utilised secular and Western feminist discourses and recognise the role of Islamic feminism as part of an integrated global feminist movement.

Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Qur’an and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Qur’an (Holy Book), Hadith (sayings of Muhammed) and Sharia (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society. (Badran, 2002, 2000). Modern Islamic feminism is the activism of Muslim women born and brought up within Western societies. These Muslim feminists are people who consider themselves Muslims
and feminist, but who may use arguments outside Islam, for example, national secular law or international human rights agreements, to counter gender inequality. They also use an hermeneutical approach to develop an interpretive reading of the Qur’an by women to validate the female voice in the Qur’an (Wadud, 1999).

Amina Wadud (1999) says that her attempt to “pursue a female inclusive reading of the Qur’an through examining the notion of woman in the Qur’an turned out to be nearly unprecedented throughout fourteen centuries of Islamic thought. However, she says, that in these times of postmodernist critique when the very foundations of knowledge are challenged to move beyond certain value laden tendencies, such a method can be viewed as part of a larger area of discourse by feminists who have constructed a valuable critique of the tendency in many disciplines to build the notion of the normative human from the experiences and perspectives of the male person. Wadud (1999) would say that current Islamic culture and political perspectives have entangled contemporary Muslim women within a misogynistic discourse rooted in ancient pre-Islamic values of gender, and she would argue that Muslim men avow inclusion and full equality for Muslim women, while in practice treating them as subservient and subhuman.

In France, often, those women born to immigrant families face racism from the host community in the public spaces, as well as sexism within their own personal spaces of families and communities. Young Muslim women in France faced such ordeals living in the banlieus, but they fought back against the violence facing them, ranging from endemic sexual attacks and gang violence to the forced wearing of the hijab, either by male members of their family or at the hands of male fundamentalist gang ideology. By creating Ni Putes Ni Soumises [Neither Whores Nor Submissives] (Bellil, 2003; Amara,
& Zappi, 2003, 2006; Fayard, & Rocheron, 2009), they organized demonstrations in their neighborhoods and communities that gained support and political voice.

In summary, theoretically, my study draws on and is informed by Bourdieu’s theory of social and cultural reproduction, Said’s notion of the “Other,” and Muslim Feminists attention to the voices of Muslim women’s voices.

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism has ancient roots, through to the Stoics and ancient Greeks as well as in modernist natural law theory, social contract theory and international law. During the Enlightenment, intellectuals of the time held memberships in the transnational ‘republic of letters’, which advocated notions of human rights. The natural law theorists assumed that along with the natural law of self-preservation, humans also exhibit a tendency of “fellow-feeling,” a form of sociability that unites all humans at a fundamental level into a kind of world community. Erasmus of Rotterdam, drew on ancient cosmopolitanism to advocate the ideal of a world-wide peace. He emphasized the unity of humankind over its division into different states and peoples, and pleaded for national and religious tolerance (Querela Pacis). In the eighteenth century, the terms ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘world citizenship’ were often used to indicate an attitude of open-mindedness and impartiality. The French Revolution expressed this cosmopolitanism in the 1789 Declaration of Rights of Man. A cosmopolitan was someone who was not biased by particular religious, cultural or political loyalties. Philosophical authors such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Addison, Hume, and Jefferson were themselves cosmopolitans (Kleingeld & Brown, 2002).
Regardless of their differences, all varieties of cosmopolitan theories call for a kind of moral human universal community, i.e. helping to promote a moral commitment to justice, human rights and cultural expression. Perhaps the most common invocations of the label ‘cosmopolitan’ in recent philosophical literature have been in the disputes over cultural cosmopolitanism. Especially with disputes over multiculturalism in educational curricula and with resurgent nationalisms, cultural claims and counter-claims have received much attention. The cosmopolitan position in both of these kinds of disputes rejects exclusive attachments to parochial culture. So on the one hand, the cosmopolitan encourages cultural diversity and appreciates a multicultural mélange, and on the other hand, the cosmopolitan rejects a strong nationalism.

In staking out these claims, the cosmopolitan must be wary about very strong ‘rights to culture,’ respecting the rights of minority cultures while rebuffing the right to unconditional national self-determination. Hence, recent advocates of ‘liberal nationalism’ (Margalit & Raz, Tamir) or of the rights of minority cultures (Kymlicka) generally seem to be anti-cosmopolitan. But the cosmopolitan's wariness towards very strong rights to culture and towards national self-determination need not be grounded in a wholesale skepticism about the importance of parochial cultural attachments. Cosmopolitanism can acknowledge the importance of (at least some kinds of) cultural attachments for the good human life (at least within certain limits), while denying that this implies that a person's cultural identity should be defined by any bounded or homogeneous subset of the cultural resources available in the world (Waldron, 2000; Kleingeld & Brown, 2002; Nussbaum, 1994).
There are arguments against cosmopolitan theory, and one is based on psychological assumptions that people cannot accept a wider allegiance and therefore need a particular sense of national identity in order to be agents, or form attachments and function with like-minded or similar identity. However, the moderate cosmopolitan view indicates that patriotic attachments with fellow-citizens may exist, but also has to share at least some positive attitude toward all other human beings as well. In addition, the moderate cosmopolitan view believes that cosmopolitanism should be taught as an extension to patriotism much as multiculturalism does to teach inclusion. In the context of this study, this argument does not stand. My participants did speak about feeling more French than their heritage culture, but they did not discount the value of their parents’ or grandparents’ heritage culture either.

Perhaps this is the attitude that France has with its stance on secularism and the encroachment of Islamic religious symbols in Republican schools, which exemplifies the point that schools are places for indoctrinating the youth into nation-state political principles that are based on sociocultural claims to power of particular political institutions. The elimination of special motivating attachments to fellow-citizens will make a certain desirable form of political life impossible.

Could this attitude be an intermediate position here is the (Kantian) view that it is morally necessary to establish just democratic states and that just democratic states need some special commitment on the part of their citizens in order to function as democracies? Can such a special commitment go beyond mere cooperative obedience but that can still be defended in Universalist cosmopolitan terms? In this study, two of the participants mentioned that the issue was not about terrorism, but about religion in French
politics and social attitudes of intolerance toward Arabs, North Africans and seeing the
two equated with Islam. This loyalty against the republic the people as one - if you are
not French first, then you are not sociopolitically a reliable fellow-citizen. The retort is
that these questions or doubts are based on certain assumptions about human psychology
and human nature. As the world becomes a smaller place through increased social,
political, and economic contacts, these disputes and the issues they raise will only
become more pressing (Kleingeld & Brown, 2002).

The United Nations is an example of a cosmopolitan community in which individuals
from different nation-states form relationships of mutual respect. Appiah (2001) suggests
the possibility of a cosmopolitan community in which individuals enter relationships of
mutual respect despite their differing moral, religious, or political beliefs. Many of these
philosophical or ideological perspectives such as cosmopolitanism, cross-culturalism,
interculturalism, transculturalism and hybridity all sound very much the same in that
various forms of interactivity supposedly takes place between disparate groups.
Cosmopolitanism is an umbrella under which many other perspectives come under as
subcategories.

- **Cross-culturalism** is useful to categorize various terms used to conceptualize the
discourse about current inter- and intra-subjective and objective relativities when
discussing the concerns of a globalized culture. Particularly, the ethical assumption is
that in all instances the entire society must adhere to the same constitution of
fundamental rights and obligations, and cannot use cultural differences as an excuse
to reduce the rights of certain groups. Cross-culturalism claims that it is concerned
with a broader exchange beyond that of multiculturalism’s concern with nationalistic particulars or social group cultures.

- **Transculturation** (Ortiz, 1995) described the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. Much like acculturation, it defines the results of contact between two or more different cultures and merges as a new, composite culture in which some existing cultural features are combined, while some are lost, and new features are generated. Cuccioletta (2002) explained that transculturalism was more social while multiculturalism was more political. He thought transculturalism was more social because it was accessible to the individual to make changes in their perspective and community. Amalgamation would come under this heading.

- **Acculturation** (cultural assimilation) implies a transition from one culture to another, which either happens as a monocultural transmission generationally or as with immigration the transmission of host culture over heritage origin culture. However, it has been described as still exclusive in regards to some ethnicities when it comes to intimate or elitist social groups or clubs (e.g. WASP clubs).

  According to Mehta (2000), “Universalism is considered imperious, presumptuous, depoliticizing and a search for uniformity rather than contrasts. Cosmopolitanism, by contrast, is a willingness to engage with ‘the Other’” (p. 622). In my view, the women in this study were indicating precisely both frames of mind, “a universalism in the existential human condition, but also a willingness to openly engage with the other themselves equally regarded as part of the diverse historical cultural face of French-European-Cosmopolitan citizenry today.
Cosmopolitism is the term that best describes the construction of these participants’ identity in this study, whether consciously or unconsciously, to name their other view. The women made sense of their personal experiences by negotiating their own place in choosing to alter their personal philosophy into what I interpret as a cosmopolitan view thus transforming the limited social spaces of the French and heritage cultures into “another view” for themselves – a cosmopolitan view of inclusiveness. Silverstein (2004) examined the tensions between the French Republican historical national identity and its current multicultural version of Frenchness. He said, “Former colonial subjects became postcolonial immigrants and a generation later, French-born citizens.” In spite of the rhetoric of republican ideals and universalist citizenship, and multicultural phrases like “Black-Blanc-Beur,” (which means Black, White and Arab was the slogan for the French soccer team and the French nation when France won the World Cup in 1998 reflecting the multiculturalism of the team and the nation) the French sociopolitical state is still fearful and suspicious of race and terrorism. Recent past terrorist attacks by extremist factions in France, make it understandable for the French to be fearful of extremist factions, but it does not excuse the stereotype clichés that profile all young North African’s “delinquency and identity crises” with that of North-African-equals-Arab-equals-Islam-equals-terrorists (Silverman, 1992).

Methodologies for Conducting Qualitative Research

Narrative Construction of Identities

The potential for qualitative research in overcoming some of the limitations of quantitative studies is in providing new insights through narrative inquiry. Bruner's
(1990) ideas of narrative knowing are used in the social sciences. Thinking along the same lines as Mead’s (1967) socialization process and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1986), Bruner posited that narrative knowing is the idea that the world is socially constructed by means of language. We use language to communicate our ideas and express them in narrative constructs around the things we do and events we experience personally. Polkinghorne (1988) included the notion that narrative constructions are fundamental schemas used for linking individual actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite. Riessman (1993) suggested that narrative talk is organized around important events. A teller in the conversation takes a listener into a past time and summarizes what happened, often by making a moral point. Riessman (1993) theorizes that in telling a story about an experience an individual is also creating a self of how the individual wants to be seen by the audience. In this manner narratives help relate actions by framing them in a way to make sense of them at a given moment in the past, as well as a means to distance, separate or reunite us with the past. Narrative provides the medium to elaborate and reflect on the choices, actions and circumstances that permit us to imply a moral lesson in the meaning and understanding as a basis for life experiences. Narrative provides a tool for making meaning by constructing meaning to life experiences and events that do not need to be coherent, unitary or fixed, but can be contradictory, elusive and blurred, which according to Hytti, (2003b) highlight the dynamic nature of the meaning-making process in narrative format.

Another interesting aspect of narrative texts studied by Vilkko (1997) showed how the process of memorising can be seen in the structures found in the narrative text. This idea relates to two different times being present in the narrative: the time of remembering
(present) and the time of the event (past). Jarvinen (2000) points out that interviews also reveal something about the future. Hytti (2003b) examines how interviews in effect reproduce cultural scripts and can be seen to possess properties of all social interaction from every day common sense knowledge of social structures. Narratives are seen as an essential component of individual and socially constructed realities. They are subjective accounts reified as objective knowledge and acts of sense-making (Boje, 1995).

A common element in narrative approach is the premise that life is interpreted in stories. It is this narrative interpretation that constitutes the process by which humans essentially give meaning to experience and action in existence (Carr, 1986; Riessman, 1993). Hytti (2003a, 2003b) believes that because things need to make sense to us, we strive for coherence within ourselves by telling and retelling the stories that make up the story of who we were, who we are and what we will become. In this manner, she believes that our story-like projections act to unify the self (Carr, 1986). Kelemen and Lightfoot (2000) viewed identity as a product of the self’s reflexive process through narrative construction.

This approach recognizes that individuals are not only constrained by the events and experiences lived, but also by the limited repertoire of available and sanctioned stories they can use to interpret and communicate their experiences. Tierney (2000), explains that life histories are containers of memories that can be rendered in the interview and linked to ideas about true accounts by the examination of the cultural scripts and narrative devices speakers use to make sense of their own life experiences.

Biographical studies such as Roos (1993) and Hanninen (2004) presuppose how the material tells something about the actual events that have taken place and the meanings
the person attaches to them. These studies assume realist points-of-view that the stories of
events can be considered true. This allows the use of triangulation between stories told by
different people with other evidence or the use of the interpreter's theoretical
understanding as a method for validating the truthfulness of the stories in the
interpretation.

While narrative knowing relies on sequential and temporal ordering of events that
link causality, other views suggest that narratives can be theme-based rather than simply
episodic temporal sequences. According to Hytti (2003b), narratives are both thematical
and sequential as individuals construct meaning through reflecting upon how or what
particular events may have led to certain consequences and/or outcomes in time. For
example, a narrative explanation or interpretation relates sense-making or meaning of
events and human experiences through integrated plots and events that are
understandable in relation to the contextual happenings.

Thematically-focused interviews can also be used as a source for narratives
(Hanninen, 2004) and framing the context and categories structures the interviews to
reflect life stories narrated. Further, narrative research methodology can be applied as a
method for data collection and as the way of reporting research results and
conceptualizing life as story-making in the form of literary critique (Czarniawska, 1997).
Although Czarniawska (1997) points out several advantages of doing field-work to study
the actual production of the narratives, such as in face-to-face interviews that may
influence the direction of the conversation somewhat that does not mean that written
accounts through letters or emails between the researcher and the participant cannot
convey a sense of intimacy, and provide useful information that may be analyzed (Vilkko, 1997; Kuula, 2000).

Riessman (1993) distinguishes between ethnographies and narrative research based on their different focuses on events. Ethnographic studies focus on the events, not the stories people tell about the events, which is the focus in narrative studies. Hytti (2003b) states that various textual analyses that are applied in the social sciences, such as semiotics, hermeneutics, discourse and conversation analysis share the same idea of social constructivism as narrative research, but only narrative is interested in how the people themselves interpret events. Individual participants can add their own voices to their experiences to be used in the study of textual narratives.

As an example, a researcher in narrative interviewing should ask a question like, "Could you tell me about that particular event or time?" which invites the interviewees to express narrative short answers to questions. Narrative interviewing can introduce the topic for the interview and still give the interviewee total freedom to narrate whatever they want. In this manner, it offers some advantages to the interview because the plot and main concepts of the story are chosen by the person being interviewed. Otherwise, Geertz (1993) warns that a structured question and answer type of situation where the participant’s role is limited to only respondent misses the opportunity to let them tell their story, and may illicit what he called thin narratives, lacking personal story-like elements (Hytti, 2003b).

The manner of analysis and presentation of data is also a factor in whether attention is focused toward coherence of the stories, or the frictions, contradictions and ambiguities in how people narrate their lives. In a study by Johansson (1999) a participant was
concerned about not being able to correctly recall events in order to provide a factual experience because as one of the participants stated, “If you need to check some questions, please call me. Sometimes I think differently of things on different days, and you may want to verify some particular points.” The implications of this are the notion that an individual may not be self-evidently aware of changing and therefore not able to tell the story, but the researcher may apply a general understanding of human personality and theoretical knowledge to represent a truer story and that the authority ultimately lies with the author rather than the narrator.

Hanninen (2004) applies the concept of inner narrative to make a point that it is important for the interviewed participants to tell stories to the researcher that are close to the stories that they would tell themselves, reflecting the authentic thoughts and thinking of the individual. She bases this belief upon the fact that we can understand each other through language and therefore links between the inner and outer narratives of the individual mind as a product of its time. Jarvinen (2000) explains that the story is no longer the same as during the event of the story, because in the present we need to explain our motives and meanings of the past in a way that lead to the present. So lived life can never be recapitulated fully but it can only be understood in terms of how it is narrated today.

Informed by the work of Narrative researchers, my study draws on the notion that narratives are instrumental in naming and actualizing the self and understanding one’s life’s experience. My study therefore uses narrative in researching social issues to capture the drama that story elements provide. In this form, narrative may reveal the emotional meaning in communicating the experience.
Empirical Studies

The examples in these studies help to capture the context of some of the complexities of attempting to learn about the collective and individual experiences that influence identity. They explore the theoretical concepts that advance educational design and enhance understanding that is relevant to integrating research and practice. In addition, they integrate professional knowledge with empirical data to inform instructional developments and decisions. Some of the results in these studies build upon what is already known to work. They reflect and support theory and demonstrate the relevance to teaching methods and student learning based on context and establish relationships between intervention behaviors and fostering environments for enhanced understanding.

Most studies about North Africans in Europe, describe persistent problems for North African and Middle Eastern Arab Muslims. According to Kaba (2008), the literature on North Africans continues to demonstrate persistent isolation, very high unemployment rates and cultural conflicts.

Editors and authors Hoerder, Hébert and Schmitt, (2005) along with others compiled a group of comparative case studies using a critical perspective that explored questions of belonging and social capital among immigrant youth. They looked at transculturation in immigrant youth and asked how they “negotiate and interpret social relations for their own social and political purposes” (P.18). Hoerder’s chapter on cultural transfer in a case study of students in Paris concludes that identities are defined by “multiple interactive cultural practices in family, in local, regional community, or state-wide contexts” (p. 147).
Tribalat (1995) noted that the educational literacy level of many parents of second-generation students not only affected the communication with their parents in the first language, but it also affected the means for parents to interact with the schools and teachers. Parents were socially and economically limited in many ways because of the language differences and educational levels. This meant less interaction with the schools or with the teachers so parents could monitor what or how their children were doing. In addition, having little formal education themselves, most likely made them feel somewhat intimidated by the teachers and the school administrators, further limiting any outside participation in their children’s academic life. Moreover, because of the lack of French language ability and education, many immigrant parents thought they could not help with their children’s homework when these students reached secondary school (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Seginer & Vermulst, 2002; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Henderson, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996). As Tribalat (1995) observed, the second generation may learn to speak enough of their first language to communicate with parents, but the lack of literacy among parents, and the insistence of schools on French proficiency, meant that parents involvement with teachers and schools was limited.

Even with this limitation of language, many studies found that parents’ ethnic, economic or educational backgrounds were less important when compared with their level of emotional support and involvement in their children’s education, both at home and at school that had the greatest influence on their children’s academic success (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002). When students knew their parents were paying attention to how well they were doing academically, they performed better in school irrespective of their ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds (Darling &
Steinberg, 1993; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997). However, Regner & Loose (2006) noted, parental involvement at home proved to be a stronger predictor of academic achievement than school-site involvement. Despite the fact that many immigrant parents could not provide direct help with homework, they could still encourage their children to do it well (Fuligni, 1997; Seginer & Vermulst, 2002). And the mere fact of perceiving parental interest was sufficient for students to infer that their parents placed a high value on education (Epstein, 1988) and, in turn, to motivate them to succeed academically (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, Dejong,, & Jones, 2001). Therefore, parents may be limited academically in how they can assist in their children’s learning, but they are not intellectually limited in how they can help emotionally support their children.

Killian (2003) explored the identity issues facing second-generation immigrants and “how differing perspectives are negotiated in immigrant families”. Burton (1993) said, “French-born children of North African immigres,… find themselves ‘paumes entre deux cultures, deux histoires, deux langues, deux couleurs de peau, ni blanc ni noir, a s'inventer (leurs) propres racines, (leurs) attaches, se les fabriquer’ [Mixed between two cultures, two stories, two languages, two colors of skin, neither white nor black, have invented (their) own roots, (their) cultural attachments, to create themselves]. Rosello (2005) used the notion of “performative encounters” to better understand the contemporary position of the Maghreb. She reported that a type of multicultural bilingual code-switching has become a way of expression for a new generation of North African authors (p. 232). Her points reflect similar remarks made by participants in my study when Alia and Yasmine spoke about a mixing of sociocultural traditions.
Writing about North African youth in France, Begag (1990) states that they were stereotyped in the “public eye as a result of problems stemming from culture shock including failure in school, delinquency, clashes with police in the inner-cities and racism” (p.3). Begag believes that the risk of social outbursts in isolated immigrant communities in France will continue to increase due to the marginalization experienced by the North African youth living there. Seeing no opportunities or hopes for their future, they have rebelled by opting out of school, which is valued by French society.

Stereotype threat is a confirmation bias, and can be either positive or negative. Coming from a teacher, it can be in the form of both, as “self-fulfilling prophesy or teacher expectations” (Wilkins, 1976). A stereotype threat is the fear that one’s behavior will confirm an existing stereotype of a group with which one identifies, and it can sometimes affect performance (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002; Osborne, 1995).

Bowen (2004) notes that Muslims who immigrated to France after World War II were mostly unskilled workers recruited by the government and French industries from Algeria and other French colonies. According to him, “large housing projects built in suburbs or industrial enclaves maintained their isolation from the cultural mainstream.”

Acculturation orientations refer to the attitudes individuals hold towards both their culture of origin and the dominant culture of their host society (Berry, 1980; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). Attitudes towards both cultures are not mutually exclusive (Berry, 1980; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). A fifth orientation, called individualism, has recently been added and refers to the preference to identify oneself as an individual rather than as a group member (Bourhis et al., 1997).
Regner and Loose (2006) examined the “perceived parental involvement, ethnic identity and acculturation orientations, in order to discover their respective contribution to grades among ethnic minority students” (p. 777). They stated that “research has clearly demonstrated that perceptions of academic parental involvement (Jeynes, 2003), acculturation orientations (Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002) and ethnic identity (Chapell & Overton, 2002) influence grades of ethnic minority students” (p.777).

In conclusion, it is important to note that none of the studies described above focused on young immigrant women’s educational experiences in their own words. The present study takes up the challenge through the research challenge described in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Building on my personal experiences as a second language learner, a student in a foreign culture, and a teacher of English as a Foreign (Second) Language in France and the United States, I applied my study of French history and culture, and multicultural education, and experience in classroom teaching to understand the experiences of young, North African-French university students in France. The purpose of this study was to expand the research in understanding educational and social success factors in immigrant populations. The study contributes to increasing understanding on students of immigrant origins and their successes (or lack thereof) in French school systems, but is relevant to any society facing large immigrant populations. Furthermore, school systems with stated commitments to Universalist ideals of citizenship such as France must consider how a multiculturalists approach to acknowledging social diversity among the student population may contribute to finding better ways to support the multicultural needs of a diverse student population in the schools and their families in the communities. Through this study, I explored the cultural and educational influences on the success of North African-French female university students in France as these students themselves saw it. The study sought to understand the role of educational and cultural contexts and practices, played out in their daily-lived experiences that most effectively promoted successful personal attitudes and behaviors. This was intended to provide insights into student behaviors that inform both sociopolitical policies and educational theories and practices internationally. In so doing, I represented their voices in terms of their sense of belonging, educational influences, and sociocultural-economic-political context. The
stories of these North African-French female university students, in their own voices, explore to what they attribute their academic success and how they make sense of their school experiences in France. Inconsistencies and other shortcomings in understanding why some students succeed while others do not are part of the problem. Much research to date has focused on economics and government policy with less one-on-one intimate interview-based studies that portrayed the immediate perspectives of those most directly affected, particularly studies that focused on young women. By intimate, I mean face-to-face interview questions conducted in a conversational style rather than anonymous survey questionnaire rubrics with a list of rigid responses. The Ministry of Research in Education sought “to promouvoir l’égalité des chances à l’université – to promote equal opportunity and diversity at university levels and to raise the success rates of students of immigrant origins (Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, de l’Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2006). A key aspect of this is to target high schools as the focus of attention in which to develop partnerships with secondary schools for early intervention. The Ministry of Research in Education also suggested that research involve interviewing those most directly affected, particularly immigrant or minority students. Due to a lack of research using narrative inquiries into the personal experiences of these students and their educational stories, my study contributes by using narrative inquiry to bring the experiences of minority students, in France, into the existing research. Commonly, such methods like interviews and observations are primarily used in the naturalist (interpretive) paradigm, as well as supplemental in the positive paradigm, which, however, uses primarily surveys. In addition, these educational stories of French North African female students may address higher education success issues that these young
women must deal with as well as the many other sociocultural hurdles they must overcome in order to succeed within the French system.

Case Study Design and Narrative Approach

My study was a multiple case study design using qualitative methods through a narrative inquiry approach. Merriam (1998) speaks about a case study as being a bounded system that focuses on a particular or “single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). Yin (2005) spoke about multiple-case studies and their importance “to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences.” In addition, Stake (1995) believes that “case study conveys the “experience of actors and stakeholders...largely with narratives and situational descriptions.” He further states, “Selection offers the opportunity to maximize what can be learned, knowing that time is limited, the cases that are selected should be willing subjects.”

Culler (2000) argued that “narrative theory is crucial for the analysis of texts of all sorts” (p. 5), and has “relevance to the way humans interpret meaning (Culler, 1997, p.2). Some research psychologists have applied narrative inquiry to study the psychology of behaviours and attitudes among individuals and groups. The emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of our being, combined make up our subjective experience of being alive (Belling, 2006). Although we only glimpse into the individual’s experiences through narratives, sometimes we as the audience may see more than the narrator explains. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the nature of narrative inquiry as a space that moves back and forth through time and along a continuum of personal and social experiences. Each woman’s narrative describes several scenes or stories within her overall story, which take us from her present circumstances to her past and future within

Preskill (1998) articulates this idea best:

Our ongoing efforts to construct an identity, to reach our potential as human beings, to make the choices that shape who we are and how we will act on the world are all part of questing for the second self. It is a metaphor for actively and continuously engaging in a process of self-discovery (p. 345).

In qualitative inquiry, three data collecting techniques are typically used: participant observation (e.g. audio taping interactions, field notes/logs, photographs, and images), interviewing, and document collection. In this study, I used primarily interviews. The research questions explored the following:

- What are the narratives of North African French female university students in France with regard to their personal identity?
- Who (or what) has had the greatest influence on the educational experiences of the participants?
- How have social and political conditions affected the educational experiences of the participants?

For the first question, I intended to understand how these young women came to philosophize themselves, as they reflected upon their personal life experiences and environmental influences. In addition, I wanted to know how they recognized what has helped shape their conception of self. How do they adapt or re-adjust to their circumstances? I explored issues of religion, gender, immigration and a sense of
belonging, self-identity and citizenship. The second question probed the major influences in each participants’ educational career – parents, families, teachers, and others who guided or impacted their determination and abilities to succeed in the French education system. The third question was designed to explore the roles that social and political conditions played in the education experience of North-African French women. I also looked more broadly at the historical legacy of French colonialism and its influences as regards notions of “the Other” (Said, 1978, 1985, 2004) throughout the data analysis.

Richmond (2002) described the learners' stories and experiences based upon their recollections and statements about their own feelings and perspectives. She also found that the narrative process enabled participants to transform their own learning when they critically reflected on their narratives and begin to re-story and reconstruct their lives.

Thematically-focused interviews can also be used as a source for narratives by framing the context and categories, and structuring the interview questions to reflect life stories that are narrated against that constructed theme (Hanninen, 2004). Although Czarniawska (1997) emphasizes the advantages of being in the field during the actual production of the narratives, letters or emails written to the researcher can also be a powerful source of data that provides a great deal of meaningful insights when analyzed (Jarviluoma, Moisala & Vilkko, 2003; Kuula, 2000).

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative is a form of representation, rather than a mode of analysis. They suggest that the narrative inquirer must have a sense of an audience and a sense of what it is about one's research text that might be valuable for them. They advise researchers not to apply a theoretical framework too rigidly,
explaining that the analysis and interpretation of field texts (what they call interview data) into research texts is done by composing it as an illustration in its context of contributing to questions of social significance, and in context to other research and theoretical work. By doing this, the analysis of the interviews will represent more of the narrative voice of the participants in the inquiry.

Participants, Site, and Access

Planning and Arrival

I had been excited over an announcement from the French Ministry of Education regarding the call for Equal Chances among French immigrant student population. One of the suggested ways to help the Ministry fulfil its call was to interview the immigrant population of students and ask them what it was that they thought would help. It made perfect sense to me to ask the people most closely involved what they think, and that was exactly what I had on mind to do. It was great; in fact, I could not believe my good luck at being so timely, until I realized that I was nowhere near being ready to start my research study. I still had to complete several necessary stages in my doctoral program with my university to qualify me. This was in 2006, and I was not ready until 2008. As I was crossing the Atlantic on my way that had taken two years to coalesce, I was hyper-aware of what I meant to do, also knew well enough that I was not ultimately in control of everything.

Before going to France, I tried to make every possible arrangement in advance. I was fortunate to have contacts in France who helped me make arrangements that satisfied my research endeavours. A mutual acquaintance introduced me to a professor at one of the universities in Paris with a large diverse student body. My contacts in France greatly
aided me in accomplishing my research study within the parameters that I had designed by enabling my access to second and third generation French female university students with immigrant origins background that I had focused on in my research study.

After an all-night flight, I arrived at the Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport in the morning. I was not sure if my university contact, Professor Léveilleur (his self-coined pseudonym), would meet me or not. We had corresponded by emailed the night before, and he told me he would try to be there to pick me up, however, if not that I should take a taxi, and he supplied me with directions both in English and French to give to the driver just in case. As it turned out, he was not at the airport, so I took a cab and headed for the campus with my directions where we had agreed to meet as a backup plan.

It was raining heavily as the driver helped me unload my luggage. After carting it in under an awning, I stood there looking out at the rain, savouring for a moment that I had actually arrived. Then, I made the phone call to Professor Léveilleur. He was already there on the campus and within minutes pulled up in his car to fetch me.

Professor Léveilleur arranged my housing accommodations with the help of the university administrator. However, due to overbooking and no cancelations, my accommodations had fallen through, and I went through a period of not knowing from one day to the next if I would even have a place to stay for the night. Fortunately, Professor Léveilleur had a friend who offered an apartment to rent, so I had a place to stay.

After a while, when things were not going smoothly, I would remind myself that in spite of it, I was lucky to be there to complete my study. My participants would echo this
same attitude, saying that in spite of the discrimination or hardships they faced, they still considered themselves lucky to be in France with the opportunity to get an education.

Participants

Merriam (1998) states that an important characteristic of case study is defined by its bounded system (Smith, 1978 in Merriam, 1998). In this study, I considered the criteria of being a North-African French female university student as the essential delimiting factor or unit around which I based a bounded system for the case studies. The participants in this study were measured as individual case studies bounded by these context criteria. In four months, eight women agreed to schedule an interview with me and the majority of them had completed reading the questions and had made notes to refer to during the interviews. I ultimately conducted hour-long interviews with eight individuals, four staff members and two visitors. Eight of these interviews were taped and transcribed; the other three were outlined with notations and written into accounts afterward. The ninth woman interviewed for this study was conducted through emails, receiving the same interview questions, however she responded only in written form through our emails. Any relevant data from those interviews is attributed to pseudonyms in this report. My participants ranged in age from 21 to 37 years and included first-through third-generation immigrants. Six were single, two married, and one engaged; they were students of sports, engineering, and law. Table 1, Participant Characteristics, lists and describes each of the participants.
Table 1

Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Origins</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yesinia</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malena</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Algerian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leena</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yasmine</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafa</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Algerian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizette</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Algerian-French</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sana</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Algerian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assirem</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Algerian National</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alia</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Tunisian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A key attribute of the participants was a degree of homogeneity. Clark and Robinson (1998) noted the importance of selecting similar cases to describe a sub-group in a population. With the focus on North African-French women in France who have reached the university level, it was important for me to be able to document their geographic, ethnic, and cultural origins, learn something of their family and social backgrounds, and their experiences in the French education system. Some common level in these factors resulted in comparable data sets and deepened the perspectives that my study may provide.
Site

The primary site for data collection was a large metropolitan campus in Paris, France, one of the largest universities in the Paris region. Between 35,000 and 40,000 students enroll yearly in all fields of studies, including social sciences, philosophy, literature, history, languages and linguistics, economics, law and political science, as well as teacher training, acting, cinema, physiology and sports. The university is renowned in the fields of law and economics, as well as being privileged to have several well-known, influential professors such as Paul Ricœur, the phenomenologist philosopher, as an administrator and Jean Baudrillard, the postmodernist philosopher, who was a professor there. The campus is also known as having been at the center of the May 1968 student riots in France where student protests spread to other areas and led to a national political crisis. The academic setting provided direct access to the participants of greatest interest in this study.

Access

I enlisted the assistance of a professor at the university and a teacher of English as a Foreign Language as cultural advisors. Professor Léveiller Senior Lecturer and English language professor in the Science and Technology (methods) of Physical Sports Research Center, (Maitre de conférence et professeur Centre de recherches anglophones, UFR Sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives) at the university in, France was the primary point-of-contact and coordinator in Paris. He facilitated introductions and interactions with students and faculty and provided access to academic and logistical resources.
Professor Beauvais, a high school teacher of English as a Foreign Language (*Lycée professeur de anglais*), in southwestern France, advised on secondary education and French culture and translation. She was my supervisor when I conducted my student teaching at the *lycée* in France in 1998. Additionally, two former students of Professor Beauvais, provided an introductory perspective for the study. Both have direct experiences in the cultural and educational issues of interest in the study and we became acquainted through online conversations, much like pen pals, over the time that I prepared for the fieldwork.

I worked with Professor Léveilleur, Professor Beauvais and French community members to help identify candidates to participate and begin building a participant network. Wright and Decker (1994) describe building chains of contacts through the use of people who know other people to obtain knowledge of participants. My goal was to have no fewer than five participants who complete the entire study with me. At first, I thought that a primary avenue for finding participants would be through an offer to teach business English classes at the *université*, but unfortunately, that was not possible.

I arranged my visit to the university for the fieldwork so that I could be there for an entire semester and during the times that the students would be most active. During the winter months, the university and students typically prepares for exams; over holiday weekends and during the weekends, the campus is quiet. I arrived just after the students returned when large numbers of people were on the campus. Professor Léveilleur drew from his students and other colleagues at the university to recruit participants. I formulated a four-page survey instrument to elicit background information about
experience in daily life and distributed it to interviewees and others, asking them to return completed forms during the interviews or in Professor Léveilleur’s mailbox.

**Procedures**

Aware of the myriad of possible cultural sensitivities and the need for academic rigour, I followed established protocols for research involving human subjects. I framed the dialogue in each interview using a combination of my three research questions and adaptation during the interview session. Forbes (2006), Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), Glesne (1999), and Spradley (1980) all stress the importance of adaptability while conducting interviews. They relate the value of being flexible enough to go with the moment and to be able to note and record these moments of emergent interest or importance, which may lead to further exploration of the situation. In taking this advice, I approached the interviews with an explorational attitude that allowed for discovery (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), rather than determine, in advance, which themes would be constructed in the study.

**Interview Protocols**

I began data collection in the initial contacts with the nine participants. (See Figure 1- Study Timeline).

As candidates volunteered, they permitted me to contact them and briefly describe the nature and purposes of my study. I did so by telephone, email, or in-person. When possible beforehand, I sent email attachments or handed in person a standard packet of study information that consisted of the interview questions, informed consents forms, and a brief description abstract of the study’s purpose and intent. (Copies of all of these forms located in the appendices section.)
Figure 1. Study Timeline

I wanted them to have some time to reflect and become comfortable with the areas of their lives that I wished to explore. Regardless of our manner of contact, I reviewed all materials and obtained signed consent before each interview. The standard packet of study information consisted of three initial instruments:

Letter of Introduction – I used a standard letter, in both English and French, to introduce myself and my affiliations with UNLV and UPX. I explained the schedule, methods, and expectations and affirmed my commitment to work ethically and responsibly with all participants.

Consent Form – Each participant was required to sign a consent form signifying their understanding of the process for the study and their commitment to complete the study. This form was prepared in accordance with UNLV Internal Review Board requirements. Each participant was given a copy of the signed form.

Interview Questions and Survey Questionnaire – Each participant received the interview questions and a list of survey questions that I intended to use to collect as much
background information about each participant as possible, including family history, education background, places lived, interests, and achievements. While not all participants completed the questionnaire, they did provide additional background about my study and helped prompt additional discussion during the interviews.

Even in this introductory period, I began noting the levels of interest and enthusiasm of the candidates, the completeness and amount of elaboration in their responses, illuminating details in their responses, and their availability as limited by schedule conflicts). I began scheduling the interviews and conducted them mainly in a private office space at the university. At the start of each interview, I went through the informed consent form explaining the purpose for each required signature. Truly, compared to French research protocols and the U.S., I imagined the French either considered it as either ludicrous or highly suspicious.

The interviews were recorded on audio media only as part of the permanent record for the study. I had planned to record the interviews with a video camcorder, which would have allowed later substantiation in analysis of facial and body gestures during participant interviews, but none of my participants would consent to video recording. At first, many seemed somewhat curious, if not suspicious, about my motives and intentions.

Each interview lasted no less than one hour and continued as long as the participant was willing so in some cases we spoke for two hours or met a second time for another hour. The interviews were conducted in English and French, according to the abilities and inclinations of each participant. My goal was to allow enough time to construct meaningful dialogue without overtaxing the participants. It was difficult to schedule time with the participants around holiday schedules and examination weeks. Participants were
either busy with studying for upcoming exams or leaving for short holiday breaks. I considered myself lucky to get them to schedule and commit an entire hour with me alone. I recognized that these interviews comprised my primary data set and could not be reconstructed later, so I tried to maximize the amount of information that I collected from each by keeping us from straying too far off of the questions. Nevertheless, each participant gave me a great deal of background information that surrounded each of the questions’ answers.

After each interview, I undertook a preliminary analysis of the information I had collected. I copied and archived all records (e.g., audio files, emails, and field notes). Backup of all data was essential to protect against any loss of irretrievable data; a systematic catalogue of my data has been essential for later retrieval and analysis. I later reviewed and completed a time log of the audio files, noting topics discussed and highlights from each interview and compared the results of each interview against similar results from other interviews, looking for preliminary patterns and subjects for further investigation and dialogue.

I collected additional data in local settings such as interviews, observation notes, and audio-video recorded excursions and transcribed interviews of cultural venues, and neighborhoods. As circumstances allowed, I interviewed participants both at the university and in outside social settings. The outside settings allowed me an additional nuance to the collection of cultural artifacts and anecdotes involving sociocultural perspectives that participants must be aware of as part of the everyday French social structure. This additional data helped me to describe more accurately the cultural setting for my study and to enhance my understanding and the reliability of my data. While
conducting the field work, I also observed and participated in daily life, such as shopping, working in the university library, and walking around the area. I collected brochures, books, and maps and took notes and pictures. I was delighted to make the acquaintance of the university’s professors as well as others in the community; all members of the university community with whom I interacted were helpful and interested in my project.

Data Sets

Table 2 displays the data sets and field analyses that I collected for this study; the data sets are described in detail below.

Table 2

Data Sets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Preparatory and Administrative Documents</td>
<td>Internal Review Board; copies of the plan and methodology; letter of introduction; signed consent forms; survey questionnaire; interview guidelines; introductory copies of emails; financial and travel records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Field Notes</td>
<td>Observations taken during all meetings, interviews, and visits plus administrative and logistical notes; hours, interviews, transcripts, emails, member-checks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interview and Social Contact Records</td>
<td>Audio and photograph files; field notes; copies of post-interview emails.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Cultural Artifacts</td>
<td>Video, audio, and photograph files; cultural artifacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Interview Transcripts and Translations</td>
<td>Transcripts of interview audio files; translation of French interview content; consideration of content, theoretical framework; preliminary figures, graphics and coding data along with preliminary drafts for dissertation and presentation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Preparatory and Administrative Documents were required of the university institutional Internal Review Board (IRB) regulations for conducting ethical human research. For this study, the international research site and participants
complicated the IRB process slightly. They required multiple copies of the detailed plans of the study design and methodology. In addition, these items were included: letter of introduction; signed consent forms; survey questionnaire; interview guidelines; introductory copies of emails; financial and travel budgets and timeline records.

2. **Field notes and observations** were taken during all meetings, interviews, and visits, plus administrative and logistical notes were made for countless hours of analysis and transcription, along with in-person and back and forth emails of translation checks on audio and written interviews, transcripts, and member-checks as triangulation of the data.

3. **Interview and Social Contact Records** data collection and analysis consisted of the audio interview files, and the transcriptions and translations and social contact records in the form of field notes and copies of pre-and post-interview emails.

4. **Cultural Artifacts** were also part of the data collection such as video, audio, and photograph files that document some of the cultural field of the study site.

5. **Interview Transcripts and Translations for the French interviews** were made for each participant interview. These nine separate files included transcripts and translations of the interview; translations of the French interview content; analytical consideration of the content as well as the theoretical frameworks such as preliminary figures, graphics and coding data along with preliminary drafts for dissertation and presentation.
These diverse data sets provided a comprehensive basis for my data analysis and provided a foundation for enhancing credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness of my results, as well as maintaining an administrative record of this study.

These data sets and field analyses techniques entail as much detail work in the pre-planning stages as that of the actual deployment of the specific tasks and objectives of the study plan to ensure a well-planned, organized research process. However, no matter how well planned a study is, it does not preclude the unforeseen possibilities of chance, so it is advisable to be flexible as well. Qualitative research uses a naturalistic (interpretive) paradigm approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 39).

Data Analysis

“Where quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations. Qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry” (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 48).

Narrative inquiry in educational research and elsewhere is a valuable tool for gaining and gathering meaningful information from interviews and in presenting the data more in the narrative voice of the individual. In this study, using narrative inquiry during the interviews helped develop the central history of the social and personal identities of these individuals. It allowed the participants to tell their own stories, which provided a descriptive knowledge of their perspectives and experiences that were then analyzed through narrative inquiry methods.
In “Acts of Meaning, Bruner (1990) considered the narrative form as a non-neutral rhetorical account that aimed at “illocutionary intentions,” to communicate meaning. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) noted that, "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world." In other words, people’s lives consist of stories.

**Interviewer’s Attitude**

As researcher, I felt privileged to be allowed to peek into their private lives through the interviews, as they told me important stories about themselves and others that orbited their personal lives. Bateson (1994) wrote that participants sometimes draw one in and indeed I found that each interview unfolded like a mini-movie of the week. Much like Jung’s (1990) archetypes related to personal, cultural, and spiritual growth, or as important to our modern narratives (Campbell, 1991), the stories featured the familiar archetypal cast of characters, each scene revealing the participants’ situatedness, and teaching us how our attitudes and others’ affect our choices, and situate our lives chances.

I tried to put the person who was being interviewed in a comfortable, secure and equal position as much as possible! I ensured them privacy and I provided an informed consent that explained objectives of the study, confidentiality, reference persons, and the questions.

As the interviewer, I encouraged the person to speak by being somewhat neutral. I was part of the dialogue and contributed information in a natural conversational style, but at the same time, I listened to what was being said as a researcher. I recognized my own subjective individual situatedness. I was careful with my body language, and I genuinely
shared a little about myself when asked. I had an empathetic attitude. I was not just interested in what they were saying as a researcher. I felt really privileged to hear their stories. I reformulated our conversation by saying things like “you said that…?” “Did you mean…?” “As I understand…” I repeated what the person said, or picked a word or sentence and repeated it. I was sincerely supportive when it seemed that I needed to be. I kept my questions open enough and precise enough to give the participant the place and the opportunity to speak and develop her ideas. The structure and content of what I wanted to explore was adaptable, but I was also precise in attempting to establish a focus in my mind.

I was able to audio record the interviews but it was not possible to video the earlier participants, so I stopped asking and simply eliminated it as a point of concern. I did take notes a few times during the interview, only to capture something such as dates or contact information. Most of my impression notes were made after the interviews. I recorded short comments about any changes in behaviors or attitude that seemed to surface during the interview. I could recall the sense of these moments when I listened to the recordings again. I also noted nuances about my style that I had not been conscious of during the interviews. If they were annoying little habits, then I changed my way of speaking. Later, when I transcribed the interviews, I included as many nuances as possible, with nearly every word and sound, silences and hesitations that I could include, looking to capture not just what they said but how they said it. I had fluent French speakers listen to the recordings and translate some of the participants’ interviews. I also got confirmation on some of the translations to verify the accuracy of the translations.
Procedures Used for Analyzing the Data

I kept asking myself questions of the data continuously throughout the analysis and I made field notes of these thoughts. I started before, during and after the interview. I continued this ongoing dialogue while transcribing and especially as I read and reread the transcripts and listened to the recordings, over and over trying to hear what the data was telling me, while doing the coding process of categorizing and subcategorizing. I also relied on multiple triangulations by involving other observers, theoretical perspectives and member-checking to review and compare the data and the interpretations. I first transcribed the entirety of eight of the nine interviews (as the ninth was an in-depth email interview there was no need for transcription) that documented the interviews. During the transcription process whenever I was unsure of some instance dealing with language or cultural issues, I sought the help of two independent French translation assistants as well as other researchers for their input. I also contacted the participants directly by email for further clarification or elaboration whenever a question or doubt arose that I felt needed to be explored. Next, I constructed charts that categorized each of the nine participants by the three research questions, and carefully reread the transcriptions and field notes making commentary and asking myself questions of each interview as they pertained to the questions. During the analysis process, I made multiple passes as I sifted through the data, coding it, and constructed models, charts and hierarchical structures all the while looking for coherence, differences, and patterns and themes to emerge. Throughout the multiple passes of the nine interview transcripts, I sampled phrases that had any bearing on the three questions using them to guide the categories of identity and belonging, educational experiences and support, and the social and political contexts. These helped
me to organize the data and enabled me to look across the nine participants interviews. Slowly, patterns and themes emerged from the data categories. Continuing in this manner of sifting through the data, I eventually reached a number of common themes that I labeled, and then further sifted through the data themes developing sub-themes. I continually compared and contrasted the responses across the participants and noted phrases or words that indicated information that was either emotional or factually pertinence in informing my inquiry.

I noted how participants used personal stories to help contextualize and explain their answers. Czarniawska (1997) argues that narrative is central to organizing life. Meaning that people enact “stories” and that these stories provide legitimacy and accountability for their actions (Czarniawska, 1997 in Hytti, 2010).

I also gathered the emails and other correspondences plus cultural artifacts and field notes. Using in-depth email interviews is an acceptable tool in doing qualitative research. There are numerous studies that have used email interviewing as part of the methodology to deal with issues such as second language (Karchmer, 2001), experiences of immigrants. In addition to initial interviews, email can also be used to probe, elaborate, clarify, and elicit follow-up information for member checking (Robert & Dennis, 2005).

It was intense work to first listen to and then sift through the stories to pick out emotional and factual information. I looked for meaning in the answers they gave in the stories and by the kinds of stories they told and how they told them. I documented the multiple passes through the transcripts in making view graphs and poster-sized graphs of tree graphs, charts, spider charts, and flow charts that itemized each participants’
characteristics and significant responses. This kind of analyses is time-consuming due to the conversational and personal nature of narrative inquiry.

Table 3

Examples of Analysis of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Subs</th>
<th>Categories and Subs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Origins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalties</td>
<td>Extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences/similarities</td>
<td>Love, loss and imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Cultures</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate</td>
<td>Difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>School education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Environment</td>
<td>Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Cultural origins</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents made it easy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I analyzed the data from the women as individual cases in a multicase study by categorizing individually each participant in how they answered the research questions and determined patterns and themes and then across the participants looking for similarities and difference. Then, I distilled these, constructing themes and sub-themes by further comparing and contrasting and grouping relational subsets. It was a continuous process of sifting the data looking for gold. As I categorized respondents’ remarks by my research questions as headings, certain commentaries made by respondents as well as some of my own observations became the headings for domains.

At first, these headings were loose, overall ideas that seemed to characterize the participants individually and as a group. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Dewey and Vygotsky (would support this type of analysis, since he viewed experience as having both a social and personal meaning and believed that people should be analyzed both as individuals and as part of a group or social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Bassey, 2009).

Then I further used certain articulations from the respondents and others to aid in a deeper analysis between these in order to develop concepts and relationships. In retrospect, I marvel at how they evolved out of the data, but acknowledge that it is also an interpretative process. Above, Table 3, Example of Analysis, illustrates an example of the outline process of distilling commentaries and ideas that extended the relationships.

**Modes of Analysis**

Geertz (1993) said that a structured question and answer type of situation, such as a survey that only offers rubric responses, may elicit what he called thin narratives that lacked the opportunity to relate personal elements such as story-like incidents. For my
participants that was not the case. They had the opportunity to relate personal stories, which they did, and provided me with a rich narrative about their personal experiences.

Vilkko (1997) showed how the results of memorising are portrayed in the text and the process of memorising can be seen in the structures found in the text. “This idea relates to two different times being present in the narrative: the time of remembering (present) and the time of the event (past),” (Vilkko, 1997, p. 69 in Hytti, 2005). Jarvinen (2000) in Hytti (2005) elaborates on this further:

The story is no longer the same as during the event of the story. In the present, we need to explain our motives and meanings of the past in a way that lead to the present. So lived life can never be recapitulated fully but it can only be understood in terms of how it is narrated today. (p. 69)

The researcher's voice is also a matter of concern in the field of social sciences (Hatch, 1996), and in my study I have heeded my own assumptions about being researcher-listener. An interpretive approach strives to emphasize the dialogue between the researcher and participants (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) and this is what I intended to do, so I represented as much as possible the voices of the participants over that of the researcher, while including my analysis of their stories (Steffen, 1997, Dwyer, 1982). I found that my own assumptions changed as I, too, came to understand my own role in creating the material and not just discovering it (Hytti, 2003b). Qualitative research must remain flexible in order to follow unforeseen circumstances or occurrences that can become a source of exploration and better understanding (Forbes, 2006) in the research itself. Glesne, (1999) regards data collection as a period of extended data analysis; therefore, my study has been a process of continuous analysis throughout the project.
Particularly during the interview sessions, I observed and listened analytically to the respondents and formulated further questions that probed any issues that emerged and seemed meaningful for other respondents or for further conversation.

Categories and Subcategories and Themes

Throughout the process of collecting data, I engaged in an on-going analysis of field notes and interview audiotapes using analytic induction (Becker, 1970; Erickson, 1992) in order to discover similarities in broad categories and sub-categories of the participants’ experiences, beliefs and practices and then develop subcategories to increase the interpretive depth of my study. I catalogued the data sets and indexed the categories and subcategories and topics that had been explored. From this I was able to cross-reference information among multiple media (e.g., emails, interview audio files, field notes, and cultural artifacts), as well as among different participants. I compared all data and information against the central research questions to ensure that the research record was as complete and responsive as possible.

By eliciting information in addition to the introductory research purpose, I was able to anticipate certain directions that responses could take but still remained flexible enough to follow emergent themes. For example, the ways that participants expressed certain attitudes or behaviors that they had adopted, such as manners of dress or other ways of expressing themselves, illuminated larger discourses about political and societal issues such as culture, nationality, citizenship, identity and religion that mediate the students’ perception of themselves and others.

Data from cultural observations and artifacts was used to establish a cultural backdrop, a baseline description of the common formative cultural and educational
experiences faced by the students. The interview transcripts were examined to identify
trends and specific aspects of their cultural and educational experiences that were shown
to have promoted their success.

I also continued to examine literature on North African-French and Muslim women
and education as well as other issues as they became potentially relevant to my study in
order to compare findings of my emerging theories with other research findings and
critical perspectives. Along with emergent themes and categories in my own data, I
compared theoretical and analytical examples of other specific cases in the research
literature on women’s voices, identity formation, and Muslim women and wider social
and educational issues as they may pertain to the success of female students. This has
been useful in relating analyses and emergent themes (Forbes, 2006; Morse, 2008).

Reliability and Validity of the Research Data

Reliability and validity address issues about the quality of the data and
appropriateness of the methods used in carrying out a research project. The quality of the
data and the appropriateness of the methods employed are particularly important in the
social sciences because of the different philosophical and methodological approaches to
the study of human activity. Black (1993) considers that social science research involves
investigating all aspects of human activity and interactivity. Social science is a body of
knowledge enriched by many different disciplines like education, psychology, and
sociology, which come from different philosophical traditions and contribute different
aspects or perspectives to the study of human activity. Qualitative researchers usually
research a question through multiple methods. It is not unusual to use a combination of
documentary analysis, together with non-participant observation and interviews. The use
of multiple methods in research in order to corroborate data sources increases the reliability of the research.

Reliability refers to how certain one can be that any person using the same interview questions (the research instrument) would find similar results. In qualitative research this may be difficult given that human behaviour is never static (Merrian, 1998). Qualitative researchers do field work within an established tradition and design data recording sheets to guide analysis of in-depth interviewing or of participant observation events. It is also possible to design data sheets to facilitate document analysis, so it is possible to address reliability issues regarding the consistency of one's methods for recording data.

Validity addresses whether one's research explains or measures what one said would be measuring or explaining. It deals with the appropriateness of the method to the research question. In Mason’s (1996) words, you should be asking yourself "how well matched is the logic of the method to the kinds of research questions you are asking and the kind of social explanation you are intending to develop" (Mason, 1996). This is the case for justifying the appropriateness of a method to the research question. Creswell (1998) discusses the importance of validity issues in order to increase trustworthiness and reliability of qualitative research. Multiple kinds of data sources (e.g. students, teachers and parents perspectives), multiple investigators or multiple theoretical perspectives can all be used to increase validity (Denzin, 2003).

A second way in which one should think of validity is in interpretations of the data. All interpretations are subjective, so the issue here lies in tracing the ways by which one has arrived at a particular interpretation. The researcher is responsible for showing that the interpretations were not simply fabricated, but that they are the product of deliberate
thoughtful analysis. This involves constantly assessing one's interpretation and a persistent self-evaluation of one's intent in making a particular interpretation meaningful. Therefore, another function of the literature review is to provide the context with which to interpret the data that has been collected. I did exactly this at every juncture of the analysis. I also solicited the advice and second opinions of others regarding translations and interpretations. In addition, on numerous occasions, I contacted participants directly to ask for clarifications and elaborations whenever I was in doubt.

**Analytical Rigor**

The analysis has to have rigor, based on being able to trace the sources and reasons for particular interpretations. Another way of increasing the validity consists of showing the participants excerpts of my interpretation of their interviews. In this way the participants themselves corroborated the research by feeling free to either agree or disagree with the interpretations. Similarly, the researcher must procure a level of trust and respect to make sure that participants do not feel as though they are being exploited. Member checking or the sharing of interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and or drafts of the final report with research participants also helps to make sure they and their ideas are being represented accurately (Creswell, 1998 in Glesne, 1999). Rich, thick description is writing that allows the reader to enter the research context. Subjectivity is the clarification of researcher bias and reflection upon one's own subjectivity and how to monitor it in the research.

Triangulation requires the use of multiple data collection methods, which relate different kinds of data in an attempt to contribute to the validity of the research (Berg, 1995). It also increases confidence in the research findings if multiple kinds of data
sources (e.g. students, teachers and parents perspectives), multiple investigators or multiple theoretical perspectives are consulted to increase validity (Denzin, 2003).

For this study, I used the following variety of techniques that helped increase the reliability and validity of the analysis and interpretations of the data:

**Cultural Awareness** – I engaged by learning the culture and developing a rapport and understanding with all involved. Developing rapport through multiple participant contacts increases validity of the interviews by providing the participants time to think more deeply about their own feelings, reactions, and beliefs.

**Extended Observation** – Being in the field as an observer increased validity of the data for accuracy of participants' problems or behaviors and socially interacting phenomenon by spending long periods of time in the setting.

**Multiple Data Sources** – I used interviews or inquiries in conversations with teachers, parents, friends, fellow-students and family as well as observation and artifact collection.

**Member Checking** – I shared interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and drafts of the report with some of the research participants and with my cultural advisors to verify that their ideas were being represented accurately (Creswell, 1998 in Glesne, 1999).

**Rich Description** – I incorporated in ways that allowed the reader to enter the research context. I referred to descriptive and analytic recordings of details to aid accuracy, trying to avoid judgment statements, make the text visual with the moment, person, setting or day and be concrete in using descriptive words to convey evaluative impressions.

**Subjectivity** – I addressed issues of researcher bias by continuously exploring my own subjectivity and being aware of my social and cultural situatedness as a woman, as a researcher, and as a student myself. I examined my writing both before and after the
interviews and thereby being able to address and reflect upon any preconceived opinions (Glesne, 1999).

**Alternative Perspectives** – I also sought alternative perspectives and opinions from other French community members and other students. This helped to further explore the topic and subjectivity.

I addressed issues of possible researcher bias by continuously exploring my own subjectivity such as through writing both before and after my interviews and observations, thereby being able to address and reflect upon any preconceived opinions (Glesne, 1999). Seeking alternative perspectives and opinions will be another method to further explore the topic and subjectivity. Being in the field as an observer will increase validity of the data for accuracy of participants' problems or behaviors and socially interacting in phenomenon by spending long periods of time in the setting.

**Ethical Issues and Considerations**

Because I am neither Muslim nor French, my analysis was that of an interested, informed, culturally sensitive observer but it was, nonetheless, an outsider’s perspective. I am supportive of these women, and although I did not share their exact experiences and situatedness, I did have many similarities with their backgrounds. This perspective as a woman, educator, and researcher aided me in forging meaningful dialogues with the participants, and gave me a sense within which to appreciate their contexts.

**Participant Risks and Benefits**

Spradley (1980), Stake (1994), and Glesne (1999) all state that it is ethically paramount for the researcher to be responsible to those individuals who participate in a study. It is important that participants are informed regarding the purpose of the study, its
relevance to participants, the reasons for their selection, the importance of participation, and how the issue of confidentiality will be addressed.

I explained that no material benefits were to be derived from the study, although I hoped that it might help to better inform the decisions implemented in educational policies, input to pedagogy, and increase understanding of hybrid cultural issues and roles in the larger French society by allowing participants to share or affirm their cultural heritage, and perhaps relevant to other immigrant populations (Mexicans in the U.S., for example). All of these affect student success, feelings of belonging, as well as a sense of self-worth about themselves, and their cultures and values among the community. Some participants expressed how difficult it was to reflect upon their situatedness. They had never considered doing so before, but they liked it. It gave them a chance to think about themselves in a subjective-objective stance. Their reflections helped them to reread their own story, renegotiate how or why certain events had happened, and understand how this affirmed their own growth and agency.

Summary

The aim of my study was to add to our understanding of how North African-French female minority students think about learning and educational success and their experiences as they develop their academic identities. The analysis of successful North African-French female university students’ experiences makes visible the patterns and practices of how these students’ beliefs, practices, and life experiences, through their own voices, can illuminate how social and personal interactions in the classroom and elsewhere can affect student success. Such an analysis may also provide an opening for teachers and students to critically reflect upon these interrelated actions and to help
institute change or reforms to help other students struggling with school by providing different means of support so they do not give up but gain encouragement in understanding how to strive to maintain a process of success.

**Limitations of the Study**

In future research, I would ask participants to tell me more about their life stories and arrange more time to meet with family members and friends. I would also, add a group interview to obtain an interesting dynamic interaction to discover other issues that may surface of importance for them. Nevertheless, in the end, my goals for this study were met as I designed it. I engaged as many participants as possible and kept in touch with them through emails in order to conduct follow-up interview questions for further clarifications that helped in the analysis and provided a richer description of the participants (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Glesne, 1999; Spradley, 1980; Forbes, 2006).
CHAPTER 4
PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

My primary research interest is in the lived experiences, life story and situations of immigrant origins women in their own voices, and the obstacles that women must overcome in society. This work will help to inform pedagogical and other practices in learning environments, particularly in post secondary education, to improve understanding of the needs of minority women learners. I am interested in the experiences of young women because women's experiences are often excluded in seeking to understand human development (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997).

I sought to explore the experiences of young North African-French women and their academic and social experiences. I wanted to hear from their point of view what was and is important about life and learning in their lives. I wondered how their understanding of themselves had changed over time, and looking back over the past, up to the present, I wanted to know what stood out for them. These were broad general themes based on Hoerder, Hébert and Schmitt (2005), “in order to understand the issue of cultural belonging in young people today, it is necessary to examine the broader social and historical context while avoiding mono-cultural assumptions.”

To restate briefly, my overall research question that informed my study was to understand the experiences that these women attributed to their overall academic success. And in answering this question, I explored the narrative stories of nine North African French female university students as they reflected upon their lived experiences and narrated their own understanding and interpretations about the constructs of their personal identities.
My inquiry sprang from three interview questions exploring their perspectives regarding such issues as Where do I belong? Who or what has had the most or least influence on your educational experiences? And how have social and political conditions affected your educational experience? As I stated in the Chapter One introduction, I imagined the three questions as teleidoscopic mirrors in the sense that as the lens is focused on something it turns it into a kaleidoscopic image. In addition, I considered them as concentric circles having their centers at the same point that categorized the areas of: (1) sense of belonging, (2) educational influences, and (3) sociocultural-economic-political strata. I asked about self-image, interpersonal relationships of importance, education and learning, real-life decisions or dilemmas, accounts of personal changes and growth, perceived catalysts for change or impediments to growth, and visions of the future. With this point of view in mind, let us move toward the participants of this study.

The Participants

Nine young women of Maghrebin-Berber-Kabyle origins, either born in or immigrated to France with their parents at a young age, agreed to be interviewed for this study. All were between the ages of 20 and 37 years, and all were either current or former university students living in France. Two of the women were married, one was engaged and the other six were single. They were a mix of first, second and third generation immigrant origins.

Each of the nine participants brought her own perspectives to her responses and spoke at length addressing each of the three interview questions. Each of the participants had a chance to expand on her experiences, adding information she felt was pertinent to her personal story. Although we did not have the opportunities for many conversations, they
were gracious and candidly shared a great deal of their background history with me even though I was a complete stranger.

Yesinia

Yesinia and I conducted our interview via email correspondence over a period of several months. Although we tried twice to arrange to meet in person while I was in France, we, unfortunately, were not able to do so due to our schedules. However, we have not given up on this idea, and we both fully believe that we will have the chance to do so when the time is right.

Yesinia was thirty-two years old, and graduated with a Master’s degree. She had married in 2007, and was considering pursuing the agrégation, a competitive civil service examination in the French education system. She was born in France and says that she is French with Maghrebian origins. She teaches English as a foreign language in a French lycée (high school). She also translates French and Arabic articles and papers for academic researchers. Yesinia joined an organization that helped children of foreign origins to improve their results at school, and discussed this at some length:

“I had worked in this organization "un centre social" [a social center], but there was no real name given to our action. It was located in an area where most of the people were of foreign origins. Most of the volunteers were also French with foreign origins, some teachers or students voluntarily helped pupils who had difficulties at school. Our aim was to help children or teenagers who wanted to succeed but had some difficulties and they couldn't afford private lessons. In this centre social, they also offered help to people who couldn't fill in some forms. Mothers of different origins
exchanged their recipes and there were also activities for the young during the holidays.

“One of my pupils was a Moroccan teenager who was preparing French for the Baccalauréat. She didn't like reading. Most of the texts, she had to prepare, were poems. I remember that I took her to the library in the city for the first lesson. I wanted her to go out of her neighborhood and that library was new. She told me that she had never been there before, I was amazed... and so was she. She started to go to the library on her own and that was one of the greatest reward she gave me. She passed her exam with some difficulties for the written part but she felt comfortable for the oral part. So you can definitely say that my role was to help by teaching about the culture and the language. I moved out in 2004 and little by little, we lost contact with the students. I don't know if this organization still exists” (Yesinia).

In relating this account, Yesinia, now a teacher herself, shows how difficult the situation can be for teachers and for many minority families to get the kind of community support needed to help them meet the challenges they face on a daily basis in negotiating a life for themselves in French society. This is especially true for many minority students who need extra help, if they are to be successful in school.

When answering the question “where do I belong?” Yesinia mentioned that it was difficult, as she put it, “to describe myself to myself” as she had “never thought about doing that before.” It was easy to talk about other things, such as hobbies, work, and interests, but she found this to be “a real introspective challenge!” In fact, very often people would ask her whether she felt more French than Moroccan or the contrary. “I just think that such a question is pointless; I am both French and Moroccan, I was born in
France, but for most people here, I am Moroccan before being French. I feel I am split into two parts; I have a Moroccan side and a French one.’ This division was not a problem for her, as she “did not suffer from knowing” who she was. However, it was a problem for her socially, if not entirely a personal psychological one, in having to feel always to justify one’s *raison d’être*.

Even though she is proud of her Moroccan cultural heritage, Yesinia felt herself to be French. She is confident that having another perspective of the world (partly due to her Moroccan origins) is an advantage. However, no matter how she feels about herself, she does not necessarily feel fully accepted as French. This became apparent when she mentioned her major educational influences. She had left home for the first time when she was 22, the year that she spent in England as a French teaching assistant. She candidly explained, “My main fear, while meeting the head teacher for the first time, was that she would be disappointed to find out that the new French assistant did not really look French.” Surprisingly, Yesinia was to discover that the head-teacher and her students, for that matter, did not ask where she was from as soon as they saw her. “For the first time I could speak about my origins without having the impression of justifying myself.” In this atmosphere, Yesinia was free to teach her pupils to understand that France, like England and elsewhere, was historically a country made up of all kinds of different people coming from many different places and with different cultural origins, native languages, and religious beliefs.

Away from everyone and everything that was familiar to her, Yesinia also came to understand herself more that year. Although, she had always been aware that her parents had given her “an extraordinarily rich culture,” and she had always been “proud of
having two cultures” it was during that year spent in England that she came to fully understand how much she was “tied to both my two countries – France and Morocco.” As she said,

“Those feelings were with me before leaving France; they increased because of the distance, and they stay with me now. All these events have enabled me to understand who I really am. I am both French and Moroccan. My foreign culture is not an obstacle, it is a great chance and it is my strength. This lack of confidence has disappeared little by little and now if I work harder it is only because I want to do my best” (Yesinia).

Her parents came to France in the early 1970s from Morocco. Her father is of Berber origins and his family still lives in the Atlas Mountains without any water or electricity. Yesinia spoke about them, “I don't speak the Berber dialect, but I feel so close to the people there; they speak with their heart. I haven't been to this village for years but I had learnt a lot from the Berber people when I was a child.”

Her parent’s stories of not having the opportunity to go to school impressed her, so she understood at a young age that “learning was a real chance.” “They told us why they couldn't go to school and their stories made us realize that school was important.”

Yesinia’s father had to leave school because his family needed him to work in order to bring some money and food home. Her mother had often begged her own father to let her go to school, but the day he finally decided to take her, he lost his identity card on the way and blamed her for it. Consequently, he forbade her to go to school again:

“He put the blame on her [the mother] for that loss and he told her that it was a sign, which proved that she didn't deserve to go to school.” She saw how her parents struggled
to give her and her siblings all the opportunities they had not had. “We saw our parents struggling to give us a good education…my father would leave home early to go to work (he was a house painter), and my mother would do the housework in the neighborhood to pay for our clothes, books and sometimes private lessons when we had some difficulties at school” (Yesinia).

Yesinia understood that it was important to do well in school if she wanted to succeed in getting a good job that she would like. She was ambitious and worked hard in her studies and later in her profession, because she wanted to be a good teacher. She even joined an organization that helped other children of foreign origins to improve their chances of success at school. Due to Yesinia’s own experiences and those of her mother and father, she understands how difficult it can be for immigrant children to overcome the odds that challenge them. Her ability to empathize with her students not only benefits them, but also makes her a better teacher.

A few months passed without any word from her, when suddenly she wrote. Apologizing for not doing so sooner, she explained that she had gotten married that year and had a new job. Now, she did not have to drive so far to work every day (one and a half hours). She was happy.

She also spoke about some of her social and political perspectives, mentioning that many organizations in the town where she lived tried to help foreigners to fit in. Her first year at her new school had been very challenging. Many of her students came from poor neighborhoods and suffered from social and family difficulties, such as divorce and low economic status. Some of her students were newcomers and did not speak French
fluently. Yet, Yesinia felt close to her students and appreciated that all of the teachers worked together.

Reiterating some of her earlier remarks, she elaborated on the overall impression that she thought she might have made. She wished to qualify it by adding some of her current perspective:

“"I hope that I do not sound too paranoid when I say that I often had (and still have sometimes) the feeling that I had to work harder than the others to prove that I deserved learning. Firstly, I think I lacked self-confidence. Secondly, I had that feeling because most of my teachers and classmates saw me as a foreigner and not as a French girl with foreign origins. Consequently, I had to work harder to prove that I could be as good as any other French student. I felt I had to justify why I was there.""

“"Primary school remains a very unpleasant experience. My parents were told many times that immigrants' children couldn't succeed in studies. My schoolteachers also tried to discourage us. Once I was the only one in the class who had found a grammar rule in French and instead of congratulating me, my teacher shouted at the class that it was a shame that a Moroccan knew the grammar better than the French! When you are nine and you hear such words, you cannot be proud of yourself. My origins were not an obstacle for me but for the others.

“"When I went to collège [middle school] and lycée, things improved. There were more pupils of foreign origins, but still I worked really hard to prove that I could be as good as the others and also to prove that I wouldn't marry after passing the Baccalauréat, it was one of the clichés stuck on Maghrebian-French girls at that time. At université, I felt relieved. There were too many students to feel noticed because of
my origins. Of course, I went on working hard but I felt that I was doing so for myself and not to prove anything to anybody.”

“In my family there was no pressure concerning marriage. My parents encouraged us to study but they couldn’t urge us to marry someone we hadn’t chosen. So if we failed, marriage wouldn’t be an option or our fate. If we failed, our fate would be to face professional and social difficulties. I think that Maghrébin families have various backgrounds. In some families, boys work harder than girls because girls prefer marrying. These girls consider marriage as being a social rise. In other families, girls work harder than boys to escape from marriage or to get a good job in order to be independent. It really depends on [the] parents' mentality and also on the representation of school one can have.

“After my "Licence" [bachelor's degree] two of my friends and I applied for a job as a French assistant in England. I got the job but my two friends didn't succeed the job interview. I got sour congratulations from my "friends" who told me that I had succeeded in the interview because of my origins. I really didn't understand what they meant. I was really at a loss when they explained their point of view. My friends believed I had succeeded because my foreign origins proved that I was open-minded and that I could adapt myself easily elsewhere. That analysis wasn't bad or mean, but my friends couldn't imagine that I had succeeded because I had been better than them at promoting the French culture and language” (Yesinia).

In spite of these negative experiences, Yesinia has managed to persevere. She has found not only the strength, but also the kindness as well to deal with the obstacles and adversities in life. These values come from her own personal will. For Yesinia, the
major influences, then, were her own ambition to succeed and the support she drew from her parents. Her acceptance of and pride in her dual cultural identity was a source of strength. It also allowed her to empathize with her students and others of mixed origins, even when she herself had to open the doors to help them understand her perspectives and attitudes.

**Malena**

Malena was twenty-two years old and in her first year as a student in the Master’s program in the Sports department, *UFR de sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives (STAPS), Master DE.* [Science and technology of physical activities and sports]. She told me that it will take two years for the Master’s and then she would consider a Ph.D., specializing in *Contrôle Moteur (CM)* [motor control], studying the science of physiology and biomechanical human movement. She likes what she does, but is not interested in teaching. Rather, she wants to work in research within sports.

Malena had described herself as a little bit of a “garçon manqué” [tomboy] when she was younger, and that she and her girl friends (also tomboys) liked to have fun. After coming to university, she had outgrown her tomboy behavior. This was evident by her well-groomed appearance and her mannerisms, which seemed to be self-confident and outgoing, but calmly alert to our conversation. It was a bit of a struggle at first as we both worked around the two languages, but soon we established a pattern and as the conversation flowed, we both begin to relax more.

We began with the question about belonging. When she answered, her tone sounded a little curt. “I consider me as a normal student because I have *grande* [grownup] in a family who were *Musulman* [Muslim] but they don’t practice. I consider me as a
European student.” I wondered what she meant by “normal.” However, as I pondered it, I realized that quite simply she was a normal student, and in fact, it was the question that suddenly sounded a little impertinent to me. After all, she was a normal student, and perhaps this air of defensiveness was an example of what Yesinia had expressed as always feeling as though she “had to justify herself.” Understandably, one might develop a tone that reflected the feeling of tediousness in such circumstances. Perhaps she meant that she did not stand out as different because she did not wear the hijab, but I did not think to ask her that at the time. Given the period, it seems quite plausible that the current debates on the subject was exactly what she was thinking -- the headscarf affair.

Her parents had grown up in Algeria and considered themselves of Berber ancestry. She told me that her father came to France in 1962. Later, when he went back to Algeria to see his family, he met and married her mother there, and in 1973, they united in France. When her parents came to France, they adopted French life conditions, so Malena felt that her family was completely integrated. Her mother practiced religion by doing Ramadan and not eating pork because that was how she was brought up, but she did not wear the veil. Malena said that her father eats pork and does not go to Mosque. At home, there are no signs that they are Muslims. She said, “I don’t consider myself as a Muslim; I am of Algerian origins, I am proud of my origins.” Many of the women had made similar remarks saying that they did not consider themselves as Muslim or Arab, but North African-Berber-Kabyle ancestry. One of the things Yesinia liked most about her parents was that they were totally integrated, which had helped her tremendously to fit in. Both of her parents had had the opportunity to find work.
Her parents spent three months in Algeria last year to visit. She talked about her father saying how much he loved his country and was happy to be able to visit. “They want my sister and me to visit the country of their birth. I haven’t been there since I was three.” Her parents did not go there regularly because of the problems, troubles – riots. She told me that her father’s whole family lives in France, but all of her mother’s family stayed in Algeria.

Later, Malena elaborated a little about her family background history. It was curious that Malena stressed that there were no signs in their house of being Muslim or Algerian, especially when she described how much her father loved his country of birth, and she sounded so proud of her origins. However, she was also very proud of her parents’ having made an effort to integrate into French society, which she stated made life much easier for her. Given the colonial past between France and Algeria, it is not too difficult to imagine what undercurrents could have motivated her parents’ efforts to fit in to French society. Perhaps this would have helped to understand what was behind her statement that there was “no signs of being Muslim at home.” However, this study was not able to consider these types of in-depth inquiries at that time.

When asked about her formal education and who or what had been an influential factor, she said that her father had been a big influence on her education, and that she had some teachers who had made a positive impression on her as well. However, she commented that her religion (or her parents’ religion) had not been a major influence in her education. Her father loved to help them with their studies at home, especially in the scientific subjects: She said:
“My father loves school and he loves to know. He was quite sévère [strict] for that. He enormously influenced me, pushed me in my educational career. He always encouraged me and tried to teach me out of school when I didn’t understand. He helped me a lot. I also had some teachers who helped me and with whom I had good relations and they transmitted their knowledge and taught me to love school” (Malena).

Then, she quickly added, “I will not say it was easy, because if not I would not have failed my bac.” The Baccalauréat is informally referred to as the bac and is an extremely important examination taken in the final year of high school (la terminale). The bac, as it is so reverently or terrifyingly referred to, is without exaggeration an institution within itself. The French pride themselves about it, while at the same time probably secretly fear and loath its institutional power to sculpt their lives. She laughed, sounding a little embarrassed when she told me about how her friends had not been a good influence on her studies, because she and her friends had all three of them missed their bac in lycée because of hanging out too much. “My friends... haven’t helped me a lot in my educational career because at high school for example, I failed my bac because I was with them too much.”

As for religion, even though she refers to it as “my religion,” it did not influence her educational life, as Malena stated, “My religion didn’t help me in my education. My parents integrated themselves, learned the language, the religion didn’t have a place.” She liked school, even if she did not always find it so easy. As she said,

“I had problems, yes, but it seemed easy because I come from integration. If I had been resulting from a family, which would not have been entirely integrated, that
would have perhaps seemed more difficult. I had examples of it in my class, Algerians, Moroccans, or the Maghrébin countries, which in their family did not speak entirely French. At their homes, they spoke Arab. Therefore, they had more difficulties than I had” (Malena).

When asked what she thought about the importance of language and about the difficulties for people who do not speak French. She said,

“Yeah, in the school system the language is very important. Yeah, I think that the people who do not speak French, even the young ones, finally it is the most important. When they are at the nursery school, and they cannot speak French because at their home they speak only Arab, it is very hard afterwards for the schooling. They have enormous difficulties. It is for this that after there are delays in the reading, in the writing, and it is the base of the education system and to evolve, move afterwards, there are problems” (Malena).

As for the question, "Were there any supports or help in the schools at the elementary levels and the secondary levels of college and high school (when students have difficulty with the language)"

“Somebody who cannot speak the language of the country, the language of the education system, could have private lessons on the side because, well, the family is not going to help him/her speak French. He/she could take remedial courses precisely to help it. The family could pay for these lessons” (Malena).

However, these private lessons are expensive, so many immigrant-origin families cannot readily afford to pay for them, increasing the disadvantages that these students must overcome to gain academic success.
Malena was quite sure that her parents’ efforts to integrate made all the difference for her as far as being successful in her academic studies. She recognized that she was fortunate because her father had a good professional job, and that her parents worked hard to give their children educational opportunities.

The third question discussed social and political conditions and whether immigrants’ perspectives were taken into consideration more today than they were years ago. Malena said, “I think that the current policy, it could offer beneficial things to immigrants. The problem is to force oneself to integrate [into French society], to force oneself to learn the language, and I think that if they do, then one wants, one has the will to be integrated.” She elaborated further by saying that it was true, for example, that workers are mainly immigrants, but the problem is that they cannot get a decent job, simply because they do not master the language. “If one put them, for example, in another job a little more advanced, they would have the barrier of the language. I think that it is the main difficulty that the immigrants do not manage to fight.” I asked if she thought there was discrimination against immigrant people in spite of French society saying they wanted to help immigrants integrate. She told me about a Moroccan friend of hers who had been at the university for three years. Although, he had a very good command of the French language he had been a victim of discrimination while using the public transportation.

“I have an example of a friend of mine, who is Moroccan, and he had some problems; he felt himself persecuted because he felt rejected. He was a victim once in a public transport. [An inspector] came and asked him for his transportation card, and he had it on him, only the inspector ignored it and wrote him a fine and [there was no reason]” (Malena).
She added, “It’s true that there is discrimination compared to that. In the educational system, I haven’t seen a lot, but it can happen that there is prejudice.” When I asked if she had ever experienced discrimination, she said, “Never, I never had discrimination because I have always spoken French and I never had [the] problem of integration.” She meant that her family had made the efforts to become integrated so she did not have the problems that so many other students of immigrant origins had whose parents had not integrated well.

I asked if it was possible to feel French, to be regarded as French by one’s peers and the community, regardless of one’s origins or parents, or grandparents. She said, “Yeah, it is why immigrants themselves feel to a certain extent French; on the other hand, when they are criticized, when they are offended, they feel Algerian, Moroccan.” She thought perhaps this was part of the reason why they use violence, because “they want to be heard, they want to be listened to, and they think that it is the best means of being heard, but here again it’s too bad, because violence has never been a means of communication.” She believed that instead of fighting, instead of using this violence, which is sometimes not justified, it would be much better for them to prove to the people who surround them that “one can integrate by mastering the language.” Maybe what Malena was inferring was that immigrants needed to make more of an effort to show, no, to prove to the French people that they were not inferior by mastering the French language.

However, she must have thought that the language was not the only problem because she continued, “I must add the young people, in particular, speak French, but perhaps
they should make an effort on clothing, on their language, on their appearance.” Leena, my third participant, would say something similar about presenting oneself to the others as a good image.

Malena appeared to be a confident young woman who had definite goals and ambitions to fulfill before she wanted to marry and start a family. As she said,

“I think that my studies are enormously important…later, after my studies, to get married. I prefer to continue my studies just to finish, find a job, after build a family, have a husband, children…my studies to base a family…if not, it is too hard to support a family” (Malena).

Malena was sure that she wanted to finish her studies before she considered getting married and starting a family. She knew that a sound economic foundation would be the best thing to help ensure a good education for her own children and would be the basis to have a successful outcome to raise a family. Although she sympathized with the sociopolitical obstacles that many immigrants face, she also felt that they were partly responsible for not making more of an effort to integrate into the French society and ultimately European citizenship.

Leena

Leena was twenty-one years old, and she had her bac Littéraire, [Literary], but she is in the STAPS (UFR de sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives (STAPS), MASTER) faculty department studying sports. She wants to work with handicap sports. She was a third year student at the University Paris X Nanterre. She was the only participant who wore the hijab [veil]. I asked her a few preliminary background questions such as age and present academic activities. When asked about her
university studies, she told me, “This year I want to finish, because I think that it’s…how to say…it’s enough. And this year I get [sic] married, so I want to work a while.”

When presented with the question, “Where do I belong?” Leena asked, “In [sic] university or in general?” I said “in general, in French society.” She then said, “Ah, my identity, ah…I feel myself French, even if my parents come from Morocco, but I was born in France.” Unlike Malena, Leena did not emphasize that her parents were completely integrated or that she had found it a disadvantage having to juggle two languages. “At home I speak in French and Arabic. I live as French and Arabic, all the time. There is no problem, no problem.” Asked if people accepted her as being French, she said, “Not enough because just my name is not French, it is of Arabic origin, and I wear the voile de hijab, donc voila [veil, headscarf, so there], but when we study together there’s no problem.”

She read the question about educational experiences and influences quietly to herself, and then launched into her response rather loudly. We both laughed a little about her enthusiasm, and she started again more quietly, “I have the most influence on my educational experience. I choose.” She said that her parents had wanted her to become a language teacher, but she did not want to be a language teacher; she wanted to become a sportive teacher with handicaps, and her parents agreed.

She did not experience problems or difficulties with academic studies because of language at home. She said, “There is no problem because my parents don’t have the accent. They speak very, very well French. There’s no problem. Je n’ai jamais redouble une classe [I never repeated a year.] I always passed the class superior. There is no problem.” Suggesting that she must have been an excellent student, she corrected,
“Not excellent, because I study a lot to succeed.” Taking this cue, I asked if her parents had encouraged her to do her best and said that she must study and made sure that she did her homework. “Yes, my parents have always tell [sic] me study a lot to have a good job after, to elevate your mind in the society, to represent this community pour les autres – to these others, une bonne image” [for the others -- a good image].

As for the question of any difficulties with her schoolwork and support from parents, siblings, friends, classmates, or teachers, she explained. “When I was young my parents can help me in mathematics, or French, or this type of subject, but because my parents stopped their schools at bac, and they don’t go to university [sic], now if I have difficulties, I [find] my own way – alone.” From this statement, I inferred that Leena was a third generation of immigrant origins, whereas most of the other participants were first or second generation North-African French students. Leena was also very proud, almost defensive, because she further stated that she preferred to work alone rather than ask for any help. “I don’t want to [ask] others to help me. I want to help myself – alone. I don’t want to ask for help.” Her tone sounded defensive when she said this, and she appeared very serious. This repeated the justifying tone of defending oneself that Yesinia had stated and that Malena had seemed to portray.

In a discussion about her social and political perspectives, and if acceptance in appearance in French society was changing, meaning the hijab, she answered that dress and fashion were changing, and that there was a lot more extravagance. “I don’t like this type of clothes because it’s so…” ça present femme ne comme que la femme – it does not present the body of the wife, the woman. It’s too serré [tight] – we see all the body.”

When queried of any Muslim-Islamic feminist beliefs. She answered,
“I cannot present myself a feminist. I present myself Muslim – Muslim girl, and Islam tells us not to be attractive to be provocative. We can wear, no problem, bits of color, no problem. I wear pink and black, [indicating her attire] there is no problem. But not to show our body because…it’s...to present the body in Islam is as…comme on dit, un trésor [as one says, a treasure]. Do you understand? A trésor we have to protect” (Leena).

Changing from the subject of feminism, I asked about laïcité [secularism] and whether the issue of the veil in French society regarding separation between religion and state was not really about sociocultural opposition to ostentatious religious dress, but rather a way for the French government to keep something that frightens them – the hijab, and what it may represent – under tighter political control. She said,

“We are obliged to first respect these rules. There are a lot of girls who want to go to school with hijab, but the schools can annul them, so we must respect the rule. Me, personally, I adore the hijab here at the university because before, I know that I cannot wear it; therefore, I wear it here because here we can wear it” [meaning the university] (Leena).

Continuing on the subject of the veil and formal education, I asked, even though she was born in France, and had gone through the French school system, if she felt as though she was not fully accepted as French because of the way she dressed. She drew in her breath and then answered:
“Phew, when I was young at maternelle, [nursery school] le primaire [primary education], I don’t find the difference, me and my friends at class. At lycée and at the université, I don’t feel a difference. From now [sic], I have, just here, because I wear hijab; it’s no other. Before, I didn’t feel different, because I was like all the girls, French or Africans, we all are the same, the same, the same, the same. The same pensées [thoughts], the same mind, the same clothes, the same way to be; but when I came here, I progressed in my religion. I discovered Islam when I go to the université. I evolved and from now, there is a little difference. For example, I must give a Curriculum vitae (CV) to one of my professors. He told me that I have to have a photo included. I asked him if I should do the photo with hijab or without, and he told me I think for you it’s easier to do it without hijab because the société de enterprise [business world] doesn’t want a Muslim with a hijab. Therefore, I find a difference, even if we go for an interview to have a job, I will have to take it off, because they’re narrow minded” (Leena).

Changing the subject, Leena said to me, “This year I get married.” She had been looking forward to this, of course, and as soon as she said it, I knew that that was what she was all about – transitioning from daughter to wife. She told she was done with her studies, and that she wanted to work and then start a family. As she spoke, I considered her overall comportment and appearance. She looked pretty, dressed in her pink and black polka dot head scarf that draped around her face, and her casual slacks softly silhouetting her body. I say this carefully because Leena told me how important it was for her to take care with her image. She thought of herself as a good role model for her
community and her family. She said that she was a good girl and not a terrorist just because she wore a hijab.

Yasmine

Yasmine, my fourth interview, was twenty years old and a third year student in English studies at the university. She said this would be her last semester because she was “going to London to study there in Westminster.” At the time, she expressed her nervousness about leaving home for the first time. Later, she wrote that she would have to reschedule going to London unfortunately, because she had to “find an internship in France (to be graduated) which is really, really hard!”

Yasmine said she was “from the suburbs…you know, the ‘cite,’ referring to a suburb of Paris where many North African immigrants lived. Located around the peripheries of France’s big cities are areas the French call les cités, neighborhoods heavily populated with North African immigrant workers who came during periods of labor shortages in France. Born in Morocco, she came to France when she was three. At the time of our interview, she did not have French nationality. She had asked for it last year and was still waiting for it when we had the interview. She would later write and tell me that she had finally received it.

The first question was about belonging. Although Yasmine had been in France for seventeen years, she said, “I don’t really feel like I’m French, I feel I’m Moroccan.” “I’m much more close to French people than Moroccan, but I don’t really feel like a French citizen.” This was understandable, because Yasmine was not a French citizen at the time. In some follow-up questions about her French citizenship, she wrote telling me that she had received her French citizenship, and was happy that it had taken her only one
year whereas her sisters and brothers had had to wait three years. As for the French
citizenship, she said,

“I have just received a letter inviting me...to the ceremony where I'll be given my new
French papers! My sister told me I would have to sing the French anthem, and I don't
even know it (like most French people). Do I feel more part of the French? Well...I
don't know. I don't think that mere papers will have some consequences on the way I
feel. Except the fact that I'll maybe find a job more easily or that I'll be able to travel
around the world, there is no big change. The only thing that makes me feel
somehow "changed" is that I’ll have the right to vote, which means I will be regarded
as any French citizen. For the rest, I am still very different from French people. I
prefer to say that there are different versions of French people and that now I am part
of them. I hope it's clear, even if it's not clear in my mind yet!” (Yasmine).

Regarding major educational influences, Yasmine said, “All my education I did here
because I came when I was 3, so I went to the maternelle (nursery) and then école
primaire (primary), collège (junior high), and lycée (high school).” As for whether
French was spoken at home:

“With my parents, no, they don’t speak French. They can, my dad speaks French a
bit because you know he was working in a factory – he was working class so he
wasn’t really asked to speak French, he was just asked to work. My mom, she speaks
French. She needs to go to the market and ask, count…c’est combien… [how much
is it]. I mean she can understand when I talk to her, but I speak Berber with her. I
don’t speak French, because she doesn’t really like that I speak French. She said
when you’re home you should speak Berber because we are away from Morocco and you should keep that” (Yasmine).

When I asked about Yasmine's positive and negative influences on her educational experience, she responded,

“In my educational experience, my parents, and I think my parents’ religious belongings, they are Muslim. There is this value in Islam in which you always have to look for more education, more knowledge in whatever subjects, and maybe that has also helped me, you know, to look forward, to open to new cultures.”

“My father always encouraged me. He didn’t have an education so he wanted me to have long studies. My mom…she didn’t have really, she doesn’t have really that knowledge, so when she looks at me reading books she (she can’t read actually), she thinks that’s what she wants me to do, and my father, because he hadn’t the opportunity that’s why he has always encouraged me to have long studies” (Yasmine).

Regarding prejudice, she said, “I never really met with prejudice. It’s only when I came here that I found some kind of, you know…” “Attitude?” I offered.

“Yeah, right, because I’ve been raised in that suburb I told you about where we are all immigrants so you can’t really find prejudice. When I came here [university] I found those really weird gazes, you know, they don’t understand your culture. They say, “Who are you? Where are you from?” And I’ve never really given that importance. I didn’t really care about what people said, but maybe that fact that I’m coming from “working-class” that I really hadn’t maybe the same opportunities, you know, that’s only when I came here that I knew that there were prestigious schools. I mean there’s
really a difference...if you are studying in a lycée for instance in the quatre-vingt-treize [93] or in Paris. There’s really a difference...you’re not given the same education. Sometimes I really wonder that if I had been living in Paris, if…you know, in a prestigious lycée maybe that I would be doing other studies, but I’m fine with English studies” (Yasmine).

My friend who was helping me with the translations wrote that “One of the most famous departments in France for the number of crimes and misdemeanors is 93 (Seine Saint-Denis). Rappers call it “Nine-Three” instead of ninety-three. If you come from “nine-three” you’re doomed!” (Jacqueline).

It was only then that Yasmine’s earlier remarks about not having had as many opportunities as those prestigious arrondissements [neighborhoods] really hit home. The neighborhoods where the socioeconomically-privileged youth attended better schools and had many more opportunities, made me think about where she came from and all of the socio-cultural-economic-political associations and attitudes that it symbolized.

Yasmine had spoken about this as “normal” and that she was “normal.” Yeah, it had violence but it was where she lived and called home where everyone was just like her. But really they weren’t that much like her because she stayed on at university and her friends had only been attracted by the scholarships and had soon given up and returned. She hung out with them and felt more at ease with them because they had similar experiences. Yasmine too had that tone or air of having to “justify herself” to other French people who looked at her so strange asking who are you and where do you come from.
We moved on to the third question about social and political perspectives, and then I asked “What about violence? Is there a lot of violence within your neighborhood?” She said,

“Oh no, there was…I’m not living in a ghetto you know. There were fights because you know the riots. In my cité there are many guys, many boys who find it hard to have a job, because they don’t have a diploma, and when your name is Mohamed [and] you live in the suburb, and then you don’t have a real education, it’s sure that you will find it hard to get a job. When my schoolmates ask me “Where are you from?” I don’t really like to say I’m from Mantes La Jolie, you know, because it’s the suburb and it’s famous for being, you know, being dangerous. You know, people are afraid so they ask me “How are you doing it? Aren’t you afraid?” It’s... normal. I’m normal, you know, so that sometimes…they have questions that make me feel uncomfortable. It’s just that when things happen you have all the media who come with the news. And people think that it’s happening over here and you have those kinds of clichés” (Yasmine).

I commented about when people do not have a voice, and no one knows or cares about their plight, that maybe getting the media attention inadvertently gave them a voice. She interrupted me,

“But it didn’t work. Sarkozy got elected. People elected Sarkozy because they were afraid. I mean, if you increase the violence and aggression, that’s the only results you’re going to have, even if it drives people...journalists talk about you, but the reaction of people is just that they are scared, and then you have Sarkozy who used that fear to get elected. And look at things, they are not changing – I don’t see any
change…so I don’t think it really works. I don’t think it was the best solution, maybe it was for them the only solution, and then maybe that demonstrating in the streets, you know…It’s just …the image they were given… ‘Oh, look at them, they are burning their cars…always those immigrants are creating trouble!’” (Yasmine).

Yasmine shared with me some of her concerns about leaving home for the first time. At the time of the interview, she was planning to go to London to study with a large group of students and she confided to me that she was nervous. She was afraid that she would not fit in because she was not a party girl. She did not drink, smoke or like to talk about sex and other subjects that she found uncomfortable. She seemed very young and vulnerable when she expressed her fears of going away from home for the very first time, away from her family and among those more open and privileged others:

“There is also this fear because, you know, I’ve been…the program when you go to London it’s ERASMUS and you have many parties with people drinking beer and having fun and that’s not the way I spend my life. And so I have this fear that when I go there, you know, they’ll all like you know...“Won’t accept you, or you won’t feel as part of the group?” I asked. “Yeah, because you know I won’t go to their parties. I have family here so I…but over there I won’t have anyone” (Yasmine).

Considered a prestigious point on one’s resume, the Erasmus experience was regarded both a time for learning as well as a chance to socialize. As Fiorella De Nicola (2005) presented in her study “Anthropology of Erasmus,” the results of field research carried out in Alicante, Spain from September 2004 to July 2005, which “recounts the tragicomic adventures of an Erasmus student in Spain, but in treating this story, you can also read the universal which characterizes the experience of studying abroad.” [Racconta
le tragicomiche avventure di uno studente Erasmus in terra iberica, ma nellla sua storia particolare si può leggere l'universale che caratterizza l'improbabile esperienza di studiare all'estero per un po'.

Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), along with a number of other independent programs incorporated into the EU’s Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013, is the operational framework for the European Commission's initiatives in higher education.

I found myself wondering why the European Union educational exchange programs had not taken students such as Yasmine under consideration, especially when targeting three million European students in 2013 participating in what is supposed to be a hallmark experience of cooperative cultural learning and exchange programs. This does not mean that they should provide handholding, but at least some cultural considerations that universities should offer to all of their students to support them in these types of transitional experiences.

Rafa

Rafa was thirty-seven years old, of Algerian origins, and a third year student in the English department. She had attended school for just two months in Algeria before coming to France when she was six years old. Although she did not speak any French, she was placed in a regular class where all of the students spoke French.

Rafa said that she was already thirty-seven years old and tired of doing seasonal type work such as in sales for extra help. She thought that she could not continue work in this way the older she got, and she wanted to do work that interested her. She regretted getting upset and throwing away her studies, especially since she had been such a good
student and would have done well. But now she was older, and as she said, “I feel better now than before, we’re changing after all it’s true. We don’t look at life as we did before.”

I had sent her the questions by email before our interview, so she had written out her responses, which she gave to me later. Even though she had prepared her statements, she expressed them a little differently during the interview.

I asked how she would describe herself in terms of identity, or where she saw, or felt, that she belonged. “I believe that I’m situated between two countries, here and Algeria. In fact, I don’t have an identity that is truly firm. I feel from two countries in fact, voilà. Particularly, I know to take from the things that are well here and to keep some things from my country.”

She spoke about her formal education, how it factored into her identity, and some of the special influences that she remembered. She said that it had been very important to her father to live in a nice area.

“When I was young, I had the chance to live and study. My father... wanted truly that we study, so we lived in an area where we weren’t in the cités... we lived in a nice place because it was very important for my father. Therefore, it was much easier, and as a result, all of my friends worked in school, so it was good. She continued, “As for education finally... how shall I put it... my school career didn’t really take my upbringing into account, because I feel French somehow, because I arrived when I was young. I arrived when I was six” (Rafa).

When asked if her education made her feel French, she said,
“From education, yes I believe so, yes, because I have had all of my education in France, so yes, I myself feel French, but even so at home I have an Algerian culture. I even have a double culture, but in connection to the question, another influence is also my parents, because my parents haven’t been to school and it is very important that we, their children, go to school and succeed” (Rafa)

“Also what was really the most connected to success was my ease of adapting. I was six years old when I arrived. I started in preparatory class where everybody spoke French – I didn’t speak French. I arrived in December and they put me in a normal class where everybody spoke French – not in an adaptation class. I had a very kind and young teacher who spent a lot of extra attention on me. He was very kind. Plus, at home I had my uncle who helped me with my work. I had that much to learn [meaning a certain amount of work to do], but my uncle told me no, no, no, you have to do even more in order to catch up with the others. As a result, I caught up with everybody, because I repeated the year. I did two CP. I went from December to June. I learned a little French and I repeated the year. I did two CP, and after I was always the first in the class. In the second grade...I was two times the first of my class.” (Rafa).

Rafa recalled how important her very first teacher and her uncle had been in helping her to catch up with her language and subjects in school that first year. Even though she had had to “redouble” [repeat] that year, it was worth it because she became first in her class.

Rafa had some very bad memories to share when it came to going to university. After she graduated and had her bac, she had wanted to attend Les Beaux Arts to study
architecture. However, after looking at her name they told her that she was not a French citizen, so she would have to register. As Rafa recalls,

“When I had my bac, at the end of high school, when I passed my bac, I wished to enter Les Beaux Arts to study architecture. In fact to enter Beaux Arts, it was only necessary to have one’s bac at that time and just show up, stand in line and register.

And when I arrived, they asked me what my nationality was, even though I had spent my entire scholastic life in France. But because I was born in Algeria, they regarded my name and said to me, ‘But you’re not French.’ I didn’t have French papers, so they refused me entrance to Beaux Arts and they said ‘But you, you’re a foreigner! It is necessary for you to be pre-registered.’ I didn’t know. I thought I was just like everybody else, and I missed my pre-inscriptions two times. After that I abandoned it – for that I stopped my studies for fifteen years.” (Rafa).

Not understanding why she would just walk away, I asked her why she had not done anything about it, and I also asked how long ago it had happened. She said,

“Make a complaint? No, I was too young, because when you’re 20 years old, you don’t think. So, I hid in the law department and it upset me very much, so I abandoned – I stopped my studies. I said ‘Too bad,’ and then three years ago I started my studies again. I had wanted to do architecture, but then it was too complicated and too long. I have regretted it for a long time. It was in 1991. It is a long time” (Rafa).

When I asked her why she had missed it the second time, and why she had waited so long to return, she was vague. She said that it was her regret; she had thought of it for fifteen years to do architecture. She did not know any more how it went, but it had been
the first time that she felt or experienced segregation. She did not understand at the time because it was new to her. This was the first time she did not feel like the others. I arrived at the university [saying] 'Hello! I want to register,’ but when she saw my family name and that I was not French, she said ‘Ah! You are foreign! It is necessary to come back the first of March to pre-register and then you return in July.’” Except that for me, I had done all my studies in France, and I had the same diplomas as the French, but she refused me nevertheless, because I was foreign. There was nothing that I had missed. It was just that she looked at my file.”

As for her social and political perspectives and her citizenship, she said,

“Ah, now yes, since seven years, but before no. When I wanted to do Beaux Arts, no, I was Algerian, no. I was twenty years old. I did all my schooling here, but as soon as she looked at my name and my nationality…a problem” (Rafa).

I asked if she thought it had been prejudice. She said,

"Yes, ah yes, it is a prejudice because as a result, I had to do it again the following year… it meant a waste of time… it was necessary to do two pre-inscriptions, because I was a foreigner. But all of my diplomas were French.”

I asked Rafa if she thought things had changed since then.

“Perhaps, I don’t know anymore, now, how it goes, but at that time, yes, it is the first time that I faced school segregation. I don’t understand… [why they acted like that with her, she means], maybe she gave me misinformation. It was the first time, really, where I didn’t feel myself like the others” (Rafa).

Rafa and I have exchanged emails since the interview, and I asked again why she had missed the pre-inscription the second time. It seemed to me that she had not really given
the full reason. At the time of the interview, Rafa told me that she wanted to be a French Assistant \textit{[Assistant Francaise]} for a year, and afterwards to teach French to English foreigners in an English speaking country such as in England, Canada, or Australia. In the most recent email she told me that she is a teaching assistant in Scotland and that she is very happy with what she is doing and how her life is going now. She said,

“I missed the pre-inscription in the second time because I studied at university (law) and I forgot the date! And after that I needed to work to pay my flat. That is why I spent a lot of time before returning to my studies. I regretted the fact that I didn't study architecture at the beginning, but now I'm very glad to study English! No regrets now!” (Rafa).

\textbf{Lisette}

Lisette, my sixth interview, was twenty-two years old and in her third year at the university in the English faculty (department). She already had a license (bachelor's degree) in cinema and was working on a second license for two more years, which would get her a Master. She said, “I went to the U.S. for one year to be an au pair. I didn’t want to lose my English, because I like to speak another language, and also because I like cinema, so I want to do a Master in movie translation, but they didn’t accept me in Master 1, so I have to do another license.” She wants to work in the film industry as a movie translator for translating American language movies into French subtitles. She added, “I wish I could study in America, but it’s too expensive for me so I don’t even try.”

Lisette was born in France. Her mother is French and her father is Algerian. As soon as we introduced ourselves, I relaxed. She spoke nearly perfect English, with an
American accent. She seemed eager to talk with me, so I thought this was going to be fun.

“Before we start,” I said. “Were you born in France?” “Yes” she answered. “So you are, and consider yourself, a French citizen?” I asked her. She made an exaggerated face and said “Yes.” Of course, I said, and you spent your entire life in the French school system, so then if I ask you that question “Where do I belong?” how would you answer that?” She said,

“It’s funny because when I understand this in English the translation is like “Où dois-je me situer?” (Where must I place myself?) In a place, so where do I belong? For my country, do you mean, or my family? Because my family is Algerian, so … part of me … is Algerian. It’s part of my culture because I’m very close to my family. But I feel French really [laughs], so I don’t know, maybe double culture. I think it’s good for me to have like another view of another culture because like I feel more open minded maybe” (Lizette).

I asked if she went back at all to visit, and she said,

“I haven’t been to Kabylie. I haven’t been there yet because my father was not able to return. He was Army, so if he came back to the country he would be in the army, and he didn’t want to, but because he had three children it wasn’t a problem anymore…. He didn’t go back for twenty years, and then he went back and he was disappointed. You know he didn’t recognize his country, of course, because it was twenty years after. He didn’t take us because he was disappointed, even to show us where he had lived, and what was his country... it wasn’t the country he experienced. So he didn’t take us, but I wish I could go with my aunts” (Lizette).
When I asked about her mother and whether she was French-French, Lisette said, “Yes, French, like very Catholic education.” I asked if this made her feel more French, or feel half Algerian, because she knew about the extended family, even if she had not lived there. “Yes, my uncles have been born in France, because my father was the first one. They were all born in France, but they [went] back every year to Algeria, where my father was born, and then came back.” Lisette said, “I’ve seen pictures of my family. I mean there are people who know me by my pictures. Yeah, when they come to France [they say] ‘Hi, yeah, I know you, I know everything.’ It’s strange.” I asked if she felt connected to them. “Yeah, really, because I’m really closer to my father’s family than to my mother’s.” She laughed a little. I asked her why she thought that, and she answered, “I appreciate more the aunts…they are really close to each other, they really care about each other. My uncles [are] really young, so I feel like [they are] my cousins.” Her uncles married women who were from North Africa. Her mother’s only brother is Catholic, like her grandfather, and they do not have a close relationship with him even though he is her godfather.

The second question asked about formal education and how it factored into her identity. “I don’t think the educational system factored into my identity as French or Algerian. I think they took me as a French student and that’s it. In my very young age I already didn’t feel a stranger.” I asked if her name had ever been a problem. Lisette said, “My first name is Latin, so maybe it helps. I know my parents gave me a French name because…they decided it wouldn’t be good for me to have an Algerian name.” I asked if she ever had any problems with her last name in school. She said, “I guess sometimes but it was not really clear, so I couldn’t say it was that, but for most of the
time I didn’t have problems, because I was very good in French.” Lisette then told me about a junior high school teacher that she remembered.

“I had a teacher in collège – middle school, yes? – and she was very, very racist, very old, she was like sixty, but she liked me a lot because I was good in French, but all my fellows – other North-African identity (and in France we are very rejective), she didn’t like them at all. I was the only one she would respect” (Lizette).

When I asked if she thought it was because of the language, Lisette said,

“If you speak perfect French, then I think it’s ok for you. If you have like a big accent it’s bad, if you do a lot of mistakes, like you have a bad autograph or grammar, then I think it’s harder for you because then ... French people, who are kind of racist, would say ‘Oh, you’re not French.’” (Lizette).

I asked about whom or what had the most influence, and she said,

“I think what’s had the most influence on me is me and my parents. Like the way I was educated. Maybe for a little part my teachers are also part of my education. But what I learned – I learned, yeah. Or it’s a mixture, but I really feel like I was self-educated. Like I really had the chance to choose what I wanted to be. My father didn’t care about my religion; everybody let me do what I wanted. But I think it was more my father. Yeah, he thought that I had to be good at school. I had to succeed. I had to have good grades” (Lizette).

I asked about any difficulties with studies and Lisette said that yes, she had had some, but “my mum is a teacher, so I’m sure it helps even if it doesn’t help my brother”. It strikes me as peculiar that Lisette did not mention that her mother was a teacher until the end of the conversation. I would have expected her to say that her mother was a big
influence on her educational experience because her mother was a teacher. However, her remark about herself being the biggest influence was exactly what the other participants had said.

When I asked social and political perspectives and whether she thought it was about the language, Lisette said, “Maybe for a teacher that is the case; for some others, like my grandparents, it’s more about religion.” So I asked about the veil, the headscarf issue in France currently, and what the *hijab* symbolizes at least in the media. She answered, “The *hijab*, yes. I’m not for it, because I think it’s to reduce women to not show themselves, to not show what they are, and I think the body is part of yourself, so I don’t think you need to hide your body to be respected. I am against it, but I’m not for [preventing] women with a scarf into class. A lot of them have chosen to do that so I respect that, but I just don’t understand why they feel more respectable with the scarf” (Lizette).

I asked why she thought the veil was a political issue in France. “What do you mean by issue?” she asked. I mentioned what she had said about a young woman or girl wearing the *hijab* that she should be able to go into class with it on. And since the French government was saying no to the headscarf it had become a political issue, and I asked why she thought that was so. Lisette then explained that she did not agree for very young girls wearing the headscarf. I asked if she thought it was more about a sense of “Frenchness” and a fear of Islam in French society, or at least that was the way the media made it seem. She said, “I think that more and more French people have diversity, and because this mix is growing we should adapt and have respect for a culture as French.
She added that she knew that racism existed in the U.S. as well, but she thought that Americans “are more open to the mixed culture.”

“As an example, when I came to the U.S. for eight months I didn’t really feel like a stranger... even when I was telling them that I was from an Algerian culture... they wouldn’t care at all. They were open-minded, whereas French are putting people in cases. Like the hijab, I think we categorize people more than the U.S. I don’t feel a stranger in the U.S. I was very welcome by everyone” (Lizette).

I asked if she spoke any of her father’s first language. She told me that her father’s father had left for France first, and only later brought his family over with him. Her father was eight years old when he came to France. She tells me that her father speaks Kabyle, which is a Berber language, not Arabic. She says that her father tried to teach them when they were younger to count and to say certain words, but they never really learned it. Her grandmother speaks Kabyle, and speaks French too, and even though she speaks it badly, you can understand her.

Then I stated that she did not seem to have had any integration problems about citizenship or identification except that one teacher. So she feels totally French, accepted as being totally French, and yes she appreciates her Algerian connections, but that she feels French. She said, “Yeah, because I’m not Muslim, I’m so-so.”

“I think that both religion and language are part of the integration problem. But I think that if there is racism in the politics it’s more about religion, I think, because if you don’t understand you don’t understand and they don’t care about you, but if you’re Muslim they will care because it’s like a culture problem. For example, my grandparents think that a lot of Muslims are dangerous” (Lizette).
However, it is not a question of danger from extremists or something like that for her grandparents; it is the fear that they have for their own religion. She says that her grandfather thinks that

“Catholics would disappear and nothing would be like these parts, so they’re more concerned with the struggle between Catholics and Muslims. They understand that there are both extremist and non-extremist Muslims, but they care about their own religion and they want to save it out of ‘Frenchness’. Not that French are any more practicing, because for most of them they don’t care about that, but my grandfather is just like horrified because Catholicism is being… lost. Well I would think that my grandfather is an extremist Catholic. It’s really about religion, everything is about religion” (Lizette).

I asked how her sense of herself had been changing since she had been at the university and as she had gotten older. She said, “I think my perception of myself has changed because I’m growing up and that’s normal.” I asked about her feeling different at the university from when she was in high school, and how had she changed as a young woman in the society and at the university. “I think I need to have more of an opinion and to take part of some political views from stuff like this, but I still feel like a student. I think my perception of myself will be very changed when I will be working.”

Lastly, I asked if she wanted to get married and have children and she said, “Oh yeah, sure I want to have children, but I don’t really want to get married. More and more, I don’t get the point of being married. Maybe I will, but I want to create a family, and I want also to move from France [laughs]. I don’t really want to live in France.” I asked
her why, and she said, “It’s the rain. Because when I went to California, I got used to this, now, I feel like I need more sun.”

Sana

I remember Sana by the necklace she wore – the Hamsa, the hand of Fatima. I knew that it was a popular image used as an amulet to bless and protect. She seemed a little apprehensive at first, but as soon as she settled herself in, and we began to talk, she relaxed. She was warm and friendly, but still a little guarded. I told her that she could speak French if she preferred. I said that I was not fluent in speaking French, but I could understand it, if spoken slowly.

Sana looked more like seventeen, but she was twenty-four years old, and a Master’s student in her fourth year in the STAPS (UFR de sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives (STAPS), MASTER) department at the university. She told me that she is the baby of the family, has Algerian origins, and that she speaks a little Kabyle with her grandmother, who also lives in France. She told me that she wants to see the world and after maybe think about marriage.

I began by explaining a little about what I meant as belonging. I said that I meant it in a sense of personally belonging within one’s identity. I then asked her, “How do you describe yourself?” She said, “I think I have two cultures, one in Algeria, and the other in France.” I asked her to describe herself – ethnic identity. “For me I’m French. My origins are Algerian because my grandfather and grandmother were born in Algeria, and my mother like my father is of Algerian origin. But I was born in France, I live in France, my friends live in France, and I have lots of French friends.”
She did not experience discrimination by other children or teachers due to family origins, name or language. She explained, “No, in school no, never, because at school, there were a lot of... different origins apart from French, but there was no discrimination.”

Although her parents had experienced discrimination, coming from a different generation, and living in different times, she had not. About her parents she said, “When they were young, yes, because they’re not the same times, same generation, so, yes they have discrimination, but, me, no.” Sana said that her parents’ speak to her in French, and that they graduated with technical degrees from the French educational system. Her mother was born in France.

She thought that things have changed, or are changing, even though this diversity of faces (as she called it “Benetton”) may not fully be represented yet, in the media. “A little, yes,” she said, “but it needs to be more.”

Asked why she thought it was not represented in the media more, the fact that France is a diversity of cultures, especially if there is a lot of diversity at school. She said, “Yes, it’s true. It’s true in the media, but at school, no.” She thought it was like that, “because politics, the media wants to transmit a message.” She explained why she thought this was so,

“Because there is a particular political message which they want to pass, for example, just an example, therefore consider the presidential elections, they want to create a message of grand security, for example facts which happened, which are not necessarily true or accurate either, just to have the votes they are after at elections” (Sana).
I started to move on to another question, but she stopped me and said “But, um, I want to, to… um *ajouter* [add] another point of view.”

“When I was young, my mother, my father speaks French, and, ah, I have, um, culture, French culture, so I think I have another vision, because my parents, when I was young, brought me up in a way which was more French than Algerian. And I believe that owing to this, I do not feel the discrimination that some other young people with a similar culture to mine may feel. I don't know if you see what I mean or not” (Sana).

She described her formal education, and who or what had been the most, or the least, influence on her educational experience, her successes and any failures. She said, “My personality and my parents.” I asked about helpful teachers. “Yeah, at collège et lycée.” I asked her what the differences were with university and lycée, and she offered that at middle school and high school, the professors are behind you pushing, but at the university, you are free. The relationship with the professors at the university is very different. They treat you like an adult.

I asked about any students that may need help because they are having difficulties, if there were any facilities or opportunities for minority or immigrant students to get help or were they just on their own? She said that if students need help they have to ask for help. I asked if second- and third-generation students of immigrant origins in France did not have the same chances as maybe most of the other students whose parents were French and not from the Maghrebin areas, if they would have more opportunities to go to university versus students who did not have those opportunities. She said, “No, they
don’t have more chances than another foreigner. Actually it comes from other contexts, I mean it's other things which are taken into account to be able to succeed, but not your origin.”

I asked if her values or beliefs had any influence on her success. She asked me why I wanted to know about her values. I explained that they might influence her in some manner to be successful. I said, you had told me your parents, but she interrupted me. “No, in fact, they haven’t obliged me to do that rather than this or that. I have made my own choices. For example, I have studied sports because I like sports.”

I went on to the third question about social and political conditions such as language, xenophobia, violence, media, integration and nationality. I mentioned that we had discussed these somewhat already, and I realized how difficult it is to try to reflect so quickly. But she said “Mmmmm, but I think this condition [does] not really affect my education.” What about the current issues concerning the veil?

“To be religious, for Muslim, you don’t need to wear the veil. I think in France we have changed to not have to wear it, but in other countries, the woman is, um…

“Obligated,” I offered. “Yes, so I think, to these women in the other country who suffer [from] this and I think there they are changed to not to, ah…porter la voile, [wear the veil], so I don’t understand this problem” (Sana).

I asked if she agreed with the French government in not allowing young girls to wear the veil in schools in the argument to keep separate the church from the state – laïcité. She said, “Laïcité, yes.” “Then you feel that women should have the right to choose?” I asked her. “Yeah, to decide for themselves. I affirm, though I’m not pratiquante, ah, they have no need to plus porter la voile to…to be religious!” “And you don’t want to
see that happen, you don’t want to have young girls be forced to have to wear the veil?” I asked her.

“Um…no, I’m not say that, but I think, um…she must make her own choice; me it doesn’t bother me if someone wears the veil or not. It is her own choice, but I think at school I agree with laïcité, because it breeds too much conflict at a religious level or in such subjects as sports, for instance” (Sana).

Assirem

Assirem, my eighth interview, was thirty-one years old. She is not a French citizen, but an Algerian foreign student attending a different university in France, not Nanterre. She spoke French without an apparent accent. She is studying sensor systems in electronics and robotics. We met through mutual friends. Assirem had heard about me and my research study, and she was interested in being interviewed. Although Assirem was not of immigrant origins, she was interested in the study, and she fit every parameter of the study except the immigrant status.

When I first met her, I quickly realized that she was not a shrinking violet, but quite outspoken and direct. I found her to be charmingly assertive with the people around her. She was staying with an older couple who lived in a small suburb just outside of Paris. The husband was an invalid with failing health, and Assirem helped to look after him. When she spoke about her relationship with them, it struck me as sincere concern for the old man. She thought about her own good health and genuinely catered to the old man’s care. She seemed very self-confident and frankly outspoken, nearly defiant at times in her tone when responding to my questions, but she was generous with her time.
I thought it would be interesting to hear what she had to say about French attitudes since she was attending university in France. Of course, her comments are from a colonized French-Arab-Independence view. So when she spoke about marginalization, she referred to Arab, too, not just French. The second time we met we spoke at length, but I did not record the interview because she had not yet consented in writing. I explained what the interview questions would explore. We had the formal interview later.

When we met for the formal interview, Assirem had prepared written notes. For the first question, she told me straight off, “I define myself as Algerian – Kabyle, we speak Berber. There. I am not Arab. I am Kabyle.” Being adamant about this, she was like my other participants, who did not care to be lumped into a stereotyped Arab-Muslim-Islamic culture. They see themselves as Berber.

Then she continued quickly, stating in an almost defensive tone, that school did not play any role in her identity, meaning that school had rejected or excluded her culture, because it was not taken into account. She said,

“In fact school completely rejected my identity. My culture was not present in the school. One spoke Arab in the school, one wrote in Arab, one spoke Arab at school and Kabyle was not involved. Therefore, Kabyle, in fact, I learned at home with my parents, with my grandparents, ah, I grew up with this language; it rocked me to sleep, it cradled my childhood. Algerian school had nothing to do with that language” (Assirem).
She said that the school did not take any account for her Kabyle-Berber culture, but at the university, the faculty was very politically active and started some grass-roots movements.

“But at the faculty we began to see and to have a better understanding because there were lots of movements, there were a lot of demonstrations, there were a lot of riots caused by that. The most recent event dates back to April 20th 2001, when there were enormous riots in Kabyle, precisely because of the problem of denial of identity and the rejection of the Berber language and the Berber culture.” (Assirem).

In 1980, several months of demonstrations demanding the officialization of the Berber language took place in Kabylie, called the Berber Spring. The politics of identity intensified as the Arabization movement in Algeria gained steam in the 1990s. In 1994–1995, a school boycott occurred, termed the "strike of the school bag". In June and July 1998, the area blazed up again after the assassination of singer Matoub Lounes and at the time that a law generalizing the use of the Arabic language in all fields went into effect. In the months following April, 2001 (called the Black Spring), major riots — together with the emergence of the Arouch, neo-traditional local councils — followed the killing of a young Kabyle Masinissa Guermah by gendarmes, and gradually died down only after forcing some concessions from the President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

The 2001 event that she described called the Black Spring, became a powerful symbol of Kabyle-Berber discontent with the national government and the denial of Berber identity – language and culture. During the spring of 2001, a series of political demonstrations by Kabyle-Berber activists in the Kabylie region of Algeria erupted in violent clashes between the activists and police. Large-scale riots lasted for months and
groups such as the Arouch and the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylie (MAK), which became politically active in Kabyle.

She explained that even though the professors were Kabyle, the students were Kabyle, and the region was Kabylie, it was forbidden to speak Kabyle in the schools. As a manner of protest, Assirem sarcastically and exaggeratedly highlighted the positives in which this environment gave them an opportunity to learn other languages.

“Now, looking back on it, it enabled us (it was an opportunity for us) to learn other languages, because when your language is not recognized, one is forced to learn other languages – French and Arab. In parentheses, I love the Arab language. It is a very literary language that I like very much, but I know that this culture – Arab-Muslim – is not my culture. All the same, I like this language. I like very much their poetry, I know a lot about their history, ah, this language and all, but it is not my language. It is not my history, I never define myself ever as Arab. I am not Arab. There. I have nothing against it, but I am not Arab. I am Kabyle, I love my culture, and I have my own traditions. We have our traditions, we have our culture, we have our own fashion, our own eating specialties, but we are not Arab” (Assirem).

When Assirem read the question about educational influences, her answer did not surprise me. By now, many of the participants had said the same thing: her will and then her parents also had been the biggest influence in their academic success. She said that her student career had been very successful, and that she felt truly well integrated. She had many teachers that were very good, too, but as far as religion was concerned, she personally did not find that it had really been an influence.
“As for the religion, me personally, the religion has not really been an influence in my environment. Yes, we are Muslims, but, well, we do not practice. My father is Muslim and my mother also. Papa, he does do the prayers, but he never brought us up to have to do the prayers. He really let us do whatever we wanted. Religion has never really been a problem for me in my life. I dress as I want. I do what I want. I do respect the month of Ramadan. I do it out of tradition, not really from conviction. I do it [out of] respect for my parents and for the society, but the religion frankly has never been a handicap for me ever. I believe in a God, but I do not practice. Certainly, if one day I do choose a way of religion surely, it is Islam, because it is the religion the most close to me. I was very free; we were very free. But we were always brought up with good values, that is to say, not to steal, etc. My parents brought us up with these values, these principles of Islam. But it is to say that these are universal laws. It is not necessary to put on the veil and all that, me personally, I find that the veil for example, it is an Arab cloth. It is not my cloth, because, in fact, we have our own cloth. I do not see why I am going to put this veil on, which is purely the dress of Arabs” (Assirem).

I asked about the social and political perspectives, and if French people take into consideration the differences among North African people who come to France, or just lump them all together. I asked if she thought that Westerners, in general, just rather lump them and see, “Oh, Arab, therefore Muslim,” and they do not see any of the differences. She said,
“No. No, for them, all Maghrébin are Arabs. It is true that there are people who know the Berber cause, that is to say Kabyle, but what I have noticed here, for them, all Algerians are Arabs. They do not make a difference. In fact, the problem is not to be Arab or to not be Arab, the problem is to be Algerian. That is the problem in fact. The French and the occidentals in general they regard it and for them it is an internal problem of Algeria. It is not for them Arab or Kabyle, they are all Algerian, and the majority of the time they all are Arab or Muslim. However, it is not true. We are not all Arab. Eighty percent of the Kabyle are Muslim, but there are Christians and there are Jews in the Berber community. There are even some atheists who believe in nothing; they are neither Muslim nor another thing. Therefore, it is not true; we are not all Muslim already, but the occident regards all Algerians as Muslims – as Arabs – and, in parentheses, sometimes perhaps terrorists also” (Assirem).

I asked if she thought that the *hijab* had become a political symbol for young women even more so than a religious one and she said,

“No, I don’t believe that because I know many girls who wear the *hijab* who do not do the prayers, nor anything at all, but because they are obligated to wear the veil. For me, I am against that; if I put on the veil, I [will] do it with conviction, because I pray, because I practice fully that religion and I feel OK with myself. It is for this that I will wear the veil, but I am not going to wear it because my brother or my father or the society obligates me to wear it, no. That I don’t agree with. The *hijab* to me is a symbol of religion. Political? No, because it doesn’t reflect at all the faith. I am not obligated to wear the veil. For me it is really archaic” (Assirem).
Even though Assirem was there as a foreign student and attending a university nearby, she was also working full-time. She was trying to find a stage [professional training or practice], but she had not been successful. She considered that the reason might be because she was Algerian. As Assirem said, “it isn’t even worth the pain to send your CV or write to them, they don’t even respond, because your name is Mohamed, or I don’t know what.”

Assirem told me how other religions were forbidden in Algeria, and she found that to be a drawback as far as learning to appreciate other ideas and beliefs and growth. As an example, she explained how she had always been afraid of Jews, but now she knows many Jews who are very kind and very intelligent, so she has completely changed her vision. Although Assirem was not an ‘issue d’immigrants, [immigrant offspring] she did have a unique outsider/insider perspective, and I think that her view also helped to give a glimpse of the “origins-country” as well, and not just from the “holidays and summer vacations” view.

Alia

Alia, my ninth and final interview, was thirty-one years old, married, and had nearly completed her doctoral studies in the Droits [Laws] department. She was focusing on international law and she was the only doctoral student among the participants. Of Tunisian descent, she was the first in her family to have the bac, let alone a doctorate of law. She believes that teaching immigrant histories along with French histories will especially help broaden the narrow-mindedness of some of the younger generation. In this manner, they can come to understand how things such as cultural traditions can and have changed and adapted over time and can turn into dogma.
I asked Alia the first question about belonging. She said, “I was born in France, so I don’t feel that I’m different, I feel completely French. It’s not autonomic with my origins; I think that everyone is different from the other.”

“I felt more this [difference] when I get married, because I married a French [man] – one-hundred percent French parents. And a lot of people felt that I married foreign, but no, I didn’t feel that. When I think about him, I don’t feel that I get married with someone different from me. Ok? Ah, we speak the same language, we have the same history, we have the same [understanding of] society; I grew up here, I was born here. I feel very French because I was born here” (Alia).

She commented that her parents had wanted her to experience Tunisian culture as well as French, so her parents sent her to live with relatives in Tunisia during her early school years. She said,

"I was a foreigner when I was in Tunisia, because I didn’t wear the same dress, I didn’t have the same pen, I didn’t eat the same thing. So, there I felt different. Because I was young, I was five, and they treated me as a French [sic]” (Alia).

She recognized that part of the difference was economic. She explained, “If I was only in France in my own house with my TV and all these superficial things, I would have felt about those people differently, and perhaps where my parents are coming from.”

There I lived in a beautiful house. I was sort of a privileged person in my school in Tunisia. I wasn’t like the others in fact. Here I was like everyone, but in Tunisia I was different, really different, from the other people.” She understood the distinctions that make her a minority in both Tunisia and France.
“I know who I am because I lived there, and I met my family and all the complexity of my family, and it’s not just a dream you know. Some people that you see on holiday and you live just a few days with them and then you go home. No, I lived there and I used to see how my family is working, and the complexity of the [life], even in Tunisia. But I have changed, my family is really open-minded and they understand things. They are more open than other families that I heard about” (Alia).

We then moved on to educational influences and Alia told me that she studied her first year in France, then her parents sent her back to Tunisia for five years for school because her parents were thinking about going back and “they didn’t want me to lose my studies. [They wanted me] to learn Arabic and to know my family.” But her family decided to stay in France, so they brought her back to France. She is the first person in her family to have the bac, and after she received it they held a very important celebration with a big party and all of her relatives in Tunisia. When Alia decided to get a doctorate, she had to get a job, too, because she did not have the money to do it otherwise. She said,

“It was very hard to manage the job. The university doctorate research is very hard – sometimes you’re up, sometimes you’re down – that’s the doctoral. At first I imagined returning back home with the degree to show it to my grandfather who was waiting to see it. No one understanding what work it took to get it or what it represents, or about your work, or what you are going to do with it, because you can stop after the five years and become an attorney, earn more money and start working at a younger age. But the doctorate was something different – the highest level at
school. So grandfather, I arrive to the higher level at school. And he had only to say, ‘that is the only goal of your life, going to the higher level of school?’” (Alia).

But she valued the investment she was making and that the extra hard work was worth it to her. She saw herself as an example for her brothers, sisters, and cousins to see that if they wanted, it was possible for them to strive for something higher.

“Sometimes it’s very hard, but now I am at the end, so I want to finish. When you ask some younger people, for example my sisters, what do you want to do? ‘Oh we just want to finish the bac, two years and find a job.’ Do you understand that if you stop two years after, it will be for a job as administrative, or functional, or something in the lower level than if you go to a university and get a diploma? After five years, you will be a CAPES (competitive recruitment procedure for public sector teaching posts in France). If you stop in two years you will be all your life only in the lower level in the occupation or the service. So it’s three years more and you can begin to do that and they say ‘no, no it’s too long and we are not like you’ and so that’s that. Sometimes I feel like I failed because they don’t want to continue. I remember my father told me, ‘Hey, my daughter, if you have the opportunity to do it, go, go. No one did it before you in the family, so if it is possible for you, and you have the capacity, and you have the opportunity, you have someone who is ok to direct you on the subject you like – go, go’” (Alia).

She commented further on the influences of her professors and the French educational system.

“The professors didn’t make me feel different. Once I felt the difference, when the professor had asked me what I wanted to do, and I said I wanted to be a lawyer, and I
thought I wanted to be a lawyer in Germany. She said to me, ‘In Germany? Don’t you think that your life is quite complicated [enough], because your parents are coming from another country and you want to leave France, now, to live in another country?’ I didn’t like her answer, but I think that it was objective, but now that I think about that moment, I feel that she wouldn’t have said that to another person, it was just to me because my parents are...but when I think about it, it was the only time that I felt something different. I don’t think that the French educational system made obstacles. I think that it opened doors. I remember one of my professors in history, who each time I succeeded in something, writing something like a paragraph, telling me it’s good and how it’s important to continue this way, etc., etc.” (Alia).

“Parents have done sacrifice to come here they leave their family, they work here, your father is working hard, actually father is working very hard and it’s for all of us to give us a good education. [Parents] show us that the most important [thing] was the education, and if you don’t want to be a farmer, then you’ll have to work to go to school [sic]. That’s when I decided to continue, it was because I had the opportunity to do it. And if it wasn’t me it could have been one of my cousins, if they went to the university so high” (Alia).

Alia could justifiably conclude that her own determination and recognition of the long-term value of further education have been her greatest influence. But she also recognized the support that she received from her family, friends and neighbors, and from some of her professors. In spite of her own determination, I sensed that her grandfather’s remark hurt her because she had expected him to be proud and appreciate the value of it, or at least to appreciate her efforts. She had expected him to encourage her, but he made
her feel ridiculous perhaps. In that moment, I imagine that she realized what it represented, she recognized the difference that was in her, which had not come from a place that was based on her parents’ origins. It was from an inner place in her thinking that was much further away from the family than any geographical miles represented.

Alia explained that socially and politically she identified more strongly with France, since she had been born there. But she thought it was not just a question of ethnic origins.

“But what I want to say is that it’s a question of social and not ethnic. Because I’m from somewhere people didn’t go far in school or very long, and we...my grandfathers were farmers. I feel French, and not really different. I feel that we are in a society where everyone is different – coming from Spain, Portugal – it’s not really.... I grew up in the suburbs of Bordeaux, but very soon, my parents buy [sic] a house and get us to this house, which was in the suburbs. But we don’t have those problems that we heard about in the suburbs” (Alia).

Alia takes a very pragmatic view of her social and political positions, perhaps as a direct result of the identity she has defined for herself and the influences that helped her do so. She summarized it like this, “And at the end, what’s important is your work. I was the first in my class. People ask for my work and not for my origin. It is only my work that is important.”

I end this chapter with one of my own experiences that occurred toward the end of my research time in Paris. I believe it may help further illuminate the research experience and research findings since many of the participants made comments alluding to how the French could be “cold.” They also questioned how Westerners assumed that Muslim
women wearing the headscarf were subservient to a patriarchal system, while the exploitation of women’s bodies in popular Western culture was progressive. As Yasmine said, “I just find it really weird that they say the women who wear the hijab are submissive, and someone who is naked and wears a low-cut shirt – she’s progressive. I don’t know why progress is always associated with showing a lot of flesh.”

Me

Toward the end of my four months in France, I was delighted to be invited to dinner by a very interesting woman that I met while there. She was my landlord’s eighty-four year old Dutch mother, Roos. While an au pair, she had met and married a French man and raised a family over the course of forty years living in France. Both she and her son, Giles, had travelled a great deal, and spoke fluent English.

I was excited about the party because it would give me an opportunity to meet some ‘typically’ souche-French, [French origins; être français de souche – refers to being of “old stock” or “trunk” meaning several generations of French born and bred], plus I was going to meet Assirem, a young Algerian foreign student who was staying with the host family. Assirem was attending a French university in Paris studying robotics. She was also working for Giselle taking care of her invalid husband. Roos had mentioned that Assirem had heard about my study and wanted to participate in it. This was really, why I had been invited.

Giselle lived in a nice old house with a lovely garden. Soon everyone had arrived, and before dinner, we sat in the living room with cocktails conversing. The other guests were all older (70’s and 80’s) and mostly retired professionals.
Since the American presidential election was the current event, the conversation turned to politics, and they wanted to know for whom I was going to vote. At the time, I was not sure, but I said that I was leaning toward Clinton, because Obama did not have as much experience; however, I was still uncertain.

Then someone asked about my research. They were interested, since the topic involved immigration, and especially because of the riots. One male guest asked why I was focusing on North African females when it was well known that North African males were really the problem, reasoning (among other things) that Arab men had too much machismo, an extreme sense of virility and chauvinistic attitude toward women. It was at this point that Assirem spoke. She said that from her experience immigrant males were not as academically successful partly because of the prejudice against them from the French society. She said the French were afraid of the boys and saw them as a threat. Whereas the girls were seen as a means to transmit the French culture, assuming that, the females would be tempted by the Western lifestyles and values. Killian (2003) had related similar ideas about immigrant women being viewed by the host society as ‘vehicles of integration into dominant society’ (Deutsch, 1987; Kibria 1994).

Dinner was announced and we headed to the table, where I was shown my place name: “The American.” As we were seating ourselves, the businessman who had remarked that Arab males were too macho, sarcastically said to the gentleman across from us, “Oui, Hilary Clinton a plus d'expérience bien – en faisant la vaisselle!” [Yes, Hilary Clinton has more experience all right – in doing the dishes!] Or, alternatively, his remark may have been “faire la lessive” [doing the laundry] – a jab at having to clean up after her husband’s peccadilloes. What was that he had said, before dinner, about Arab
males being too chauvinistic? It reminded me of Yesinia and Yasmine’s statements about the French being cold and hypocritical. The attitude was clearly stated by a Frenchman.

Interview Summary

As they related their stories in their own voices, each of the nine participants told a similar story. Through their experiences as immigrants, each has formed a hybrid sense of identity – neither completely French nor completely still Berber-Kabyle. They are clear about the reasons for their academic successes, starting primarily with their own sense of determination, supported by their parents, and encouraged by teachers who took the time to work with them when they needed a little extra help and who took them at face value rather than reducing them to stereotypes. Only two of them were particularly religious, but each demonstrated a remarkable tolerance toward those who more actively practiced their religion. None were especially militant in their feminism, yet all saw the value of what they were accomplishing, both for themselves and for those around them.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSIONS

Student narratives and lived experiences help teachers to understand the relationships between student well-being and academic performance. I assumed that students’ narratives of lived experiences could tell us something about how students managed to succeed academically or to cope with academic failure. It followed that asking students about their personal stories and lived experiences would teach teachers and researchers how to help better support pupils’ learning environment. This study contributed to narrative research on the personal stories of female immigrant students and their educational experiences and provides research that will help improve the educational experience of all immigrant students in France and elsewhere. I explored the cultural and educational influences on the success of female university students of North African origins who grew up in France by posing three questions situated in three main categories:

- Belonging and identity
- Educational influences
- French sociopolitical situations

My purpose was to illustrate the role of educational and cultural contexts in their lived experiences that most effectively promoted successful personal attitudes and behaviors. My findings provide insights into minority student behaviors for sociopolitical policies and sociocultural attitudes on educational theories and practices internationally. The participants, nine female university students, in their own voices shared what contributed to academic success, and how they made sense of their personal
and school experiences. Having progressed through the competitive French academic system to the university level, they have had to prove their ability to succeed or as Yesinia put it that they “deserved learning.” As an overall theme that emerged from the narratives is how they have negotiated their own place by philosophically rising above the limited spaces of the French and heritage origins cultures by choosing to transform them in to another view, a transcendent view for themselves – a cosmopolitan view of all-inclusiveness.

Cosmopolitanism Emerged from Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is “people speaking their souls directly into our ears” (Patai, 1993) and as such, it commands that we listen with respect and an open heart. These participants’ interviews help illustrate the encounters of minority female students in France into the political-social-cultural activism among North African-French women. In this study, the stories of these female students in France reveal a glimpse of the personal and social issues they struggled with to succeed within the French school system and culture. They spoke about many things that helped to explain who they were. In their narrative stories, they represented how these experiences came to shape their overall perspectives about life and what emerged from their narratives coalesced into an overall umbrella theme of a cosmopolitan worldview. The following figure (See Figure 2 – Umbrella of Cosmopolitan Theme) represents the relationships among the categories and themes that emerged from the narrative inquiry analysis.
Figure 2 – Umbrella of Cosmopolitan Theme

During the interviews for the present study, as each participant reflected on the questions for the first time, they commented on how difficult it was to do. However, they did appreciate the opportunity of self-reflection to examine their experiences. Yesinia said,

“This is very hard to describe myself to myself. I have never thought about doing that before. It is very easy to talk about hobbies, tastes, personality, etc., but this is a real introspection and a real challenge as well!” (Yesinia).

Consequently, as they attempted to answer the questions they pointed out certain factors that helped them, not only to explain, but also to understand or resolve some paradox in their own mind. In the process, they related personal experiences and sometimes these reflections led to personal family stories providing further insights (Rescher, 2001).

**Emerging Themes**

Out of these stories emerged important universal ideas of moral support, personal growth, courage and determinant resiliency as the women managed the sociocultural...
phenomena, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, of their daily lives. These concepts reflect the educational and cultural contexts that most effectively promoted successful personal attitudes and behaviors for these North African French female students. In analyzing the interview data, within the frames established by the research questions, as categories and subcategories of their sense of belonging, educational influences that supported school achievement, and sociopolitical changes in French society emerged the overall umbrella theme of cosmopolitanism that subsumed the initial categories and tied together all of the relationships. (See, Figure 2 – Umbrella of Cosmopolitan Theme). Although each woman’s life is individually unique, apparent similarities emerged from their responses, which indicated certain common characteristics among their experiences that shaped their personal perspectives about themselves and influenced their academic success.

**Category 1:** The *sense of belonging* was expressed as a personal mix of sociocultural preferences with another perspective, which several participants expressed as having “another view.” This other view is what I termed as the overall umbrella theme of cosmopolitan worldview that tied all of the other relationships together.

**Category 2:** *Academic success* involved several factors, but the most influential was themselves – their own “volonté” [will]. Parents were next in importance, and there were others who helped support them such as teachers, relatives, neighbors and friends. Two of the participants did count their parents’ religious beliefs as being influential.

**Category 3:** Their sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives recognized things were changing, but, in their opinion, *change was too slow*, and there had not been enough.
By extension, the answers of these nine women framed by the research questions exposed deeper emergent sub-themes in their experiences: *self-will, parents’ struggles, teachers’ or societal attitudes, and nostalgia*. As analysis of these stories revealed the universalisms of current and past issues about belonging, identity, success and the changing sociopolitical background, the circumstances and experiences that shaped these participants’ lives as minority young people in French society came through as an overall transcendent worldview perspective, which they called “*another view*” and I termed as cosmopolitanism. Coming from similar cultural backgrounds and growing up in French society, they had talked about their experiences and attitudes toward transcultural notions, educational and social policies, and personal storied-selves.

Some of their accounts related personal issues relative only to the individual context, but they also connected with universal themes of the human condition such as nostalgic memories, family, wishes for success through self-will, and hopes for future happiness. They reminisced about their lives. They spoke about how much their parents’ stories meant to them. These were stories recounting their experiences growing up in the hybridized French-heritage cultures in French society, as well as the extended families in the heritage countries.

One important component that the women had in common was the stories about how parents did not have many opportunities for education. Participants related their families’ accounts of the hardships of immigrating to France, leaving behind all of the familiarity and close connections, and then being subjected to social discrimination in French society. In spite of the elements of discrimination, both past and present, the family stories were constant reminders framing their beliefs that they were *lucky* to be in France.
with its advantage of the educational opportunities. These stories offered moral courage and functioned as a form of support whenever they felt pressured by the negative expectations of teachers, schools, and society, which stated that immigrant children could not do well academically.

“My parents were told many times that immigrants’ children couldn’t succeed in studies.” (Yesinia).

Most important was that they take advantage of “the opportunity to have long studies.”

“My father always encouraged me because he didn’t have an education, so he wanted me to have long studies. My mom would always say that for her professional success, it’s not working in a factory, it’s being at a desk and writing. That taught me because, you know, she didn’t have really, she doesn’t have really that knowledge, but as long as you were writing something then you were seen as very intelligent. That’s why he has always encouraged me to do – to have long studies, you know, to be a teacher or a doctor in spite of…what all parents want their children to be.” (Yasmine).

Most parents had been farmers before immigrating, and in France, they had had factory jobs or had been manual labourers with little need to speak French. They were lucky to find any job, because most of their parents did not have a chance for formal education and counted themselves fortunate.

Discussion

The nine women who participated in this study led unique lives: they also had similar characteristics such as having immigrant origins backgrounds. Even Assirem, who spoke from an outsider’s perspective as an Algerian-Kabyle foreign student, interestingly
echoed with several of the other participants’ in her comments. In discussing these findings, I will do so in relation to identity, cosmopolitanism, educational influences and sociocultural and political perspectives.

The women discussed some of the generational differences between themselves and their parents’ experiences of prejudice in French society. Their sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives recognized things were changing, but, in their opinion, change was too slow, and not substantive. They spoke about many things that helped to explain who they were. In their narrative stories, they represented how these experiences came to shape their overall perspectives about life and what coalesced into a cosmopolitan worldview.

Identity

Some of the data indicated that they did not see themselves as non-French, foreigners, or generational immigrants out of place among French society. They felt themselves to be French citizens or Europeans with North-African Berber cultural heritage. They had spent the entirety of their lives embedded in French institutions and society. Whether born in France or moved there at a young age, it did not change how they saw themselves as French citizens. Assirem and Yasmine were exceptions. Since Assirem was an Algerian foreign student studying at a French university, she would not consider herself as French, and Yasmine, at the time of the interview, did not have her French citizenship, so understandably she did not regard herself as French, but thought of herself as Moroccan, even though she had resided in France since the age of three! However after receiving her citizenship, she did finally feel French as she said, “I prefer to say that there are different versions of French people and that now I am part of them.”
It should be noted that Leena had said, “I feel myself French,” and that she was the same as all of the other girls until she had gone to university and discovered Islam. Reflecting what Killian (2003) had noted about some young women adopting the veil as a way of reclaiming an ethnic identity (Gaspard & Khosrokhavar, 1995), Leena also explained that after she started to wear the veil she sensed a difference,

“I was like all the girls French or Africans we were all the same, the same thoughts, the same clothes, the same way to be, but when I came here [university], I progress in my religion. I discover Islam when I go to the university, I progress, I evolved and, ah, now, there is a little difference.” (Leena).

Overall, the women clearly felt they belonged, and described themselves as French or European with a heritage culture as part of their identity. However, as Malena and Yasmine had expressed it best, they really considered themselves as “normal, a normal student, a normal European student.”

What was normal? For most, growing up in French society, spending their entire scholastic careers in the French schools, had acculturated these women to the point of referring to themselves as French. Whether born in France or not, they all felt and saw themselves as French, even if they did not always feel fully accepted as French by French people. It annoyed or frustrated them that most French people tended to see them only as immigrant Arabs or Muslims. However, when addressing their heritage cultures, they stressed the point that they were of Maghrebin, Kabyle or Berber origins, and not Arab. Not discounting their parents’ origins, they were proud to have two cultures, which they felt made them interesting and unique. It gave them something more than the other French students, which they expressed as having “another view.” As a source of
comparison with their French counterparts, it meant being less narrow-minded, and more accepting of diversity and transnational realities, more of a cosmopolitan worldview: “I think it’s good for me to have like another view of another culture because I feel more open minded maybe I don’t know” (Lisette).

Parallel to social identity theory (Burke, 1991), this may have also afforded them a way to psychologically fend off the feelings of inferiority that they sensed stigmatized them as immigrants that they perceived in French attitudes toward foreign cultures, especially ones from former North African colonies. Instead of accepting the negative stereotype of being from an immigrant culture and therefore inferior, participants reconstructed a positive image of this “otherness” by turning the negative etic attitude of French society into an emic positive of self regarding their heritage origins. Pike (1967) suggested that two perspectives can be employed in the study of a society’s cultural system. It is possible to take the point of view of either the insider or the outsider. This allowed them to develop a healthy attitude that supported a positive self-image, thereby manufacturing their own symbolic capital, which was an important self-protecting mechanism to help them ward off any social self-fulfilling prophesies of failure and in turn supplied them with a positive self-image of psychological capital and well-being, which may enhance their chances for academic success in school (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

Stereotype threat is a confirmation bias, and can be either positive or negative. A stereotype threat is the fear that one's behavior will confirm an existing stereotype of a group with which one identifies, and it can sometimes affect academic performance (Aronson, et al. 2002; Osborne, 1995). Coming from a teacher, it can be in the form of
“self-fulfilling prophecy or teacher expectations” (Wilkins, 1976). Discussing educational influences, participants recalled both positive and negative experiences when they talked about how school, teachers and other students had made them feel. Many said that a teacher’s encouragement had meant so much to them; enough to make them believe in themselves and to continue their efforts. They related the kindness of teachers who took extra time and care to work with them privately, or wrote encouraging remarks on their papers. These positive experiences made all the difference to their self-esteem, their attitudes and in their level of effort. They also noted the opposite experiences as well, such as teachers who were outwardly prejudiced or treated them like a foreigner and publicly humiliated them in front of the whole class, which caused them to feel different. These positive and negative experiences were part of the ongoing dialogue that was processed into their overall self-identity. They compensated for these negative attitudes with self-affirming propositions of having “another view” that protected their self-integrity, creating a broader vision in which to place their self-identity.

Otherness in Heritage Country

In Chapter 1, I explained Derrida’s “think travel,” expression of leaving home, leaving the known and “going far away toward the unknown, taking all of the risks...even the risk of not returning” (Bauman, 2000) as a way of relating it to the participants’ inability to psychologically return to the homeland of the parents or grandparents. Exploring the relationships between the affective aspects of a place, which Relph (2000) explains as “places [that] are constructed in our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations” helps to frame how the nostalgia regarding the “return myth” affects immigrants mixed feelings of being lucky while also
feeling loss. As the title of the 1934 novel by the U.S. author Tom Wolfe (1998) states, “You can’t go home again.” Consequently, participants did not always feel completely at home in the heritage country either. Sometimes when visiting or living in the parents’ origins country, they lacked a feeling of being at home. This feeling of being rejected was sometimes experienced in the reverse in the heritage country, when they would find that sometimes they were not accepted there as Moroccan, or Algerian or Tunisian, but (condescendingly) as French or as “immigrant” outcast.

“I was walking in the streets of Marrakech and met many young Moroccans who greeted me by saying "ça va la France!" [There goes France] or "ça va l’immigrée!" [There goes the immigrant] I spoke with some of them and I've realized that they don't see us as "real" Moroccans, which is true in some ways but still I found it hard to make them understand that my Moroccan culture is as present as the French one whether I'm in Morocco or France. Of course there are lots of clichés concerning immigrants' children so I just hope that some conversations have made the young I talked to more tolerant” (Yesinia).

“When I’m in Tunisia I am also from a minority because I’m not really Tunisian. I was born in France and I’m a second generation. So I was a foreigner there because I didn’t wear the same dress, I didn’t have the same pen, I didn’t eat the same thing. So there they treated me as a French (sic).” (Alia).

Even some parents felt that they did not recognize their own country, because as they said, it was no longer the same place they remembered, or their family all lived in France so there was no longer any reason to return. Alia pointed out, “there is narrow-
mindedness there too.” Yasmine had said, “I find I cannot even have a conversation there because they’re all….Oh you have it so lucky in France.” It was interesting that they also expressed feelings of being “othered” in the heritage country too. The “narrow-mindedness” among French society was also experienced in the country of origin, as they talked about the “narrow-mindedness” they found there, and how difficult life was there with so little to live on. Yasmine said, “Even if we share so many things, for instance, when I go to Morocco I feel the stranger, I feel foreigner.”

Burton (1993) said, “French-born children of North African immigres,…find themselves 'paumes entre deux cultures, deux histoires, deux langues, deux couleurs de peau, ni blanc ni noir, a s'inventer (leurs) propres racines, (leurs) attaches, se les fabriquer' (p. 17). [Mixed between two cultures, two stories, two languages, two colors of skin, neither white nor black, have invented (their) own roots, (their) cultural attachments, to create themselves]. Also in the heritage cultures, the women related evidence of otherness from this social-culture. As Yasmine said she could not really have a conversation with her cousins because they were so caught up in their own imagined reality of multiple perspectives – the grass is greener cliché.

Otherness in France

Benraouane (1998) noted that although the revolution of 1789 was to create a culturally homogeneous nation that superseded regional and linguistic particularism [there was still] the emergence of a new ethnic minority in France [that was characterized as] the ‘Other.’ Lost between two cultures and rejected by two civilizations, the host culture and the culture of origin, which was the “typical second generation North African”, experience (p. 8). Maillard (2005) related that only 4 percent of the children of
immigrants get to university, compared with 25 percent of their native contemporaries. The notion of individual equality in the French Republic does not recognize ethnic minorities, which makes it difficult to help them when they are not seen as different from other French under the law. However, the bigotry and discrimination against ethnic minorities exists. Despite their experiences with incidents that made them feel discriminated against as individuals and less equal as French citizens, they counted themselves “lucky.”

“I have this Morocco in my mind, you know, I have money, I go to the beach, I have fun with my cousins and family, but I don’t see that [real] Morocco. Maybe I should see it and then I’ll think about how lucky I am, because I am lucky to be in France. I have opportunities I wouldn’t have if I were in Morocco, but sometimes I don’t really realize it, even if I sometimes feel prejudices, and I don’t really know who I am or where I belong, but I’m lucky to be here. So even if I’m, you know, always complaining, and, maybe, even if you have so many immigrants complaining about France, about the way we are prejudiced. We’re lucky, I think, but I wouldn’t say that I am the luckiest. Yeah, I don’t feel like I’m sacrificing; it’s the way I’ve been raised, the way my father told me that you’re lucky because you’re in France.” (Yasmine).

They appreciated France for the opportunities to have an education that their parents had never had, but they did not see themselves as only a hybrid mix of cultural values as their only option. They saw themselves as something more than that, something they expressed as “another view”. This other view was something beyond being a hybrid mix lifestyle or view. Although French society saw them as immigrants coming from an inferior culture than French culture, they discounted this view as being narrow-minded
and thought they were more open-minded than most French people were. In describing themselves as having more, as having another view, I think that what they were trying to express was the formulation of a cosmopolitan worldview perspective.

**Cosmopolitanism - “Another View” Outside the Clichés**

Cosmopolitanism, in the lives of these nine women constitutes “another view.” Although most of the participants said they were French first when asked about where they belonged, they stressed how they were more open to learning from others and that they had a broader understanding when considering their worldview because of having additional cultural perspectives. It was only when travelling outside of France that others viewed them as French first. Yesinia found this when she spent a year in England to do her internship. She was pleasantly surprised that she did not have to justify herself as French or explain her origins.

“I was surprised to see that the head-teacher did not ask me about my origins as soon as she saw me. My pupils had the same reaction as the head-teacher. For the first time I could speak about my origins without having the impression of justifying myself.” (Yesinia).

Lizette had a similar experience when travelling outside of France. She had been an au pair in the U.S. Her impression was that her origins had not been an issue, whether she was French or Algerian, that people just accepted her as French.

“For example, when I came to the U.S. I didn’t really feel like a stranger. I was very welcome by everyone, even when I was telling them that I was from an Algerian culture too, they wouldn’t care at all. They were open-minded.” (Lizette).
Even the negative remarks aimed at them in the heritage countries had derogatorily referred to them as French. However, in France as much as they related how they were the same as all the other French students, they still experienced a much narrower viewpoint when they saw themselves reflected in the eyes of French society as a foreigner or as an immigrant.

“Most of my teachers and classmates saw me as a foreigner and not as a French girl with foreign origins. Consequently, I had to work harder to prove that I could be as good as any other French student. I felt I had to justify why I was there.” (Yesinia).

“I’ve been raised in that suburb...my ‘cité’ where we are all immigrants so you can’t really find prejudice. It’s when I came here (university) really that I found those really weird gazes, you know, they don’t understand your culture, they say who are you? Where are you from? And, I’ve never really given that importance. It was never really a big matter for me.” (Yasmine).

They attributed this attitude to the notion that the French were culturally narrow-minded or always having to categorize people. As Lizette said,

“French are putting people in cases, categorizing people into classifications according to what they look like, or how they talk, or what they wear – always putting people into categories.” “In France we are very rejective (sic). If you speak perfect French then I think it’s ok for you, but if you have like a big accent or make a lot of grammar mistakes it’s bad. Then I think it’s harder for you, because then French people who are kind of racist would say ‘Oh, you’re not French’” (Lizette).

Or as Yesinia said,
“I was born here, but for most people here, I am Moroccan before being French. I think that French people have difficulties with accepting cultural differences. After the riots in the suburbs in 2005, I read lots of articles concerning immigrants’ integration in France. Most of the articles underlined the fact that French people do not know how to integrate immigrants” (Yesinia).

One important factor stood out in the analysis. The women thought they had more to offer because they had more than one cultural viewpoint or perspective. Instead of being lost, they found that their other viewpoint gave them a broader perspective worldview! They tended to be open to the ideas and conduct of other people. They saw themselves as having more tolerance than the narrow-minded provincialisms of the French and of the origins culture as well. The participants’ views did not fit exclusively into one category or another, resulted in some overlap. Cosmopolitanism as an analogy is what I aimed to indicate was the fundamental equality they felt was missing from the French and heritage origins attitude. Therefore, they developed cosmopolitanism in their perspective of “another view.” The other view that participants spoke of aligned with a cosmopolitan view. Lizette, for example, stated, “I think it’s good for me to have like another view of another culture because I feel more open minded” (Lizette).

Yesinia also illustrates this attitude,

“I like differences. I like differences in people. I like exchanging with people who have different ideas, views and backgrounds. I like learning from the others’ experiences and sharing with them mine” (Yesinia).

Their view seemed to be more accepting than either of the other two cultures, and instead of being marginalized by the rejection from both of these cultures; they chose to
reconstruct another place, not just between them, but above or around them. In this way, they could avoid the negative aspects of the narrow-mindedness in the othering, and choose to identify with the more positive aspects of both these cultures. By adjusting their own attitudes, they chose to broaden their own perspective. By ignoring the negative stereotypes, they developed their own vision and reconstructed their own self-identity sustained by another view. Rather than limiting their sense of self as dictated by the others' narrow-mindedness and intolerance, they chose to be more tolerant. Consequently, they were able to expand their capacity of accepting difference rather than shutting it out, as exemplified by their comments:

“I don’t want to disturb my mind with things like, ‘Oh you were born in those places, or your parents are not from here, etc. The culture of my parents it is my origin, but the origin is different from what I am’” (Alia).

“There has certainly been an evolution in the way I see myself. I just think that mentalities are evolving very slowly, the generation that follows me is still confronted” (Yesinia).

“I prefer to say that there are different versions of French people and that now I am part of them” (Yasmine).

“It’s good to know about other ideas and others’ beliefs for another perspective...I have changed my perspective completely” (Assirem).

Whether or not the participants were consciously naming their other view as cosmopolitanism, it seems implied in their ideas and voiced in their expressions. Articulated in this other view or perspective is an impression that they think is in terms other than those of geographical boundaries and nation-states and cultural exclusiveness.
among differing social groups. When participants pointed to the history of France and
Europe as intermixed historical migration and ancient trade routes, they were indirectly
acknowledging cosmopolitanism as the logical results of the on-going diasporas of the
human populations.

Identity Implications

In parallel with the philosophical ideologies of multicultural or cosmopolitan
education, they emphasized the importance of educating younger generations in an effort
to develop open minds. If students were taught how people have intermixed and
coexisted throughout the centuries, even among those with different cultural and religious
beliefs within a national setting, they would understand how cultural codes are generated
and become traditions, which can then lead to intolerance.

“We have to explain to younger people that it is not only a problem of the others. It is
everywhere, it is society, it is life. It is not a paradise in our community. It is not that
everything is white or black. It is not Europe in question; it is something that you can
find everywhere. Ok, our parents didn’t go very far to school, so there was a lack of
culture and connaissance [knowledge] and a lack of open mindedness. Because the
open mind, it’s not something that you have, you have to learn it. If you don’t tell
people they’re not going to look and they will just stay in their way. I believe it’s
more important for people not to exclude themselves and to understand that all the
world and all those countries has [sic] been centuries of immigration coming and
going and so we are all foreigners. It’s just to make people realize that they make a
sort of code, a sort of standards of where we come from. If we don’t show or teach
them how to look around and to open their mind to see how it’s changed, adapted –
something wrong today can be right tomorrow, and so don’t be attached to those symbols and not be narrow-minded” (Alia).

Perhaps they did not intentionally advocate a cosmopolitan worldview, but their ideas are not without some parallels to that of the philosophy of cosmopolitanism. Pointing to the similarities of people everywhere, they talked about how missing their families and only keeping in touch during the holidays and on special occasions like births, weddings and funerals was a commonality in our modern experience. They emphasized the universal human condition of people rather than their divisions. Not from an imperialist, ethnocentric, universalism of civilizing cultural superiority, but a cosmopolitan universalism of mutual experience and democratic interest of human rights or social justice. Alia held a clearly modern cosmopolitan worldview. When she spoke about how immigrant families, French families or any nationality or ethnicity of families living far from each other, or in the same country, today did not have enough time, or did not make the effort to keep in touch with each other over the distances. She alluded to this universal experience of modern existence to point out that it was not just immigrants who were nostalgic for a mythic loss of homeland. As an example, she indicated her French husband, whose family lived in the same country, and did not get to see each other except on special occasions and holidays. She pointed out that someone living in the U.S. has a similar experience when it comes to keeping in touch with family, whether living in the same city or living at opposite ends of such a large country. Alia explained that it was not just an “immigrant experience,” it was a universal experience!

“I hate the idea of immigration, of second generation, or why people have to live so far from their family and then I say ok, look, it’s not only you as the daughter of
immigrants, it’s everyone, so it’s not a question of immigration. People whether living in France or in the U.S., which is a big country, cannot see their family all the time so it is the same. My husband doesn’t see his family perhaps twice or three times a year and he lives in the same country. Or my cousin who is only living in another city from my grandfather can go and see him, but doesn’t see him more than me or phone or write” (Alia).

These women spoke about having to leave France in order to feel themselves accepted as French. They may feel excluded from the French society, but they do not exclude themselves. They may feel othered by the cultural heritage origins, but they do not long to go back to that either. Evidence of hybridity was noted in being displaced between the two cultures of France and origins, but they did not focus on that aspect of their experience. They rather chose to concentrate on their broader view, a view I term cosmopolitan.

Hybridity is useful as a description of two overlapping cultures, and may even lend some of its biological connotations, but it is still a limited view, which does not allow for a fluid transpersonal possibility of changing cultural identity options for the individual to reconstruct a new all-inclusive meaning. Rather, it defines an individual as a product of two separate cultures, or as marginalized in being rejected by or rejecting both cultures and therefore lost psychologically without a safe harbour of certain cultural identity. At certain times, this may have been so for some of the participants in this study, but it is still too restrictive to permit a flowing view for identity construction. Even if these new constructions are only self-protection mechanism, such as in psychoanalytic theory, an unconscious mental process that makes possible compromise solutions to personal
problems or conflicts. Or as Lacan (1998) thought that, because separation and lack lead to desire, the unconscious is primarily governed by “the desire of the Other” (the “Other” being the social world around us as) (Richmond, 2002). It acts against the negative stereotypes of teachers’ self-fulfilling prophesies about immigrant children’s abilities, it does not invalidate them. As a means of defence, it provides a psychological space in which to constantly reassess one’s own schema. And in this manner, a healthy self maintenance of well-being will most importantly lead to more optimism overall reciprocating higher self-worth or confidence and positive self-fulfilling prophesies.

Likewise, in a sense of being neither here nor there, as discussed earlier, some of the women also related instances of being treated as “French” in the heritage country. Yasmine tried to describe it:

“I wondered if I got a job there, to go back to Morocco, if I could spend my life and I don’t think so. It would be really hard to integrate. There are many things that bother me there too. Sometimes their jealous because you’re in France, they consider you..., and you can never have a real conversation because there is always this...ah you live there, you know...” (Yasmine).

These women seemed to emit a sense of sadness and guilt in expressing how they felt--guilt from the mixed feelings surrounding all of the stories and the nostalgia that becomes part of the myth of the family – extended family, and the homeland. As well as the mixed emotions of loyalties in feeling more at home in France even if it is not always perfect. Simultaneously, feeling the connection and the separation both in France and the heritage culture from the people and the land, despite having such close ties. Alia tried to describe it,
“I have changed. You understand? And sometimes it is really complex because sometimes I feel very...because if I weren’t living here, if I wasn’t born here, if I wasn’t attached to France, I wouldn’t live so far from my big family. And I would have an ordinary relation with my family and with my grandfathers. It is really a black point in my life. I’m very happy to have spent five years there for my studies, but sometimes I hate this too because it makes me know more about my family, more about this country [Tunisia]. And now I feel something about these people. I feel love, I feel angry, I feel proud” (Alia).

The hybridity and transcultural nature of their identity may have distanced them somewhat, and it may have carried a little sense of sadness, too, because of the complex emotional connections they held for both countries and the people, but they did not necessarily feel that they would or even could go back to live in the heritage country. Their hybridized-sociocultural kinships sometimes created emotional conflict for them. Perhaps a sense of guilt arose from the attachment they felt for France and a certain unexpressed disdain they had for some of the heritage cultural way of life. The guilt from feeling that attachment and attraction for a place or culture that they knew did not treat them as equals but as inferior, but in spite of this they still saw themselves as better off or “lucky” to be in France with so much more to offer as Yasmine said,

“Even if I’m, you know, always complaining...so many immigrants complaining about France about the way we are prejudiced, we’re lucky, I think. I mean, I’d say I am lucky when I compare myself to my cousin or my family...it’s so much easier in France in comparison with my cousin.” (Yasmine).
The sadness may come from a universal existentialism of the human condition in feeling the passage of time and the sense of loss in time and place that loomed over the births and deaths of loved ones and friends and connections. This may also contribute to the description of “having another view” a broader, less narrow view of the world. These beliefs, in the end were what gave them the feeling of being above the petty provincialisms of both their French and heritage cultures. This idea of having “another view” was what appeared to be a cosmopolitan perspective and gave them a way to cope with the prejudices they experienced in the stereotype clichés that some teachers and French people held in the society.

Similar to this idea of the participants rejecting to perform the stereotypes and instead choosing “another view,” Appiah (2001) states that each person's identity has at least two dimensions: a collective dimension and a personal dimension. Elaborating on the collective dimensions, he explains it as kinds of persons: men, gays, Americans, Catholics, butlers, hairdressers, and philosophers. These "kinds of persons" develop by the creation of our names for them, so "numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being with our categories labeling them" (Hacking, 1982). This is what sociologists call labeling theory. Explaining further about the “kinds of persons,” Appiah (2001) states that certain conventional expectations that govern a role are based on acting as a role exemplifies, which means constructing the performance. But for some identities, or roles, you can choose whether or not to play a certain conventional set of behaviors for these identities, or you can choose whether or not to adopt the identity. This seems to reflect Bourdieu’s (1977) notions of how habitus, and doxa, or orthodoxy that is acting in
accord with social convention are sometimes opposed “\textit{hairesis hairesis}, heresy – made possible by the existence of competing [possibilities]” (p. 169).

In developing a cosmopolitan view as a collective dimension of their identity then these participants could see themselves as a “kind of person” that they wanted or chose to be, rather than a rejected or restricted “kind of person” dictated by the negative stereotypes of two opposing cultural worldviews. The fact of having to go outside of France to experience acceptance of being French, as some of the participants expressed, may have contributed to the recognition of a broader vision possible than simply being one or the other or even the hybrid mix of only two cultural choices. Perhaps defending their own psychological well-being led them to a place where they could empathize with others and cultivate a generosity of acceptance for others. Maybe this was evidence of what psychologists call a self-protect mechanism, which they see as an emotional response to self-protect one’s world self-esteem.

Likewise, Rosello (2005) used the notion of “performativencounters” to understand the contemporary position of the Maghreb. She reported that a type of multicultural bilingual code switching has become a way of expression for a new generation of North African authors. Her points reflect similar remarks that Alia and Yasmine made speaking about a mixing of sociocultural traditions. Alia had said that the Parisian immigrant communities isolated themselves to an extent by adhering to an even stricter code created from a “mixing” of traditions from all of the differing Maghrebin and Arab or Muslim cultures. Not understanding where these traditions originated, she believes that teaching immigrants about their own histories, along with French histories, will help to broaden the younger generation’s views and to open their minds. In this way they will come to
understand and to recognize how things change and adapt over time. Explaining further, she feels that it is important for both young immigrant origins people living in Parisian suburbs and young French people to be taught how to turn narrow-mindedness into a broader perspective and to understand how all peoples are intermixed genetically, historically and culturally. Alia said,

“I knew more things about my history because I was there. I know the other side – the other view about colonialism and other things. I’m not lost and I can react when I hear something. I know more than you [French] and more than the young people who are also immigrants, but only live here and have a sort of truncated story because no one gives us the answers to the questions that they didn’t [even know to] ask” (Alia).

Alia’s cosmopolitan perspective was not simply a by-product of hybridized cultural identities because she mentioned this about the immigrants living in Paris:

“They make here a sort of code, sort of standards. Yes, Maghrebin code because they apply the code of Moroccan the Algerian and Arab; they make a melting. It is not tradition. It is really the code of the French community, the French Arabic community. They adopted some things coming from Morocco and they adopted things coming from Arab. The young people who are living in this group don’t know that, in fact, they have created their own code, which is completely different because it’s this improper code. They don’t see how it’s changed. They don’t see how it has adapted. They cannot understand that it’s coming from a special evolution in the French society and it’s not the same in the country where your parents come. So don’t be attached to those symbols. If we don’t teach them how to look around and to open their mind to something else [they will not know]” (Alia).
Educational Influences

First and most importantly, was their own volonté (will), which they attributed the most influential cause of their academic success. Second, participants counted the influence of their parents as an essential factor contributing to their school success during which, parents had supported them economically, and had encouraged them emotionally to do their best in school. Third, they valued the influence that came from outside their immediate family – teachers, relatives, and neighbors who helped by encouraging them and helping with their homework. Only two of the participants attributed their parents’ religious beliefs as a factor for their academic success. In spite of the negative remarks by some teachers to parents and students about how immigrant children could not be expected to do well in school, their parents’ stories and hard work gave them the moral support to positively influence their self-esteem. As Yasmine said, “their dream or wish was for their children to have long studies.” “Long studies” meant going to school. It meant going on to study at a university. Since most of the participants’ parents had not been to school for more than a few years, if any, “long studies” became a way to express the hopes and dreams that parents had for their children to be successful.

Educational Influences: Volonté, Parents, Teachers, Relatives, Neighbors

Although prejudice, whether clearly expressed and readily observable, or indirectly expressed yet implied, was inherent in the nature of their social milieu while growing up in France, these women had an adaptability of mind and character that buoyed them. Bearing in mind Yesinia’s remark that she had always had the impression that she had to work harder in school strikes me as this sense of how resilient the women in this study
had to be. Naming their own will as the motivation for their academic success helps to account for this resiliency:

“I have the most influence on my own educational experience. I choose” (Leena).

“I think what’s had the most influence on me is me” (Lizette).

“My personality. It was me...I have made my own choices” (Sana).

“Me personally, I defined my achievement, thanks to my will” (Assirem).

Resiliency is what provides an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. The resiliency or determination in their own nature helped them to keep going time after time. Yesinia exemplifies this sense:

“I have failed many times and although failures are hard to accept, one day you learn from them.” “I went on working hard, but I was doing so for myself and not to prove anything.” “Now” as she says, “if I work harder it is only because I want to do my best” (Yesinia).

At the time that these students are referring to the schools, per se, did little, if anything, to provide institutional support systems to second and third generation students and parents with lower-economic status. These students’ academic success was due to a certain resiliency, either innate or learned that they called volonté. It afforded them the most influence on motivating them to work hard despite problems.

It did help to have the kindness of others’ efforts like teachers who offered academic support. And many would argue that this is what teachers do as a profession, but it was more the emotional affect of caring support and encouragement that came from kind teachers that motivated their own will to continue working harder. Relatives and neighbors were sought too, whenever needed, but many of these women first stressed that
it was how hard they themselves had worked and studied that had been the most influence on their school success.

Currently, educational wide efforts have begun to offer more equal access and support for minority students. Instituting “positive discrimination” policies, vocational training, other career option changes and specific academic assistance are some of the ways in which the French are attempting to address some of these social and economic problems. Certainly, without better support systems to help transition them into the job market and French society, many minority students will face the experience of what Portes and Rumbaut (2001, p. 59) called “downward assimilation” and lead to further social unrest.

In summary, although many interdisciplinary research works are available on the philosophical and psychological subjective experience of different forms of consciousness in consideration of volonté – will or volition, inherent as locus of control – the cognitive process by which an individual decides on and commits to a particular course of action, (Lefcourt, 1982; Seeman & Evans, 1962) the question of how it arose from these women’s different experience of self to account for their success is reflected in their narratives.

Notions of “Luck”

Bourdieu (1977) wrote about the relationship between ‘subjective hopes and ‘objective chances’. He characterized this as “an adjustment between the individual’s hopes, aspirations, goals and expectations, on the one hand, and the objective situation in which they find themselves by virtue of their place in the social order, on the other.”
Maghrebin parents may have been stereotyped as North African immigrant working-class, with little, if any, formal education. However, according to Bourdieu’s (2001) own ideas that the prospects of possibilities supplied them, for the first time perhaps, such as the sense that moving to France with all of its possible opportunities gave them, was a real sense of breaking out of that *habitus* of what he characterizes as a predictable future of low social status and poverty. Opportunities to move out of a certain social class and poverty that would have been impossible in the countries of origins, in France became a real possibility for these women’s parents and grandparents. If not for themselves directly, it was an imaginable goal to conceive an alternative future for their children. Bourdieu’s model of the relationship between ‘subjective expectations and ‘objective probabilities’ represent this *habitus* transition or, as he expressed it:

“The dispositions of *habitus* (themselves adjusted, most of the time, to agents’ positions) expectations tend universally to be roughly adapted to the objective chances... [that is an individual’s] subjective hope tends to be adjusted to the objective probability [that] governs the propensity to invest (money, work, time, emotion, etc.) in the various fields. So it is that the propensity of families and children to invest in education (which is itself one of the major factors of educational success) depends on the degree to which they depend on the educational system for the reproduction of their capital and their social position, and on the chances of success for these investments in view of the volume of the cultural capital they possess – these two factors combining to determine the considerable differences in attitudes towards schooling and in success at school. One is always surprised to see how much
people’s *wills* adjust to their possibilities, their desires to the capacity to satisfy them” (p. 216).

Alba and Silberman (2002) noted that until the late 1970s, about three-quarters of Maghrebin second-generation students “grew up in families where neither parent had earned any sort of diploma.” This was the case for many of the participants in this study, since the women related how their parents had not had the opportunity to formally attend school beyond more than a few years. The exceptions were Leena (third generation) and Lizette (second generation of interethnic marriage - French mother), who both had parents with French *baccalauréat* or French university degrees. Many parents and grandparents had been farmers in the heritage countries and had not been able to go to school (especially women), so education was highly valued. It had been a major theme in the family stories, and carried the weight of these missed privileges, which impressed these young women to appreciate fully this opportunity in France. In some cases, missed educational opportunities may have even been a factor to drive a young woman in making right an old wrong caused from historical patriarchal gender inequalities of her family. Yesinia, for example, may have consciously or subconsciously been compelled to right the injustice she felt was committed against her mother by her grandfather. She may have felt it was not only a way to right the injustice, but to honor her mother’s dream of going to school by successfully doing so herself. Yesinia may have felt that to waste such seemingly unlimited educational opportunities available to her would be unforgivable.

Parents’ stories instilled a high value for education in their children. Parents impressed upon these women to count themselves “*lucky*” (for which they did) to have so
many opportunities growing up in France. Yesinia said, “I was lucky to be encouraged by my family every time I wanted to achieve something.” Malena said, “I was lucky that my parents found good jobs which permitted me to study, have good values, social values, we learned to integrate easily.” Yasmine said “I am lucky to be in France, I have opportunities I wouldn’t have if I were in Morocco. I’m lucky to be here. We’re lucky [immigrants], I think. I’d say I am lucky when I compare myself to my cousin.”

As an investment in their children’s futures, fathers, who could, moved their families away from the isolated immigrant neighborhoods and attempted to integrate into French society. Fathers and mothers sacrificed and worked hard to help their children have “long studies.” They helped when they could with schoolwork, paid for expensive private tutoring lessons and encouraged their children to go for it and take advantage of every opportunity to continue their education. In spite of parents being repeatedly told by teachers or the schools that their immigrant children couldn’t succeed they continued to support and encourage them “to have long studies, to be a teacher, or a doctor …what all parents want [for] their children to be.” (Yasmine).

The fact that most of their parents did not have opportunities to go to school gave the participants a deep sense of appreciation and love for all their parents’ efforts. They knew the stories of hardships experienced by their parents, and they knew that parents worked very hard and sacrificed to pay for private tutoring lessons so that their daughters would have a chance to attend university, even though it would have been less of an economic burden to have her get married.

Fathers were credited with doing whatever they could to ensure that they got their children out of the ghettos, where they would have a much harder time to assimilate into
French society, and to do well in school. They moved their families to a “nicer place to live” in order to help their children live in better neighbourhoods with better schools. In a sense, those fathers who moved their families to better neighborhoods ruptured the status quo and tried to established a new *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) for their children in France. Fathers were considered more influential than mothers were in the participants’ education. Fathers, described as strict, took an active role in their children’s education by encouraging them and helping with homework when they could. Mothers were more likely to be termed as “illiterate.” “Illiterate” defines someone not able to read or write in any language, as though they were completely without means to communicate with the textual world or to have valuable cognitive knowledge. However, we “read” the sociocultural world with all of our senses. Multiple ways of knowing and multiple textual layers are available to our senses both visually and in social behavioural cues or codes.

Although some of the women did relate that their parents were not able to help them with their homework because they had not gone to school, or had only gone to high school, parents still encouraged them to study and work hard in school in order to succeed, and to go as far as they could in their studies.

“My parents can help us when we were at the first year, but when we are at college they cannot because they didn’t go so high in school, so a lot of the time I worked alone, sometimes very, very late.” (Alia).

“When I was young my parents can help me in mathematics or French, but my parents stopped their schools at BAC, now if I have difficulties, I have to find my own way.” (Leena).
In spite of having to overcome more social obstacles such as socioeconomic and cultural discrimination, racism, prejudice, stereotypes, and in some cases linguistic difficulties, or overcoming through hard work, acculturation, kindness and luck to reach their academic goals, these participants did succeed in rupturing that *habitus* to have long *studies* at school, continuing on to obtain Master’s and Doctorate degrees.

Participants mentioned how teachers, relatives and even neighbors had been an influence as well. Many said that a teacher’s encouragement had meant so much to them, enough to make them believe in themselves and therefore to continue their efforts. Kindly teachers who were gentle and took extra time working with them privately not only helped them excel but also made all the difference in their attitudes:

“I was six years old when I started first grade. They put me in a regular class where everybody spoke French, but I didn’t speak French. I had a kind, young teacher who particularly took the time to help me do as well as the others. I also had an uncle at home who helped me. He said that I had to work harder because I had to catch up with the others.” (Rafa).

“I also had teachers who helped me quite a lot too. I had good contact with them. They taught me their knowledge and they taught me how to love school.” (Malena).

“I remember one of my professors in history, who each time I succeed in something, writing a paragraph telling me it’s good and how it’s important to continue this way, all right, it’s ok, bravo, you did good and continue this way. I did have those paragraphs telling me you have to continue. I was very proud.” (Alia).
They noted the opposite experiences from teachers as well. Teachers who publicly made them feel inferior or foreign in front of the whole class, and how embarrassed they felt. As Yesinia related,

“I often had the feeling that I had to work harder than the others to prove that I deserved learning. I had that feeling because most of my teachers and classmates saw me as a foreigner and not as a French girl with foreign origins. Consequently, I had to work harder to prove that I could be as good as any other French student. I felt I had to justify why I was there.” (Yesinia).

Even kindly neighbors helped with their homework when parents could no longer help:

“Sometimes when it was very, very difficult I ask my neighbors. There was an older woman who I go [sic] and ask her if she can help me. If I have some difficulties in dictation or it was in math, I went to the neighbors.” (Alia).

These experiences, both positive and negative, influenced their academic success and were part of the ongoing process of inner-dialogue that shaped their concept of self-identity, making the appropriate adjustments, internally, to fit the equation of who or how they saw themselves.

In their view, education was an avenue for their socioeconomic gain. It was a way for them to improve their situation regarding social status, thus gaining social and economic capital. For some, it was also a means to claim a larger social space extending beyond the historical patriarchal system of gender constraints of cultural origins. And, for them the old stereotype in French society about the girls either doing well in school, or they get married off was not the complete view. Some participants related that indeed some young
women did want to get married and considered it social advancement, but that was true for any culture. It was not that they themselves did not wish to marry and raise a family someday, but they held a mature practical attitude towards it. They were sophisticated enough to realize, as several stated, that it was much easier to start with a firm economic base on which to raise a family. Therefore, if you had a better life then you were happier and a way to achieve this was with a good education that provided access to a professional job that you liked and rewarded you with personal satisfaction and social and economic capital. They were not being materialistic; they were simply being practical.

Sociocultural and Political Perspectives

In Nanterre, just outside of Paris, is the Parc André Malraux [André Malraux Park]. The park is situated near the Tours Aillaud (also known as Tours Nuages), a housing project built in 1977 at the outskirts of La Défense business district. As part of a renovation project the Esplanade Charles de Gaulle, is an open area that connects the Nanterre business district with access through to the park. Situated along the esplanade, are a number of large glass cubes inscribed with famous quotes by Charles de Gaulle. (See Figure 3 - Esplanade Charles de Gaulle).

One of the inscriptions is from a December 31, 1967, televised traditional New Year’s address to wish the French people a happy new year for 1968. In that speech, he said: *Quand la France réussit, tous ses enfants voient grandir leurs chances…Charles de Gaulle*. [When France succeeds, all her children see their chances/opportunities increase/grow…]
Charles de Gaulle made this speech on New Year’s eve of 1967. Who could imagine then, the coming events that would unfold in Paris, France and around the world of that New Year in May of 1968? In May of 1968, Paris witnessed massive demonstrations between the police and students and motivated workers to a general strike that would cripple the French government to the point of near collapse. Around the world, 1968 would see clashes erupting between police and students in other countries as well and lead to some lasting political changes (Feenberg, 2001). However, still in 2009 minority students experience the lingering residue of colonial elitism and pervasive ethnocentric imperial culturalism of some French cultural attitudes that have not changed. These attitudes in French society would leave a lasting impression on the lives of some of these women in this study, by creating a seemingly defensive sensibility toward the outside society that would only strengthen their inner personal will. As though always trying to somehow justify oneself as being good enough when reflected in the eyes of the other and maybe never feeling fully accepted as French despite having been born there and raised there. Yesinia said it:
“I often had (and still have sometimes) the feeling that I had to work harder than the others to prove that I deserved learning… I had that feeling because most of my teachers and classmates saw me as a foreigner and not as a French girl with foreign origins” (Yesinia).

In contrast, two of the women spoke about their experiences in the UK and the US, about how they did not feel different or unacceptable about themselves as French or North-African heritage when reflected in the eyes of these cultures. Of course, this does not imply that the U.S. or the UK are not without their own ethnocentric prejudices. Still, it is interesting that the women felt this acceptance of themselves as French while outside of France. Lizette offered an explanation. She said, “French are putting people in cases, categorizing according to what they look like, or how they talk, what they wear. Like the hijab.” Yesinia agreed based on her experiences in Britain, as she said, they “did not ask me about my origins as soon as [they] saw me.”

The women addressed some of the issues of the immigrants’ situation in French society, and offered some of their views from both perspectives of the problems. They spoke about language, culture, education, employment, politics, discrimination and integration. From their perspective of having Maghrebin-Berber heritage, and not Muslim or Arab, they understood how immigrants resented that French people saw only Muslim or Arab or worse terrorist religious fanatics. They wanted the French to appreciate the differences between North Africans and Arabs or Muslims. Most of the participants agreed, in theory, with Lisette who said that the French “tend to put people into categories.” Participants were tired of the stereotypes that lumped them all into Arabs. It also bothered them that many young people of immigrant origins themselves
did not know their cultural history. Alia and Assirem both commented on this lack of knowledge and understanding stating that many young, North African-French people did not know that Christians and Jews had been, and were still living among Muslims in North Africa for centuries. As several of the women pointed out, if the history of France and the Mediterranean area were examined it would reveal a region full of immigrants that had been cross-culturally hybridizing as part of migrations, trade routes and invasions for over millennia. Several of the participants thought it was important to teach young people about these historical facts. They believed that it would help to combat racism, discrimination and stereotypes based on religious and national myths.

Feldblum (2001) explained how the French republican view of citizenship only seems to “promote equality.” He warned that this model actually institutionalizes discrimination by refusing to recognize ethnic minorities or the unequal treatment of immigrants. He further stated that the dominant cultural values are only paraded as the popular will of the nation. The French argue that the “Anglo-Saxon model” of multiculturalism really creates social separation and minority group ghettoization. Ironically, it seems that France has created this very situation by constructing massive, low-income, housing projects meant to warehouse all of the “temporary” workers that came to France. Now, these “banlieues” or “cités” have become islands of large immigrant populations living in a near separate ghettoized city-state. Hence, the “societal disintegration and ghettoization of minority groups” reflects the reality of most large immigrant neighborhoods in French cities. Tribalat (1995) reported that second generation Maghrebin students suffered “from an unusually high level of social problems, such as early school dropout, unemployment, and deviance.” When some of the women spoke about how their fathers had made sure
to move the family to “nicer areas,” it was from this immigrant isolation that they were trying to get away. Rafa was one among many of the participants who expressed that she was lucky to have a father who had wanted the children to have a real chance to study, so he moved the family. Rafa said, “I was lucky to live where I could study. My father really wanted us to study so we lived in a place that wasn’t in the cités.” However, they did want to keep some of the culture alive in the children, and at the same time they also had to mix it up with the others, Rafa said. Of course, it helped to have a job.

However, Yasmine lived in one of these cités or banlieues. She spoke eloquently about the sociopolitical atmosphere in France and her analysis was critical. “I don’t like telling people that I’m from Mant La Jolie because it’s the suburb and it’s [in]famous for being dangerous. I’m not living in a ghetto. I mean it’s not that dangerous, it’s normal, I’m normal, you know, so sometimes they [other French students] have questions that make me feel uncomfortable. When things happen you have all the media who come with the news and you have those kinds of clichés.”

Sociocultural/Political Implications

Islamophobia among French or Western civilization is evidenced by the tendency to equate Muslims and Islam with terrorists. Participants felt that the portrayal of immigrants by the media exacerbates these stereotypes that equate Muslims with Islamic terrorists which threatens National security. The women did feel that the immigrants themselves add to this image by the violence and by the lack of effort on their part to integrate into the French society. The riots, of course, gained international attention and the images of the North African spectators overrunning the field during the October 2001 soccer game between the Algerian and the French national teams add to these iconic
images that justify the beliefs of some French people about immigrants being unwilling to integrate into their society. Yasmine thought the riots and violence had not been the solution, but had only made things worse. She said, “It drives people…journalists talk about you…it’s just the image they were given, ‘Oh, look at them they are burning their cars! Always those immigrants are creating trouble.”

The women did not seem to resent the fact that they or their parents had assimilated into French society. In fact, they expressed a profound gratitude toward their parents’ efforts and struggle to integrate into French society. However, what they did resent was a sense of resistance that they felt was from French people in society. They expressed this as a coldness or refusal to recognize any differences beyond Arab – and therefore Muslim. This “sense” evokes myriad factors, such as a substratum image of French national and colonial history. Alia and Assirem, as well as other participants, mentioned that if the history was examined, France would be discovered as a country full of immigrants. This is confirmed by the fact that “France was the first country of Europe to become a country of immigration, which was initiated in the 1880s by immigration from central Europe and from the border states of Belgium and Italy” (Noiriel, 1988).

The women thought for the most part that “discrimination positive” (the French version of affirmative action) programs were good. For example some of the Grandes Ecoles such as HEC Paris and Sciences Politiques, have begun to open their once-elitist doors by “favouring the recruitment of more ethnic minority students from deprived areas in an effort to diversify its student population in these historically exclusive institutions. The École des Hautes Études Commerciales de Paris (HEC Paris) is a top ranked business school located near Paris, and one of the most prestigious French Grandes
Écoles. The grandes écoles ("graduate schools", literally in French "grand schools" or "elite schools") of France are higher education institutions. Unlike French public universities, which have an obligation to accept all candidates of the same region who hold a baccalauréat, the selection criteria of grandes écoles is determined by extremely competitive written and oral exams. Only a few hundred students are admitted each year in these exclusive schools. Traditionally, they have produced most of France's high-ranking civil servants, politicians and executives as well as many scientists and philosophers.

Social Markers

The international media helped to make the hijab an iconic image characterizing Islamic fundamentalist values. Although French secularism is the basis of arguments used, the schools were used as a national tool in order to institute the sociopolitical will. Bloul (1994) believed that what the French were really protesting was an ethnic marker in republican institutional space. If your address is in certain parts of Paris, such as in the suburban departments of Hauts-de-Seine or Seine-Saint Denis where some of the largest immigrant banlieues exist it marks you as probably of Maghrebin origin. More likely, it marks you as “Nine-three doomed.”

Alba and Silberman (2002) studied government documents that measured such criteria as school, marriage, and birth records, looking for social markers, found for example, that an individual having two parents without any diploma could be a certain social marker that would increase the likelihood of signalling that an individual was of Maghrebin origin. Although the French did not collect census data among French citizens based on the grounds of the Republican model, “French census takers used
names to separate Maghrebins from non-Maghrebins among French citizens” (Le Bras, 1998; Schnapper, 1992; Todd, 1994).

Social markers were a concern for participants like Leena who would have to take off the hijab before having her resume photo taken, because the business world “doesn’t want a Muslim with a hijab.” They would still have to consider their last name though, but as Alia decided, it would not matter to her in the long run because it would be her accomplishments that would be her worth, not her name. Even though Lisette was a second-generation offspring of a Maghrebin father and a French mother, she had a distinctive surname and thus remained recognizable to other French. She had seen other students in her classrooms experience prejudice from teachers, but she herself had not. She thought it was because she could speak French well, so the teacher liked her and did not pick on her. In France, the Republic declares that all French citizens are the same, but “equal is not the same” if your name is Mohammad and you have little formal education. Social stereotypes of North African girls viewed them as hopelessly under archaic patriarchs, and their only hope to escape being married off was to be academically successful. This view never considered that parents might aspire for their daughters to succeed as a way for them to escape poverty and a backward submissive position in a patriarchal sociocultural structure.

Recommendations

Bourdieu (1977) had characterized schools as places of social and cultural reproduction, explained through the habitus concept of subjective mental attitudes that individuals practice and continue to reproduce as they compete within a society to gain different forms of capital. Naves and Crowley (2003) characterized schools as “public
spaces where students, teachers and communities grapple with the complexity of broader social problems of inequality, social and racial discrimination and violence that is generated by and reproduced within its body.”

The women in this study thought that schools needed to do more to encourage immigrant students to participate in school by accepting differences and affirming the cultural diversity of French citizens. Their ideas reflect some of the goals of multicultural education programs. To offer assistance to immigrant families, multicultural education advocates involving all community members to work as a network to meet their needs with language and cultural differences. Offering free community classes operated by volunteers, such as the one that Yesinia worked with, to help tutor minority students who needed assistance with school. Multicultural education advocates school administrators and teachers reaching out to minority parents and immigrant communities to draw them into the school setting. They view these broad partnerships of parents, students, school administrators and community members as actively engaged healthy discourse in strategizing how to best pool and utilize various community resources in order to provide the necessary supports that address, not only the students’ academic needs, but also helping to meet some of the basic needs for all community members. Often, immigrant parents are excluded from the social networks that French parents take for granted when understanding how to support their children academically or interacting with the school system. From Ogbu’s (2003) assessment of how U.S. schools differ in better teachers and resources and children’s needs according to the income levels of the neighborhoods where they are located is supported by Yasmine’s experience:
“I really haven’t had the same opportunities, [it’s] only when I came here [university] that I know that there were schools like HEC (Hautes Etudes Commerciales), [the top business school in France] you know prestigious schools that I wasn’t really given the opportunity. I mean there’s really a difference if you are studying in a high school for instance in the 93 or in Paris and parts of Paris. There’s really a difference...you’re not given the same education. Teachers are not the same, so of course there’s an imbalance” (Yasmine).

Minority parents need to have access to the schools too and to feel welcomed in the school environment by school officials and teachers. Minority parents need to be valued for their input in supporting their children’s academic interests.

Education Policy Implications

Critical pedagogy can challenge the grand narratives of national myths by encouraging “dangerous discourses,” and acknowledge the current diverse cultural school populations (Bigler, 1999). One of the aims of narrative inquiry into the life stories of students is to further our understanding of the relationships between the personal and social dimensions of identity. My findings should have indirect implications for other organizations to design learning support programs, provide understanding of how to meet the needs of immigrant students learning and how to utilize methods of impacting students’ cultural perceptions to develop confident self-identities crucial to encouraging positive attitudes and producing successful self-fulfilling outcomes.

Factors that make student success complex include the attitudes of lower expectations from teachers towards minority students, inferior schools and family background of lack of education. Educational policies and practices can improve ways to help practitioners
relate to diversity issues in all types of schools, increase student academic achievement and develop intercultural communication skills (Banks, 2001).

Multicultural education challenges the sociopolitical context of educational policies and practices by promoting a more inclusive curriculum and *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Fox & Gay, 1995) as part of the schools’ responsibility to ensure social equality for all students (Wong & Grant, 2004; Fox & Gay, 1995). It seems that, even in France institutional biases of the dominant culture that are structured into the sociocultural environment of schools discriminate against the cultures, backgrounds, and communities of minority children in their education. In reference to these issues, Nieto (2003) criticized U.S. schools for failing to do more to promote the success of all students by affirming their diversity.

Using a combination of theories to address the complex interrelated sociocultural structures can help to explain how the differences between school culture and home culture institutionalizes the discrimination against minority students and can lead to their academic failure and socioeconomic disenfranchisement (Nieto, 2003).

Caring teachers make a significant difference in motivating students’ attitudes towards school. Previous researchers such as Nieto (2003), Noddings (1992) and Valenzuela (1999) have stressed that whether schools or teachers cared about students’ welfare and success was as significant as, if not more so than, the socioeconomic conditions in influencing student learning. I found this “ethic of care” makes a difference in how students experience school and thereby influences their attitudes and behaviors. As Flores-González (2002), concluded school climates can create “school kids” who feel connected with school and “street kids” who feel disconnected from school.
In this study, I have taken into account the cultural, social and political context of these women’s experiences as a way to help explain the complexity of their lives and the tendency of schools to act as agents of social and cultural reproduction for the dominant culture. By instituting unfair policies and practices regarding the cultural and language issues, schools affect minority students’ academic achievement. In doing so, they act as gatekeepers directly influencing the nature of the relationships among students, teachers, and the communities they serve, as well as the political relationship of particular groups to society and the schools. (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Language classes must target the needs of immigrant parents in order to communicate with French speakers, to understand the cultural norms in France, and to help them prepare to enter the job market. They could be offered workshops and interact with teachers, counselors, and administrators to become familiar with the aspects of the French school system. The availability of translators/interpreters is also vital to ensure that parents comprehend and are able to communicate with school personnel.

School administrators need to ensure that guidance counselors share pertinent information regarding filling out applications and forms for scholarships or loans. Also needed is the development of academic partnerships with high school administrators, teachers, students, and parents to identify any academic weaknesses and to improve instructional performances. Universities and high schools could ensure they welcome the concerns of and the needs of immigrants to help meet the resources that are available to them. Community leaders need to develop a partnership with the high schools and the universities to enhance recruitment, enrolment, and retention in higher education attainment for immigrant students.
Future Research

Some ideas for future research could focus on what, in the view of these students, are the challenges they face in attaining higher education.

1. Broaden the circle of interviews by including more women, talk to their relative and educators to more completely understand community dynamics.

2. Interview men of similar experiences to better understand distinctions based on gender in French, origins and cosmopolitan communities.

3. Interview younger students in secondary school level to look for emerging/changing views – patterns that would play out as you see here in this study.

4. Interview professionals/post-graduates to see how they succeed/progress after they get educational degrees.

Interviewing counselors may help to determine in their views these students need for motivation to complete a degree program and the challenges they face. Interviews with parents may determine what barriers they face to help the students succeed or how they themselves face barriers to the cultural factors that hinder effective communication between educators, parents and students.

Perhaps fully appreciating the value placed on attaining higher education as a means of becoming upwardly mobile. Focusing on why second and third generation males are not as successful academically in France would be an interesting study to present their concerns regarding social, economic and academic promotion and give them the opportunity to express their voices.
Conclusions

North African-French female students face multiple challenges in attaining a university degree in France. In order to resolve these challenges, parents, students, teachers, administrators, and policy need to assist this population in finding the support necessary to achieve academically, socially and economically. Some welcome centers have been established in order to assist newcomers into communities. Schools could offer adult classes for learning the basic language skills, and could have college preparatory courses or workshops offered for free or at minimal costs to students who need to transition into the university challenges that are not apparent at the secondary levels of schooling.

Through their stories, Yesinia, Malena, Leena, Yasmine, Rafa, Lizette, Sana, Assirem, and Alia stressed how they valued the opportunities they had that their parents did not. Consequently they did not want to waste their own chances, especially when they had firsthand experience of how difficult life can be without the intellectual capital needed to gain other types of capital such as economic and cultural capital. These stories acted as motivators for them as students and agents of their own success. As they pointed out, to have a happy life it was easier to start with a means of establishing economic basis before starting a family. Understanding and supportive teachers, relatives, neighbors and friends helped to bridge other gaps in their academic support. Accepting the help of these others offered the women learning environments and positive self-perceptions to more successfully assimilate their academic successes.
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APPENDIX A

DISSERTATION TIMELINE

August – January 2008 – Proposal Approval

Complete and defend proposal
Prepare letter of introduction explaining nature and purpose of the study
Prepare survey questionnaire for initial data collection
Send emails to Cultural Advisors confirming arrangements and initiating contacts for participants
Complete final travel and logistical arrangements

October 2008 – Get Access

Establish living and local working arrangements
Meet with Cultural Advisors, identify candidate participants
Identify participants, make initial contacts, waivers signed
Administer survey questionnaire
Conduct field analysis of survey responses to guide upcoming interviews

January 2008 – January 2009 – Interviews and Cultural Background

Conduct first interviews with at least five participants (5-8 ideal)
Conduct field analysis of interviews, noting highlights and emergent themes
Gather cultural background data including information to document setting and to validate interview data and analysis
Conduct field analysis of interviews, noting highlights and emergent themes

December 2009 – Follow-Ups

Finish any last leads with participants
Gather any remaining cultural background data
Establish continuing email contacts with participants
Report on progress and status to Advisory Committee and Cultural Advisors

January 2009 - March 2010 – Data Analysis

Complete Draft-Final Dissertation Chapters 1, 2, 3
Compile annotated time logs of video and audio records
Transcribe significant segments
Correlate interview data and cultural background information
Confirm that data and analyses support reasonable responses to research questions
Compare and contrast data and conclusions with theoretical basis
Validate or qualify data to be used or cited in Dissertation
Confer with Advisory Committee, Cultural Advisors, and Participants, as needed

May 2009 - March 2010 – Complete Draft Dissertation

Focus on completing data collection and analysis chapters
Select and prepare final figures, tables, and charts
Confirm and document major findings in consultation with Advisory Committee and Cultural Advisors
Assemble all chapters and prepare draft Dissertation for Advisory Committee review

May 2009 -March 2010 – Advisory Committee Review
Deliver complete review draft to Advisory Committee
Respond to questions and comments, as necessary
Prepare draft manuscript for journal publication and conference presentation

March 2010 – Defend Dissertation
Dear Participant,

My warmest thanks for your acceptance to participate in the research interview linked with my dissertation project. The interview material will be the cornerstone of my thesis. Therefore, your participation in my project is of utmost importance.

I will interview the participants from ________ and from _____ phases who have accepted to participate in this study from one to three times. The theoretical framework for my study consists of identity research and the research method is based on the ________ narration and storytelling. The thesis will be finalized during the year 2008. The practical aim of the research is to convey a picture of the everyday life of different participants (university students) and, hence, to aim at broadening perhaps the partially narrow and one-dimensional view of the general public what it is to be a ________ university student.

Before the interview, I would ask you to think about a few things:

the events or situations that have come to be meaningful for your current university student status before starting up or during the years of existence

the persons that you feel that have influenced or contributed in some way to your university student status

the difficulties or times of joy that are linked with your being a university student etc.

In addition, I would like you to remember and perhaps put on a piece of paper when the important events or phases have taken place. If you wish you can also write
down some other notes on a piece of paper. However, these pre-hand actions are not a requirement for participating in the interview so that if you do not have time to prepare for the interview, it does not become a threshold for conducting a successful interview.

I will be please to answer any of the questions that you may have regarding the interview or the research.

Best regards, Donna Murray
APPENDIX C
LETTER TO PARTICIPANT

Dear __________.

Your generous offer of help will be invaluable to the research and in fact, I would want to acknowledge your assistance, association and participation as a colleague. I also extend a promise to honor all those who wish to remain anonymous.

I will briefly outline research focus:

In the relatively recent events in France, the French government and education called for efforts to try to discover and understand ways of how to improve and raise the academic success of the most vulnerable students. The ministry spoke about cooperative programs constructed between the universities and the secondary schools in order to communicate better ways to assist each other in a collaborative aim to address these concerns. The attached file describes the proposed study. Please let me know if you have any problems accessing the file.

I would appreciate your feedback about any cultural or language sensitivities in my writing. My intention is not to offend, but to better appreciate the subtleties. This will also give us a chance to begin to work together. I look forward to our getting to know each other.

With kindest regards,

Donna
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997).

In-depth Interview

Background / Arrière-plan

Pour vous, qu’est-ce qui ressort de votre vie ces dernières années ?

Quelles sont les choses qui ont compté pour vous ?

Que retenez-vous de ces années ?

Dites moi comment est votre vie en ce moment. Qu’est-ce qui compte pour vous, à quoi pensez-vous ?

Self descriptions / Auto-descriptions

Après avoir parlé un peu de votre vie, j’aimerais que vous pensiez à vous maintenant.

Comment vous décririez-vous à vous-même ?

Si vous deviez vous dire qui vous êtes vraiment, comment feriez-vous ?

Est-ce que la façon dont vous vous voyez maintenant est différente de la manière dont vous vous voyiez par le passé ?

Qu’est-ce qui a amené ces éventuels changements ?

Y a-t-il eu d’autres moment-clés ?

Comment vous voyez-vous évoluer à l’avenir ?
Gender / Sexe

Que veux dire être une femme pour vous ?

Pensez-vous qu’il y a de grandes différences entre les hommes et les femmes ?

Comment votre perception de vous-même en tant que femme a-t-elle changé ?

Relationships / Relations

En vous retournant sur votre vie passée, quelles sont celles de vos relations qui ont été les plus importantes pour vous ? Pourquoi ?

Comment décririez-vous ces relations ?

Comment pensez-vous qu’une autre de ces personnes décrirait la relation en question ?

Comment est-ce que la relation a changé, et comment formuleriez-vous ce changement ?

Avez-vous eu une relation avec quelqu’un qui vous a aidé à modeler l’être que vous êtes devenu ?

Avez-vous eu une relation très importante avec quelqu’un dont vous avez dû prendre soin, de quelque manière que ce soit ? Comment pourriez-vous décrire cette relation ?

Combien cela a-t-il compté dans votre vie ?

Comment décririez-vous votre mère (ou la personne qui s’est occupée de vos dans votre petite enfance) ?

Comment décririez-vous votre père ?

Est-ce que la vision que vous avez de vos parents a changé ?
Real Life Moral Dilemma / Le dilemme vie quotidienne – vision morale

Tout le monde a vécu l’expérience de se trouver dans des situations où l’on devait prendre une décision où l’on n’était pas sûr de ce qu’il fallait faire. Pourriez-vous me décrire une situation dans laquelle vous n’étiez pas sûre de ce qu’il fallait faire ?

Quel était la situation ? Quel était la partie conflictuelle de cette situation ?

En réfléchissant à ce que vous deviez faire, qu’avez-vous pris en compte ? Pourquoi ? Y avait-il d’autres choses auxquelles vous pensiez en décidant ce que vous alliez faire ? Comment avez-vous mesuré chacune des alternatives ?

En repensant à toute la chose, quel enseignement pouvez en tirer ?

Education

Ce projet d’étude s’intéresse aux jeunes femmes (d’origine immigrée) d’apprentissage et du rôle de l’apprentissage et de l’éducation dans la vie des femmes. Je vous demande de penser à cela maintenant.

Qu’est-ce qui vous restera de vos expériences dans le système scolaire ? Y a-t-il des expériences soit scolaires soit extra scolaires, de bons ou/et de mauvais professeurs, de bonnes ou/et de mauvaises activités scolaires, de bons ou/et de mauvais programmes ou cours, ou des aménagements ou/et organisations scolaires et universitaires ?

Qu’est-ce qui vous a le plus aidé à l’école, à l’université ?

Y a-t-il des choses que les écoles, les programmes ou l’environnement ne fournissent pas et qui sont important pour vous ? Si vous réfléchissez à toute votre vie, pouvez-vous mentionner une expérience « éducative » marquante que vous avez vécue, dans ou en dehors de l’école ?
APPENDIX E

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This study will contribute to the growing research on immigrant students and their success (or lack of success) in school systems committed to multiculturalism and social diversity. The study will investigate the cultural and educational influences on the success of North African university students in France. The study seeks to more clearly understand the educational and cultural strategies and practices that are most effective in promoting this success and to provide input and insights into public policy and education theories and practices in France and elsewhere.

Having progressed through the highly-competitive French educational system to the university level, these students have grappled with their place in French society and demonstrated their ability to succeed. As the recent unrest in poor French suburbs has vividly shown, neither the immigrants nor the indigenous French have completely come to grips with their cultural and economic place in French society. This study will explore what North African (Muslim) attribute their academic success and how they made sense of their school experience.

Research Questions

Two facets of these students' educational and cultural experience are important to the study: their pre-university experiences and the aspects of their university programs that help continue their success. Having succeeded in compulsory secondary education and having made the transition to the university level, what has helped to ensure their academic success. Therefore, the investigation into these two facets defines the two central questions in this study:
What factors promote the success of immigrant students in higher education?

The study will seek to identify success factors in secondary schools – which practices and processes were particularly valuable in promoting the success of the Beur students? Also, which aspects of their social and cultural support systems contributed to their success within the educational system? The converse of these questions will also be of interest – were there particular pedagogical or cultural impediments that they commonly needed to overcome? And what are the relationships between their success factors and these impediments?

Which factors are particularly effective to help increase academic success of students early in university programs?

The study will investigate processes in place for early identification of academic problems. Are there methods and practices for finding and avoiding problems during the transition to university education? And, which pedagogical and curricular strategies are most effective at guiding the success of immigrant students?

Significance

The topic is of direct interest to the French government and universities. The Ministry of Research in Education seeks to promouvoir l’égalité des chances à l’université – to promote equal opportunity and diversity at university levels and to raise the success rates of at-risk students (Ministère de l’Education Nationale, de l’Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2006). A key aspect of this is l’attencion des lycées qui devront être ciblés – to develop partnerships with secondary schools for early intervention. Research to date has focused on economics and government policy
but that there are no current interview-based studies portraying the immediate perspectives of those most directly affected.

The study also serves as an important point of comparison for the cultural and educational challenges faced by other immigrant populations, notably the growing Muslim student population and burgeoning Hispanic population in the United States. Thus, the results would contribute to research and scholarship aimed at improvements in American education policy and practices with regard to minority populations.
# APPENDIX F

## SCHOOL SYSTEM IN FRANCE

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French School Zones. Author: CrisDHDR - Author: Thomas Steiner
APPENDIX G

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES RESEARCHER

As part of my Bachelor’s program in French language and Culture at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, I gained a broad background in French history, art, literature, culture and society. During this program I had the opportunity to study in France, where I stayed with French families in their homes and continued my studies at French language schools. I did experience the culture shock of a non-native language learner and an outsider, as well as an opportunity to live among “native” French.

During my Master's program, in education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, my focus was in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and I returned to France to perform my student teaching at a French Lyceé (high school). This introduced me to the inside of the French education system and gave me experience teaching English as a Foreign Language to French students. This time also provided me more French sociocultural experience living independently and working alongside French teachers. My supervisor, Mme Josiane Voisin, remains a close friend and has helped initiate my network of contacts in France for this study.

Before beginning my Ph.D. program at UNLV, I taught English Language Learners (ELL), in an at-risk junior high school in Las Vegas, Nevada for four years. My students were predominantly Hispanic and faced similar challenges as those faced by North African students in France, starting with language, economic, and cultural barriers. My French and American teaching experiences have helped me to frame a context for my current research.
VITA
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Donna L. Murray

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, French Language and Culture, 1995
The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington

Master of Education, English as a Second Language, 1999
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Special Awards and Honors:
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Golden Key International Honour Society

Publications:

Dissertation Title: Female North African-French Students in France: Narratives of Educational Experiences

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