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Foreigners in their Own Country: Identity and Rejection in France by Lawrence M. Martin (2024) was prompted by a personal experience. The author, who describes himself as being in his late sixties, the son of immigrants to the USA, considered "White" in the USA and fluent in French, was preparing for an ethnography course in France. While staying with an Airbnb host who had emigrated to France from Morocco nearly 30 years earlier, he learnt in conversations with his host about her anguish, as people around her acted as if she did not belong to France. This encounter sparked the idea of conducting an ethnographic study among Airbnb hosts whose online profiles suggested family roots outside France.

Race is a loaded concept in French society, and the use of the term is actually rejected. Martin quotes Beaman (2021), who explains that the values of '*liberté, égalité, et fraternité*' (liberty, equality, and fraternity) are celebrated in France. The idea is upheld that all individuals are seen and treated as equals as long as they ascribe to French Republican values. As Martin explicates, 'Testing the validity of this position – that being accepted into French society has everything to do with *intégration* and nothing to do with physical appearance or religion – was the central goal of this ethnographic project' (p. 6).

The author recruited participants, explaining his interest in hearing their life stories. Starting in 2016, Martin undertook six trips to France covering different regions and metropolitan areas, staying one or two nights with those who agreed to participate. He conducted uninterrupted autobiographical interviews with 66 people, recording 156 hours of conversation. The interviews lasted between 10 minutes and several hours. Both men and women, with ages ranging from late teens to early seventies, were interviewed, and most were highly educated. The interviewees trace their roots to many parts of the world. The majority originated from former French colonies, yet

most have lived their entire lives in France. The interviewees have different cultural backgrounds and physical appearances, categorising themselves as Maghrebi (Northwest Africa), Black (sub-Saharan Africa or Caribbean), or Asian (various countries in East Asia).

Martin notes that existing ethnographic works in France mainly concentrate on Paris or its suburbs (*banlieues*), only on Maghrebi people or poor and marginalised groups. In contrast, he interviewed persons of various origins in different parts of France. All speak standard French and are economically successful. By their accounts, they adhere to French values and are fully integrated into French society.

The book comprises an introduction and six chapters divided into two parts. Part I of the book is structured around the participants' origins and related *faciès* (facial appearances). The interviewees rarely used the term 'race'. They referred to *faciès* to describe physical appearance or *métis* for mixed racial appearance. Chapter 1 focuses on the experiences of interviewees originating from Maghreb. Chapter 2 describes what it means to be Black in a White World. In Chapter 3, the voices of those who describe themselves as neither Black nor Maghrebi are heard. In Part II, themes emerging from the interviews are explored. These include the fear of rejection and feeling of inferiority (Chapter 4); romantic attraction and partnership, a topic especially raised by male participants (Chapter 5); and religion, particularly the compatibility of being Muslim and French (Chapter 6). Finally, conclusions are offered.

Following the premise that all citizens adhering to French values are equal, the French state negates race and ethnicity as viable categories. Demographic characteristics may be framed on the basis of immigration or citizenship status but not in terms of ethnic group membership (Beaman 2021). Consequently, the existence of the reality of race is, in fact, denied in French society. This also results in a lack of comprehensive data. Martin aims to fill this gap by giving French people of different origins a voice. He shows the lived experiences of immigrants living in a colour-blind society where 'attitudes towards non-European immigrants and their descendants are often intense' (p. 5).

Judging by the account of the vast majority of Martin's interviewees, the notion that all are treated equally as long as they adhere to French values is clearly disproven. It was heartbreaking to read the accounts of overt discrimination at workplaces and in school contexts and the feeling of rejection despite adhering to French values such as language use, customs, and values. Only in selected job areas, such as the high-tech IT industry, was discrimination not experienced. Here, specific skills or competencies were essential, and possibly the lack of face-to-face client contact also downplayed the role of skin colour. Most participants reported differential treatment because of physical appearance: being treated as foreigners in their own country, as persons who do not belong. The accounts of overt racism are intertwined with Islamophobia. Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015, participants following the Muslim faith in particular reported being questioned and their adherence to French values being doubted. Being 'French' and following the Muslim faith are considered incompatible. On social occasions, many participants dreaded being offered alcohol, as refusal would reveal their faith and their being 'French' would be questioned. Only participants of Asian background reported a sense of positive discrimination over the years due to an admiration for successful Asian economies.

Martin comments that his participants relished the opportunity to talk about their experiences and were grateful to him for his interest in their stories. For most, it was

also the first time that someone was interested in their life story, and according to Martin, the interview experience seemed therapeutic, even cathartic for many. The interviewees opened up to this empathetic stranger from the other side of the ocean.

The book provides extensive insights into the lived experiences of discrimination of non-White persons in France. The book's strength is the rich material produced with the ethnographic method, but Martin's analysis remains descriptive. The accounts in the latter part of the book are somewhat repetitive. Going beyond the descriptive level, I was missing more of a synthesis, for example, in terms of comments on the processes behind these accounts and more societal contextualisation in contemporary France.

Although not mentioned by Martin, it seems that the interviewees experience *identity denial* (Cheryan & Monin 2005). Identity denial captures the experience of less prototypical group members who desire to have their common in-group identity recognised by fellow group members. This phenomenon is exemplified by the question, 'Where are you *really* from?'. Implicitly, the person addressed this way is made to understand that they do not belong. At best, their core identity is questioned and, at worst, denied.

As Martin explains, race remains a taboo to discuss in France. Republicanism in France is thought to create national cohesiveness and community. However, as the testimonies of Martin's interviewees show, this cohesiveness does not exist. Being accepted into French society has a lot to do with physical appearance or religion. As a psychologist studying biculturalism, I advocate thinking less in *exclusive* categories. It *is* possible to feel belonging to more than one culture – it can be experienced as a doubling of resources. Given the assimilationist pressures of adhering to French values, Martin's study participants are denied the opportunity to form a bicultural identity (LaFromboise et al. 1993; West et al. 2017). Under pressure to fit in with the prototypical French society, people are also denied the opportunity to value different cultural influences. As Martin shows, there is an apparent mismatch between France's ethos and the reality of the accounts provided by his interviewees. He shines the light on the lived experiences of a large group of French citizens whose voices have not been heard to date. Hopefully, this account of lived experiences in a colour-blind society will launch a debate on discrimination based on ethnic origin, broaden discussions about belonging, reduce thinking in exclusive categories and thus contribute to a more convivial way of living together.

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