Just as my respondents were citizen outsiders, I, too, as a non-French American citizen doing research in France, was an outsider. Yet in some ways my identity as a black woman created an insider connection with respondents because they also perceived me as a racial and ethnic minority. I outline my methodology in what follows and discuss how respondents simultaneously viewed me as an insider and outsider. In line with the direction of previous work on the relationship between ethnographer and the “researched,” I consider the different boundaries I encountered in my fieldwork and how they relate to aspects of my identity, as well as the implications for the boundaries separating insiders and outsiders and for the study of race and difference when one falls within them or outside them. Throughout my ethnographic research, my position as an outsider, as well as my personal identity, undoubtedly shaped how my respondents perceived me. I further consider the implications of this intersubjectivity for my research (Burawoy 1998) and for studying race from another national context. My own race and identity were directly implicated in conducting this research. I argue that this further reveal how race operates and manifests itself within French society.

THE RESEARCH: ENTERING THE FIELD, FINDING PEOPLE, AND NEGOTIATING ACCESS

I became interested in race, ethnicity, and identity in France for both personal and scholarly reasons. My own experiences as an African American living in Paris with a French family as an undergraduate in a study abroad program piqued my curiosity. My identity as an American citizen sometimes affected how I was treated as a black person in public spaces like restaurants, shops, or the subway. And other times, my visibility as a black person led to differential treatment not experienced by other American visitors. Sometimes people stared at me, particularly in the bourgeois quartiers of the seventh and sixteenth

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Another Outsider

Doing Race from/in Another Place
arrondissements. In the immigrant-concentrated quartiers of the eighteenth or nineteenth arrondissements or the banlieues of Seine-Saint-Denis or Nanterre, this was less common. My sociological imagination was beginning to develop and these questions remained in the back of my mind as I pursued my doctoral studies at Northwestern University. As I read the work of other sociologists on identity and difference in France (including Lamont 2002 and Wacquant 2007), I became interested in better understanding the experiences of the North African second generation: individuals who have been shaped by their parents’ migration from former French colonies, though not immigrants themselves and born and raised in France. I wanted to understand the nature of minority identity in a society that does not recognize minorities based on identity categories and how this might intersect with marginalization from mainstream society. I moved to Paris in the fall of 2008 to study this topic.

I began recruiting potential participants by contacting over one hundred organizations and associations (in person, as well as via mail, telephone, and email) in Paris and its banlieues and placing calls for participants on Internet forums and websites that cater to immigrant populations. I stated that I was a doctoral student in sociology interested in the experiences and identities of the North African second generation and sought potential contacts who might be able to provide information. I had an idea of the questions I would ask, but I was purposely broad in my call for potential participants because I wanted to appeal to as many as possible. To participate, individuals had to be born in France, be over eighteen years of age, live in the Parisian metropolitan region, and have at least one parent from the Maghreb.

Recruiting potential participants proved more challenging than anticipated. Many people said no. I believe this was because French Republican ideology makes the discussion of race and ethnicity—along with racial and ethnic identity—sensitive or taboo. Although I did not explicitly introduce race as a topic unless individuals themselves brought it up, I recognize that my visible identity as a black person perhaps made race and ethnicity more salient in our interactions than they might otherwise have been. In addition, on a practical level, it was sometimes difficult to identify potential respondents, because statistics in France are not collected based on race or ethnic origin. For example, there was no census data I could use to determine which neighborhoods were predominately maghrébin.

Because I am American, potential respondents were sometimes suspicious about why a non-French person, particularly an American and non-European, would be interested in studying them. What did I already know? What misconceptions did I have? This seemed particularly acute following the 2005 uprisings that swept banlieues throughout France. Several people told me that they were sick of the media asking immigrant-origin individuals questions about their experiences and the reasons for the uprisings and then distorting them to the public. Others also told me that Americans had many misconceptions about race and discrimination in French society and about life in France. Their hesitation to talk to me was understandable.

The difficulties of obtaining a large respondent sample resulted in my use of snowball sampling (Small 2009). As an outsider—neither maghrébin nor French—this method was crucial for getting me “inside” the population I wanted to study. Building rapport with respondents in the course of an interview, I would ask at the end for the names of others who might take part. Snowball sampling is a kind of nonprobability sampling that is useful for theoretical development, especially when knowledge about a particular subject is lacking.
It is often criticized for its empirical generalizability about an entire population yet can be useful for theoretical generalizability (Small 2009).

My sample is relatively homogeneous in terms of educational attainment and employment status. Many respondents were involved in the same professional and social networks. About half of them are connected to each as friends and acquaintances or because they are affiliated with the same organizations. This later became empirically and theoretically useful in considering how immigrant-origin individuals are marginalized owing to race and ethnicity, regardless of class or socioeconomic status. I was not initially focused on the middle-class segment, but from my first interviews, I remember being struck by how upward mobility (in socioeconomic status and educational and professional accomplishments) had not altered experiences of exclusion in France. I further refined questions for subsequent interviews based on previous interviews and interactions.

I do not generalize the entire second-generation maghrébin population (or the second-generation immigrant population as a whole). I also acknowledge that the Parisian metropolitan region is not representative of all of France, and the focus on the former may shape my discussion. Yet I believe the theoretical findings of this research (namely, the denial of cultural citizenship to nonwhite minorities on racial and ethnic grounds) have implications for second-generation minority populations in other contexts. In other words, I have sought theoretical generalizability, if not empirical generalizability (Small 2009).

INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

I built rapport with my respondents mostly because of my French language skills and an awareness of French society I had gained by having lived there previously. Interview questions addressed a variety of topics related to the North African second-generation: identity; social networks; employment experiences; family history and parental background; relationship to parents’ country of origin; educational experiences; political views; perceptions of racism, discrimination, and marginalization; and religious beliefs and identities. I conducted interviews in French and digitally recorded them, unless respondents requested otherwise. I realized I had interviewed enough people, or reached the point of saturation (Small 2009), when discernible patterns and themes emerged from our interviews. A native French-speaking transcriber later transcribed them. Though I am fluent in French, she was crucial to making sure I did not miss anything as a nonnative speaker. I analyzed the interviews in French and translated them myself during the writing process. All names and identifying information have been changed in accordance with the Institutional Review Board’s Human Subjects guidelines.

In addition to these interviews with forty-five individuals, I also conducted about nine months of participant observation and field research with my respondents and other individuals, spending time with respondents’ families and attending various community and networking events, such as panel discussions. My ties to the Nanterre Association allowed me to supplement interviews with participant observation there. Association directors offered to help me make connections for potential interviewees in exchange for volunteer work (eight of my respondents were in some way affiliated with the association). This social and educational community organization was founded in 1994 by five residents who grew up in the Petit Nanterre neighborhood, a public-housing complex. Petit Nanterre is
an impoverished neighborhood and considered a zone à urbaniser en priorité by the French government. The association’s employees, volunteers, and the population it serves are mostly North African and sub-Saharan African immigrant-origin individuals. In addition to my many interactions with them, I also taught English classes to elementary school, high school, and college students, as well as working adults. My experiences at the association were invaluable, allowing me to participate in the everyday lives of the population I was studying. I became very attached to the many individuals I met there.

**NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN THE FIELD**

Ethnographers have long reflected on how their own social position and identity affects field research. Some have said that interactions with respondents may be thought of as “construction sites” (Cordell and Hartmann 2007) in which similarities and differences in social location cause the constant negotiation and renegotiation of identities on both sides (Horowitz 1986; Lacy 2008; Venkatesh 2002).

The interactions between the two parties inform the analytical process (Horowitz 1986; May and Pattillo-McCoy 2000), and reveal “localized systems of meaning” (Venkatesh 2002, 103). Research participants sometimes view ethnographers as strangers; the curiosity of respondents, and the questions it generates, tell ethnographers a great deal about what is important to their subjects (Horowitz 1986). Venkatesh discusses the “social production of the ethnographer”; that is, the roles assigned to him by his informants in his fieldwork on Chicago’s South Side and the importance of their perceptions of his research and his role as a field-worker. Horowitz (1986, 410) says this is best considered as “interactional matters based on processes of continuing negotiation between the researcher and the researched.” The social position or identity of the researcher thus shapes how participants see the researcher and how an ethnographer perceives or interprets the research setting (May and Pattillo-McCoy 2000).

Such processes also have implications for the negotiated boundaries between insiders and outsiders in field research and the similarities and differences between researcher and “researched.” In her ethnographic study of middle-class black Americans in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., Karyn Lacy (2008) discusses how ethnographers must bargain with participants to ensure their cooperation. As an African American, she found this particularly challenging in the “cross-racial fieldwork” she conducted with white middle-class residents of the communities in which she was interested. Though she herself was middle-class, and also a graduate student at an elite university, her African American identity was most salient in interactions with uncooperative white respondents. In such contexts, participants “may rely on either pervasive stereotypes or personal experiences with members of these groups as an indicator of how the ethnographer will interact with them” (2). In my case, respondents undoubtedly had prior exposure to Americans and black Americans, either personally, through the media, or in some other way, and that exposure may have shaped their perceptions of me.

Differences in citizenship and nationality add another layer of negotiations between insiders and outsiders when researching across national contexts. In her research on symbolic boundaries in France and the United States, Michèle Lamont describes how her identity as both French Canadian and an American professor shaped the interview process: “People
were more prone to explain their taken-for-granted assumptions, not knowing the extent to which I might, or might not, be familiar with their culture” (1992, 18–19). This is similar to what Caitlin Killian (2002) experienced researching maghrébin-immigrant women adapting to French society and what Paula Pickering (2007) experienced in her fieldwork with minorities in Bosnia. In Pickering’s case, this was particularly challenging in a context where ethnicity is considered a sensitive subject.

OUTSIDER STATUS: AN AMERICAN IN FRANCE

My own experience mirrored that of researchers who have conducted qualitative research in other countries (Killian 2002, Lamont 1992, Pickering 2007). As an American, I was an outsider to those I sought to study. Participants often assumed I was not knowledgeable about French society and history or maghrébin culture, and I was lectured on the history of French colonialism in the Maghreb, for example, as a result. Still, such interactions illustrated how maghrébin-origin individuals understand their place in French society.

My outsider status also exposed my naiveté. When first making connections with various organizations, I once used the slang term for an Arab, beur, and was immediately made aware of its inappropriateness and pejorative connotations. One of my respondents, Mourad, a thirty-year-old of Algerian origin, explained that the issue is not so much that beur is offensive, but that it implies that one is neither an immigrant nor French but in between, whereas most children of maghrébin immigrants just want to be thought of as French. This contrasts with his (and his maghrébin friends’) parents, for whom the term felt more apt. This proved to be a huge insight for understanding the plight of racial and ethnic minorities in France, and how they simply want to considered as French as anyone else. However, I do not know if my blunder would have been so easily excused if potential participants had thought me more knowledgeable about France.

The individuals with whom I worked assumed, merely by virtue of my American citizenship, that I could exercise power and influence on their behalf. At the Nanterre Association, people often thought I could facilitate their travel to the United States, either for work or school, through whatever connections they supposed I had (see Pickering 2007). This caused me to reflect on my status as an American citizen—apart from any other identity I have. As all research involves power relations (Ali 2006), I realized I needed to be conscious of how being American is read or understood by potential participants.

Such assumptions and stereotypes had also arisen during my first extended stay in Paris, in 2000, when I lived with a French family as a part of a junior year abroad program. I encountered negative perceptions of Americans, which was heightened after the contested presidential election of George W. Bush that November. When I returned to Paris in fall 2008 to conduct the fieldwork for this book, there was a different energy, as many in France—across racial and ethnic backgrounds—were excited about the prospect of a Barack Obama presidency. Conducting research during Barack Obama’s presidential campaign often led to conversations with respondents about race and racism, upward mobility, and multiculturalism and diversity that might not have otherwise occurred without my prompting. That I was an African American who had moved to Paris from Chicago immediately connected me to this other African-American with ties to Chicago. Many potential respondents were curious about my perspective on Barack Obama and the prospect of his
election as the first black president of the United States. Was I excited about him, too? What did it mean to me and other African Americans? My conversations with respondents were also illustrative of the ways in which they thought about racial and ethnic representation. Many maghrébin-origin individuals identified with Obama and were excited about what his presidency would mean for racial and ethnic minorities in France, demonstrating how individuals marginalized based on race and ethnic origin could connect to racial and ethnic minority populations elsewhere. Many reflected on the similarities and differences between racial and ethnic minorities in France and in the United States.

I was repeatedly asked how I became interested in the maghrébin second generation. My status as an American complicated my attempt to blend in with others—I did not deny I was American, but I did not remind others of it, either. I quickly realized that I was considered an expert on all things American. Everyone at the Nanterre Association seemed to know me as “Jean, the American,” before I had even spoken with them. Mamadou, of Algerian origin and one of the directors of the association, told me that news travels fast in this community—everyone knows when something new has happened—in this case, my arrival as an American volunteer at the center. People could tell that I was not French, sometimes even without speaking: “Oh, it’s obvious you’re not from here . . . but I get that you want to be discreet,” he said. This resembles the experience of Natasha Warikoo (2011), who in her research in London high schools found that students often asked her questions about the United States and American culture, allowing her to build rapport with her participants.

INSIDER STATUS: BEING A RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY IN FRANCE

While I was an outsider in some ways, many respondents perceived me as an insider, as we shared a status as racial and ethnic minorities (see also Khanna 2011). In interactions with them, they often invoked aspects of my personal biography, whether to point out likenesses or differences in our two identities. I discuss later the implications of this shared racial and ethnic minority status for studying race and ethnicity from a different national context.

Conducting research during the campaign and eventual election of Barack Obama led to many discussions that might not have otherwise occurred. While I was conscious of not imposing an American-style understanding of race and ethnicity on the French context, some respondents invoked such a conception. Throughout my interviews, respondents made many connections and references to race and African American identity and culture. For example, one respondent began our conversation by repeatedly asserting that, although race is a big problem in the United States, it was not a big problem in France (and this was before I mentioned race or racism). He then went on to enumerate the ways in which he has been treated differently from others simply because he is maghrébin.

I also sensed there were moments when being a nonwhite American helped generate trust with potential respondents. A director at the Nanterre Association, not long after we’d met, said that if I ever needed a place to live, I could stay in one of the apartments in the public housing complex affiliated with the organization. I was surprised by his openness, despite our only recent acquaintance, and wondered whether his trust stemmed from the fact that I am visibly African American and a woman.
IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERSECTIONS OF IDENTITY AND RESEARCH

Before I moved to Paris to conduct fieldwork, I was warned to be careful not to impose an American-style understanding of race and ethnicity on the French context, and not interpret my observations based on my own experiences as a black woman. However, what I learned in my research and have shown here is that the researcher’s identity is not an impediment to ethnographic research. Rather, significant insights can be gained from how participants engage and perceive that identity.

This became particularly salient when conducting research related to race and difference across national contexts. I was often asked why I did not conduct research on racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. And there were questions as to whether, as a member of a racial and ethnic minority group myself, I could objectively study race and marginalization. Would I naturally see race and racism through my own filter, rather than understanding race and other phenomena through the lens of those individuals under study? Yet this misses how minorities in another national context understand race and racism for themselves, and ignores the connections they make with racial and ethnic minorities in other countries. Other scholars have reflected on the potential complications of studying race in France from an American perspective. I agree with Keaton et al. (2012), who posit that speaking of race in France does not imply importing American-style constructs of race and ethnicity in the analysis. My experiences parallel those of minority researchers studying race within the United States, whose findings are filtered through their racial and ethnic identity but not the research itself (Trusdell 2013; Young 2008). For example, Young discusses how he can paint “a more compassionate, rather than intensely critical, portrait” of African American men as an African American man himself (2008, 200).

While researchers are never “ideologically free” (Keaton 2006), I remained vigilant, to the degree possible, about not imposing my own understandings on my respondents. In short, I believe that qualitative researchers should not fear the implications of their identities and social locations for the research process, including their relationships with the “researched.” Rather, we should embrace them as integral to understanding the totality of individuals’ lives.