

‘Sterilized assimilation’: the production of domestic and urban space in housing north African migrants in post-colonial France

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Abstract

Authorities use policies on segregation and social mixture to manage and control racialized populations within urban space. This perpetuates, creates, and contests racial boundaries. Building upon feminist scholarship on gender, intimacy, and colonialism, this paper looks at the production of the domestic space together with the production of urban space in order to shed light on the construction of racial boundaries. I explore how the housing policies that targeted the North African migrant population in the 1960s and 1970s were based on and perpetuated racialized difference of these migrants all the while promising assimilation. By tracing fragmented logics on (inter)racialization within the archive, I pay specific attention to the ways in which the housing policies managed and dealt with ‘interracialized’ households and intimacies. I argue that the authorities developed policies that aimed at ‘sterilized assimilation’. This encouraged social mixture of certain North African families in urban space, while negating and preventing interracialization within the domestic space – that is: interracialized households and intimacies. This history helps explain how the contemporary encouragement of social mixture in urban space coexists with marginalisation and segregation.

1. Introduction

Today, the French public authorities see the *banlieues spaces* in the French urban peripheries through a prism of problems of segregation and integration of its racialized inhabitants, mostly (descendants of) people coming from the (former) colonies on the African continent (Dikeç, 2011). The proliferation of the necessity of *mixité sociale* [social mixture] policies in urban space is one of the ways through which the French authorities legitimize state intervention in the *banlieues*, and accordingly manage and control its racialized population, motivated by the desire to decrease segregation and fight *communautarisme* [separatism and segregation based on group identities] (Avenel, 2005; Tissot, 2005). This paper is interested in the ways in which policies that focus on spatial distribution reinforces racial boundaries, even when it is aimed at social mixture. I develop the

concept of ‘sterilized assimilation’ in order to understand how the French authorities prevented inclusion and perpetuated racial boundaries, all the while also encouraging social mixture. I do so by exploring how housing policies in the 1960s and 1970s managed and controlled migrants from the former colonies on the African continent.

In the French context, scholars have argued that the discussion and policies on *mixite sociale* functions as a proxy for discussions on and the fabricating of a ‘racial balance’ as the concentration of racialized groups is framed as a ‘danger’ to the French Republic (Epstein & Kirszbaum, 2003; Pala, 2005). Research has argued that across European cities, state authorities deploy spatial politics to assimilate/integrate (racialized) migrant groups, while at the same time political discourse on segregation and social mixture blames racialized migrants for building “parallel societies” (Bolt, Özüekren, & Phillips, 2010; Gruner, 2010; Musterd, 2003). In that sense, discourse and practice on mixture and integration work to exclude those who are to be integrated (Schinkel, 2013, 2017, 2018). So, social mixture and segregation policies create, maintain, and contest racial boundaries.

In this paper, I complicate the ways in which spatial politics produce and undo racial boundaries by bringing in the regulation of domestic space. Spatial regulation of various population groups in urban space is primarily based on monolithic population categories – by which I refer to the spatial distribution of population categories across national space and specifically urban space. This overlooks the regulation of racialized and gendered boundaries within domestic space. Feminist research on gender, intimacy, and colonialism has put the regulation of intimacy and domesticity at the forefront, to argue how in the imperial context, the regulation of “sexual, conjugal and domestic life” was essential to the colonial order of things (Camiscioli, 2009; McClintock, 2013; Povinelli, 2006; Stoler, 1989, 2010). Building on this body of scholarship, The domestic space refers to the space that belongs to the household, crafted through state interventions. It alludes to the French term “*domestiquer*”, to domesticate, to subjugate a population to colonial power.

This paper looks at the housing policies of the 1960s and 1970s that formed the banlieues we know today - amidst a housing shortage during which the French authorities connected housing issues to immigration. Research on integration and urban space in France today often overlooks the history of spatial regulation and assimilation (e.g. (Barou, 2014). However, it is necessary to gear attention to the histories and policies that created the “banlieue” in the first place (Fourcaut & Vadelorge, 2008; Fourcaut & Vadelorge, 2011). Research on housing policies in the 1960s and 1970s France has shown how French authorities had similar concerns: they worried about and regulated segregation and mixture in (urban) space, motivated by anxieties about assimilation that could be mitigated by spatial distribution (F. Belmessous, 2013; Hajjat, 2018; House & Thompson, 2016). At the time, housing policies became the main site through which the French administration could regulate migrants within French metropolitan territory (Bernardot, 2008; Hajjat, 2018; House & Thompson, 2016; Lyons, 2006; MacMaster, 1997).

This paper takes a closer look at the housing policies that targeted postcolonial immigrants from the former colonies in North Africa during and after (political) decolonization of the French Empire (1960-1979) – specifically Algeria. In this paper, I break from the colonial/postcolonial divide to show how colonial practices on housing travelled between

the metropole¹ and the colony to regulate non-white migrants. I focus on both the management and regulation distribution of migrants across urban space and ‘interracialization’ in the domestic space together. This reveals how the crafting of urban space was contingent on the negation of interracialized households and the prevention of interracialized intimacies. I explore how housing policies prevented inclusion and perpetuated racial boundaries under the guise of assimilation, which I call ‘sterilized assimilation’.

I use the concept of ‘interracialization’ to refer to the process of assigning different racialized identities to members of the household. Interracialized intimacies refer to the intimate relationships (sex, marriage, unmarried relationship/cohabitation) between people who are assigned different racialized identities. I base this term on the concept ‘inter-raciality’ used in critical (mixed-)race studies to refer to the construction of interracial relationships and families/couples through the law, politics, and discourse (Ifekwunigwe, 2004; Onwuachi-Willig, 2013; Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2009). Building on Haritaworn’s work on “multiracialization”, I underline the process involved in racialization, and therefore, in interracialization (Haritaworn, 2007). Whereas the archives I analyse use “mixed households/families”, I use interracialized households to underline the action required to make racialized identity salient, rather than it being a pre-existing reality that ‘mixes’.

I will first go into the methods on which this paper is based. Then, I will set out the context in which the housing policies developed, to show how the tools of governance were colonial continuities that travelled from the colony to the metropole. Building upon these colonial continuities, I show how the housing policies consolidated and were based on racial and gender hierarchies of assimilability that connected the regulation of urban space with the regulation of domestic space. These insights help understand how (partial) social mixture in urban space negated and prevented interracialization in the domestic space, and encouraged sterilized assimilation.

1.2 Methods: tracing racialization in the Archive

This paper is based on primary and original archival sources from the National Archives of France and the archives of the City of Paris. The archives I used were selected on the criteria of being catalogued as pertaining to housing (North) African immigrants. The archives include those of the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, and the Ministry of Health, and the Municipality of Paris. I use freely available material or for which I have received special permission to consult [*derogation*] under the 213-2 du Code du Patrimoine. I look at governmental policies, correspondence, research, circulars, and legislation.

Research on race and racialization in France comes with its own set of challenges, as the French tradition of colour-blind universalism does not acknowledge the existence of racialized processes and governance. However, at the same time, research on race and racism in France has argued that racial logics are embedded within the French Republic – yet never made explicit (Célestine, 2011; Stoler, 2011; Stovall & Van den Abbeele, 2003; Thompson, 2016). In this context, I approach the archive as an “object of knowledge” rather than a “source of knowledge”, to uncover and trace how understandings of “race” and racisms worked in the spatial and domestic regulation of migrants (Arondekar, 2005; Stoler, 2002). Scholars have argued for a reading “against the archival grain”, in which the researcher attempts to uncover that what is not being said, those knowledges that are

disqualified (Burton, 2006; Whatley & Brown, 2009). Stoler has famously argued for a “reading along the archival grain”: a reading that treats the archive as a “force field” to which the research should surrender (albeit not concede) to trace its logics, to show what and how governmental rationales order governance. In this paper, I do both.

I approached the archive with the question of whether and how French authorities were interested in the regulation of the intimate lives of the (north) African population in the French metropole, and specifically, whether and how the authorities were interested in interracialized intimacies. With this question in mind, I could trace gendered and racialized understanding of assimilability that came together in the regulation of housing. By tracing and (re)interpreting the fragmentation, inconsistencies, and assumptions on categorization and regulation of (north) African migrants, I was able to uncover underlying ordering principles of the regulation of domestic and urban space: race, as it intersects with other markers of identification such as gender, class, and marital status.

2. Colonial continuities: immigration and housing

Before going into the housing policies and their function in the intertwinement of the regulation of urban and domestic space, and its investment in the regulation of mixture and interracialization, I will first set out the context of (post)colonialism, decolonization, and immigration of these housing policies and the categories they employ. The mid-1950s to the mid-1970s was a time of rapid change and economic prosperity in France, yet with grave housing shortages (not unlike other European states at the time) (van Beckhoven, Bolt, & van Kempen, 2009). In the aftermath of the Second World War, the French state was interested in the modernization of its country through urban renewal and mass consumption (Ross, 1996). From the 1950s onwards, calls for independence and nationalist struggles intensified the French efforts to retain power over its Empire. Under De Gaulle, reinstated in office in '58 after having been the leader of the French allied forces, France waged war against the nationalist movement of French Algeria, a war with intense state violence against Algerians in both French Algeria and the metropole.

At the same time, the immigration regime in France was open, at least on paper (Weil, 1995). Even though immigration was not legally restricted, the French administration did favour some migrants over others and categorized migrants differently in terms of assimilability (Spire, 2005). Housing shortages were an acute problem in France, but the state investment in migrant housing went beyond sole interest in the improvement of living standard, housing was one of the sites through which the French administration codified these classifications, problematized some groups of migrants, and managed migrants in the French territory (Blanc-Chaléard, 2016; de Barros, 2005). As I will show in the next section, the authorities differentiated between gendered and racialized categories on which hierarchies of assimilability were based, allowing the authorities to create different housing options for these categories through specialized institutions. These institutions and the categories they used created intimate connections between colony and metropole, and between the colonial and postcolonial context. A look at these categories and institutions helps understand how the regulation of urban and domestic space was intertwined through colonial continuities that perpetuate difference all the while promising assimilation and equality.

Muslim Algerians in the metropole were regulated under the category *Français Musulman d'Algerie* [French Muslims of Algeria – henceforth Muslim Algerians]. Officially, French Algeria was a French department of the metropole and was therefore administered by the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Muslim Algerians were French citizens – albeit regulated under the legal regime of “Muslim status” which de facto created a differentiated set of rights in French Algeria. In the metropole, Muslim Algerians had, at least formally, no different status to French citizens. Still, French metropolitan officials used the category of *Français Musulmans d'Algérie*, which allowed the administration to differentiate between them and the rest of the French citizenry (Lyons, 2009, p. 24). The governmental archives show that the administration continuously conflated categories of “Algerians”, “North Africans”, and “Muslims”, which illustrates the instability of categories and the lack of interest in judicial meaning. Rather, the French administration was interested in categorizations that formed the basis of differentiated treatment.²

The usage of distinctive categorizations for Muslim Algerians made possible the creation of specialized institutions and services that were also operative in colonial Algeria in the metropole, to manage and surveil the colonial migrants from French Algeria. The department of Algerian Affairs of the Ministry of Interior opened up branches and instated specialized services in the metropole to regulate Muslim Algerians in the metropole (de Barros 2005). This obfuscated the lines between colonial and metropolitan government. After Algerian independence in ‘62, these institutions were repackaged into institutions that were mandated with the management of foreign immigrants altogether, thereby placing colonial governance on the entirety of the immigrant population (de Barros, 2005) Through these institutions, colonial practices of governance travelled between French Algeria and metropolitan France that interconnected housing with social welfare, surveillance and assimilation.

Scholars have argued that the French colonial government used French Algeria as a “testing ground” for technocratic governmental techniques for modernisation and rationality (McDougall, 2018; Rabinow, 1995). To understand the metropolitan context, it is essential to see the metropolitan practices as colonial continuities. Housing policies and urban planning were an integral part of the colonial project of the *mission civilatrice* [civilizing mission] in the French cities in North Africa, such as Algiers and Casablanca (McKay, 1994). Through the 1920 and 1930s, the French colonial authorities became increasingly interested in urban planning that builds modern “hygienic housing” that would deconstruct the social structures of the “Muslim city” to better surveil and manage the Algerian population as part of the colonial project (Çelik, 1992, 1997; Rabinow, 1995; Wright, 1991).

Generally, the crafting of domesticity has been at the centre-point of imperial politics and the separation between colonizer and colonized (Conklin, 1998). In the regulation of housing, domestic space was connected to urban space. Colonial officers and architects built differentiated housing for the Europeans from the housing for the Muslim population, which was meant to stimulate a balance between the cohabitation and segregation of Europeans and Muslims (McKay, 1997). Housing units for the Muslim population were supposed to contribute to the so-called ‘evolution’ of the Muslim population into modern French city life by building European-style housing catering to and crafting a nuclear family, as part of the civilizing mission. The gendered regulation of domestic life and intimacy was fundamental to this project. The attribution of the type of housing unit was dependent on the level of the ‘evolution’ of the family, which was measured by the

behaviour of the woman: the “Muslim woman” was approached as the key by which the “Muslim home” could be controllably assimilated into French domestic life (McKay, 1994).

This interconnected regulation of domestic space with the regulation of urban space and codified racial hierarchies within the spatial distribution of the city, all the while promising the possibility of assimilation and, thereby, of equality. The notion of assimilation was integral to French colonialism, as the colonial government used the ideal of cultural assimilation to promise colonial subjects the possibility to be granted full rights as French citizens – and therefore worked to uphold Republican universalism (S. Belmessous, 2005). Assimilation, however, was a goal that could (almost) never be fully attained, and therefore worked to exclude racialized colonial subjects and uphold the colonial order (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2001).

The modus operandi that connected the regulation of domestic space with the regulation of urban space through housing policies travelled to the metropole in the regulation of Algerian migration. Police, social services, and housing organisations worked together to monitor and control this population in the metropole. The administration developed housing policies that targeted the Muslim Algerian population specifically, and separately from the French population. Such efforts took special force during the Algerian War, to suppress nationalist sentiment, as informal dilapidated housing settlements known as the *bidonvilles* were considered hotbeds for the Algerian nationalist movement. In this context, the administration established in 1958 the Social Action Fund (FAS), mandated with reinforcing the welfare actions targeting the Algerian population amidst the Algerian war. The fund brought together surveillance and the *mission civilatrice*, as it focused on four policy areas: “ending the bidonville³”; promoting Algerians’ “intellectual and professional qualifications” to benefit the economy, “encouraging evolution” especially among youth and family; and filling any “gaps in the existing social network” (Lyons 2009 p. 149). Moreover, former colonial officers who had worked in French Algeria were appointed as “managers” of housing and social action for Algerians.

Institutions, individuals, and expertise circulated between territories in North Africa and European France to monitor and regulate the colonial (migrant) populations. The focus on housing outlived the Algerian war. Throughout the 60s and 70s, French authorities worried about immigration in relation to housing. The existence of *logements insalubres* [unsanitary housing] and *bidonvilles*, in particular, fuelled anxieties about the presence of migrants from the African continent on French territory altogether – even though French citizens and European migrants also lived in dilapidated housing. In the post-independence context, colonial institutions and officers who had been mandated with the regulation of the Muslim population in French Algeria and the French metropole were ‘rebranded’ to ‘manage’ the immigrant population, bringing with them spatial politics and urban planning and the crafting of domesticity as a colonial tool of governance (Almi 2002; House 2018; Maghraoui 2008; Wright 1987).

3. Housing and assimilation

The French authorities developed housing policies along and consolidated hierarchies of assimilability, determined by logics on race, gender, class, and marital status. Authorities

employed two intertwined technologies of governance to do so: the regulation of gendered assimilation and exclusion in the domestic space and mixture and segregation in urban space. Before looking at the specific housing policies, it is helpful to understand how the problematization of gender and marital status played an important role in the construction of North African migration as inassimilable. North African migration was understood as single, temporary, and male low-skilled and low-class labour migration. As the Algerian sociologist Sayad has argued, African male migrants were seen as having an in-between” family status. They were neither ‘really’ married, even if they have families in their home country, nor ‘really’ without family. This placed them outside of the French conception of the nuclear family (Sayad 1980: 2006) – thereby marking them as outside of the French community. This informed the French administration’s position on immigration from the African continent, as illustrated by a report from 1966 report from the social services mandated with social action for migrants.

“Migrants from North Africa and North Africa have a relatively high number of social groups whose adaptation seems, a priori, excluded. ...] This population is mainly composed of single working men. The presence of families, an element of stabilisation, is particularly lacking.”⁴

Family migration was favoured to encourage assimilation of ‘men without families’, but at the same time, the French administration worried about the arrival of North African families, because it would bring about the risk of durable installation of Algerian families (Cohen 2017). The problematization of gender and marital status was used to motivate the inassimilability of north African migrants, but, at the same time, inassimilability motivated the limitation of family migration. In contrast, French authorities encourage the family migration of European migrants, such as Italians, because they were considered to be assimilable and stable migration (Spire 2005 (Cohen, 2014)). This worked to racialize and exclude African migration, and include European migration into the white French community.

These gendered and racialized hierarchies of assimilability were reflected and produced by housing policies. Legislation and policies differentiated between “housing for the isolated” – isolated being the term employed by the administration – and “housing for families”⁵. When the Prefect of the department in the Alps wanted to mix Algerian families and single men in one housing facility in 1960, the head of social affairs of the ‘Algerian affairs’ department answered resolutely: “*I am very opposed to this project*”, without further motivating it⁶. One year later, the social action fund denied a project of the Sonacotral to build a residence with both single men and families, because they “*do not consider it desirable, from a social and familial point of view, to group families and single men together in one building. Such a formula does not seem to benefit the evolution of the Muslim family.*”⁷

It was considered self-evident that North African single men were a priori excluded from the notion is of assimilability, building upon colonial logics of Muslim Algerians. The authorities made this distinguishment for North African families and single men, but not consistently for European migrants, which attests to the French authorities’ different views on these migrant groups in terms of assimilation. Through these differentiations between single men and families, the administration could administer spatial distribution and intervene in domestic space differently for families and single men. This enabled the

administration to segregate single men, all the while assimilating (certain) families through interventions in the domestic and urban space.

4. (Inter)racializing domestic space and interracialized intimacies

Housing policies were based on gendered assimilation. A closer look at the regulation of domestic space helps understand how the authorities encouraged assimilation all the while reinforcing racial boundaries. Whereas single men were manifestly excluded from assimilability into the French community, authorities considered north African households as racialized households that had to be carefully managed and controlled through interventions in domestic and urban space. In doing so, authorities did not only differentiate between families and single men, but also between assimilable and inassimilable families.

For families, the administration built two types of housing: *cités de transit* [transit centres] and *habitations à loyers modérées (HLM)* [social housing]. The former were built to, at least on paper, function as temporary housing for families who were considered to “not have the necessary degree of evolution” to live in a modern apartment, coming from the resorbed informal housing settlements.⁸ Class position together with racialized identity marked these families as lacking ‘evolution’. On paper, families considered *adaptée* [adapted] were housed in HLM. The housing policies dispersed North African families living in HLM housing in order to encourage “cohabitation”, whereas *cités de transit* were segregated from French families - I will go into the specificities of these policies in the next section.

Regulation of urban space through segregation and “cohabitation” was dependent on the measurement of gendered assimilation within the domestic space. The gendered construction of assimilability manifested in how the level of *adaptation* [adaptation]⁹ or *evolution* [evolution]¹⁰ of families was measured and targeted. In the *cité de transit*, the administration believed strict discipline was necessary to “initiate families to modern life”¹¹, and to allow the transit to HLM housing. The social workers and HLM bureaucrats determined who was considered adapted to live in HLM housing. Similar to the colonial context, the social action interventions in both the *cités de transit* as well as the social action services in the HLM targeted almost exclusively women. Adaptability was measured solely by looking at the behaviour of the wife/mother.¹² However, there were no actual clear criteria on what basis these measurements were made: rather, the measurement of *adaptation* was considered to be self-explanatory, based upon colonial knowledge on the Muslim population.

Whereas the authorities focused on women’s behaviour as a way to measure assimilation, and accordingly, to determine segregation or ‘cohabitation’, the administration did not administratively and politically acknowledge the existence of households in which the wife was white French or European. In the measurement of assimilability and the social action policies, the existence of French wives is invisibilized. The presence of interracialized households is not considered a sign of assimilation for north African migrants, whereas it is for European migrants.¹³ The lack of interest in interracialized households is not a consequence of their inexistence.

Governmental statistics in the archives make it difficult to recollect the presence of interracialized households. This illegibility illustrates the administration's negation of their existence. In explicitly looking for traces of their presence in the archive, however, I was able to find that interracialized households were actually common. The trimestrial reports by the CTAM give statistics on the amount of "European wives and concubines" in the "Muslim population" between 1959 and 1964: in '63, the CTAM counted 10 700 "European wives and concubines" and 36 000 "Muslim wives".¹⁴ The organisation "Entraide Nord-Africaine d'Indre et Loire" counts in 1961 700 North African families and 240 mixed families in the department of d'Indre-et-Loire – about one fourth.¹⁵ The Direction of population and migration of the ministry of social affairs counts about 57 000 Algerian families in France in 1968, of which 52 000 have an Algerian national as "head of household". So, about 5 000 Algerian families had an Algerian mother with a non-Algerian head of household.¹⁶ Of the "Algerian head of households", 17 000 are married to French women. In 1975, the General census of the Population counts 92 000 Algerian men in a relationship, of which 24 000 live with a French woman. The statistics of the census of '68 and '75 count based on nationality, meaning that men born Muslim Algerian but who have been naturalised as French are not counted in the statistics – thereby invisibilizing interracialized households where both partners have French nationality. However, social housing officials still considered North African families who had been naturalised as French as North African.

Yet, most of the reports and policy documents on housing and social action do not mention the presence of French or European women, which reveals an investment in the creation of mono-racialized household categories that formed the basis of the institutional differentiation of North African families and their exclusion from the French community. Social action as part of the housing system was supposed to *evolve* families by intervening in the domestic space, especially by targeting the women with educational courses. These programs taught women domestic skills: how to sow, how to clean their houses, how to rear their children, how to be proper French wives. The social action reports even reported on the type of clothing of Algerian women: dressing "*a la francaise*" was a positive marker of adaptation.¹⁷ Social workers visited families in the centres to check whether the wife ran the household well. The invisibility of French wives is therefore revealing of the French authorities' investment in the racialization of North African households as families that are different to French families.

However, interracialized households were present in both the *cités de transit* and HLM housing for North African families. A research carried out by the Etudes Sociales Nord Africaines on the north African population in the Parisian suburb Grennevilliers from 1963 shows that out of the 26 families living in the cites, 3 are categorized as "mixed".¹⁸ Generally, given that between one third and one-fifth of the North African families were in fact interracialized, it is likely that the statistics on the *cités de transit* do not mention the presence of interracialized couples, even if they were actually living in this type of housing – but that their presence did not "fit" the cite de transit as a segregated space for gendered assimilation.

Fragmented information illustrates that part of the families counted as "North African" living in HLM housing were interracialized: "mixed couples" had more chance to live in HLM housing (for north African families) than couples with a north African wife because

they had more chance to be considered *adaptée*. In the administration of the HLM housing, white women's 'assimilability' is counted as the assimilation of North African families, as bureaucrats in the housing system often favoured white French or European wives over north African wives in the attribution of housing by measuring them as more 'adapted'. For example, the Prefet de la Seine-Maritime wrote in 1960 that European wives are regarded more favourably to manage a household in comparison to Muslim women – and were in better housing.¹⁹ Officials motivated this difference was by the idea that "European wives" were better at keeping a proper household, as articulated by the Prefet de le Seine-Maritime in a letter to the Service des Affaires Musulmanes.

"If mixed households seem to have an advantage in this distribution, it is because, most of the time, these European wives benefit from a favourable prejudice in the keeping of the household, in relation to Muslim women, who need in most cases, without being inferior, an adaptation period to the western life more or less prolonged".²⁰

The authorities argued that interracialized households were more 'adaptable' to the French lifestyle – which is ironic given that they were measuring French women's adaptability to France. The presence of interracialized families, of white women within the category of 'unassimilated migrant families' did not transgress the hierarchy of assimilability. The administration included interracialized households within the racialized hierarchy of assimilation rather than complicating the racialized separation between French and North African families.

Not only did housing policies invisibilize the presence of interracialized households, but they also prevented interracialized intimacies. The separation of north African families from North African single migrants in housing policies allowed the French authorities to closely regulate North African male migrants differently from families. The administration mandated the Sonacotral (renamed SONACOTRA after Algerian independence) to build and manage hotel-type of housing known as 'foyers' for single North African men. These had an unspecified legal category and were meant to offer sanitary housing in a cost-efficient and regulated manner, that would break down the 'tribalism' that reigned, according to officials, in the shantytowns and bidonvilles. The foyer was a collective housing structure, but at the same time it highly individualized and isolated its residents, as community ties between the residents was made difficult by surveillance and the lack of feeling of ownership of the spaces (Sayad 1980). The resident had no renters' rights and hence is stuck in an in-between space: he has a bed, not a home, thereby producing temporariness and precarity instead of inclusion (Hmed, 2006).

The Sonacotral was directed by Jean Vaujour, who had been the architect behind the forced displacement of rural communities in Algeria. In describing Sonacotra's mandate, Vaujour explicitly referred to the housing projects in colonial Algeria and vowed to make the Sonacotra foyers places for "moral and sanitary progress" (Bernardot, 2008 p 48). The foyers operated from a logic of paternalistic surveillance: strict internal rules applied.²¹ The *gérants* ['managers' / 'concierges'], who were responsible for the inner workings of the foyer, were mostly recruited amongst the colonial officers previously in Algeria, for they were thought to 'know the people'. And so, the officers who had been enforcing colonial rule now enforced the rules in the foyers (Bernardot 2008). These rules prohibited female visits.

The right to visitation was an essential question in the internal management of the foyers. The former “director of research and programming” of the SONACOTRA stated in an interview that “*this was the big issue at the time: visits, especially female visits.*”²² Based on the regulations, the “gérants” refused visitors. As illustrated in the right-leaning newspaper “Le Figaro”, the foyers ensured the residents were controlled like children in a boarding school: “*no visits in the foyer. Those are the rules! Even though they are past the age of boarding school.*”²³ So, through internal regulations of housing for single migrants, the administration could prevent possibilities for interracialized intimacies and domesticity in France.

The desire of the authorities to ensure that single men would not have intimate relations with white women revolved amongst others around anxieties on sexual relations between men and (white) French women, based on the reactivation of old colonial stereotypes of Muslim men as non-sociable sexually violent men (André, 2016; Brun & Shepard, 2016; Ruscio, 2016). In the colonies, interracialized intimacies had the potentiality to upset the colonial hierarchies (Stoler, 1989). In the postcolonial context, such intimacies did not fit the paradigm of assimilation that excluded single men.

5. Segregation and ‘cohabitation’ in urban space

Policies on gendered assimilation and exclusion through the domestic space placed north African migrant households and single men outside of French domesticity and thereby reinforced the racial and gender boundaries between north African migrants and the French community. Based on this separation between north African and (white) French households, between single migrants and families, and between assimilable and unassimilable families, the French administration implemented policies that determined the distribution of North African migrants across urban space – which was a practice already used in French Algeria. In the metropole, housing policies excluded “inadaptable” domesticity and single men through segregation, and at the same time crafted “adaptable” domesticity by encouraging cohabitation in the urban space. Discussion on the necessity of spatial distribution revolved around concerns about, as per the terms used in the policy documents and discussion, *cohabitation* and *brassage*” [mixture – lit: brewing], and the positive and negative impact this would have on the population groups that were to cohabit or not. This promoted a type of assimilation that was more about sanitized proximity and the crafting of a racial balance than about inclusion in the French community.

The authorities used segregationist policies to keep north African single men spatially distant from the white French population. Together with the internal rules of the *foyers*, this was intertwined with the desire to prevent interracialized intimacies. Mayors refused to build foyers in their municipality, invoking arguments on the danger that single North African men (supposedly) pose to (white) women and young girls. Moreover, residents of neighbourhoods protested the building of foyers because they feared it would pose threats to public order.²⁴ The social action service for migrants reported in 1971, however, notes that no instances of threats against women have occurred.²⁵ The anxieties about “threats” were more about the possibility for intimacy than the possibility of unconsented intimacy. Massenet, the head of the Social Action Fund and on the board of the SONACOTRA, proposed in a speech that spatial dispersion of north African men is necessary because “*women and young girls dare not leave the house because they fear they will be attacked and raped*”.²⁶ By making the foyer the only type of housing available

(besides informal dilapidated housing), the French administration could keep single men outside of the French community, both spatially and intimately.

Housing policies did not only segregate single men, but also families in the *cités de transit*. Formally, the transit centres were built for any family who was *inadaptée*, both French and migrant. This was also stipulated in the regulation on the transit centres, for example in the circular on the transit centres from 1972.²⁷ However, in practice, the administration did not want to house French families in *cités de transit*, even though French families were also living in unsanitary housing, and needed to be rehoused. The centres, however, became a segregated space for non-white migrants rather than a centre that aimed to improve the conditions of the poor working-class. A 1971 report of the Prefet of the Paris region on the “*resorption of the bidonvilles and the problem of migrants*” asserts that housing French families in *cités de transit* for migrants “*should be prohibited and no exceptions should even be tolerated*”²⁸.

The Prefet refers to the transit centres as “centres for migrants”. The separation of North African families in the centres combined with its marginalized location led to durable and long-term segregation of its residents, as illustrated in the left-wing newspaper *Liberation*, who described the *cités* as “*a deliberate and planned policy of deporting and locking up these sections of the population*”.²⁹ Most of the *cités* were managed by the Sonacotra or the Cetrafa, an organization that stemmed from the colonial period. The *gérants* [concierges] of the transit centres had the authority to surveil the families and intervene when deemed necessary. Migrant organizations and activists criticized the *cités de transit*: the *gérants* of the *cités* are “*the king in the cité*” and rule with a “*reign of terror*”.³⁰ In residents’ own words “*here we are secluded, we wonder if we are human or if we are taken for savage animals, savage animals that must be isolated from civilization, this is a concentration camp*”.³¹

And hence, the transit centres functioned as segregated spaces within the French metropole. Their existence was motivated by an assimilationist goal that the administration knew did not function in practice. Already in 1963, research showed that the families living in the *cités de transit* were slow to integrate because of segregation. This failure to integrate, however, was read as a symptom of the poor adaptability of migrant families.³² Moreover, because of a lack of other housing options and HLM availability, many families were housed in these centres for many years, even though these centres were supposed to be transitory and *éducatif* [educational]. Moreover, inadaptation was not the only reason to house Algerian families in *cités de transit*: families from the informal housing settlement were frequently put in the centres because there was simply not enough HLM housing available (Cohen, 2013). On average, North African families spent 8 years in the *cités de transit*, instead of the envisioned couple of months to a year (Zehraoui, 1976). The temporary and repressive climate of these centres allowed the authorities to control the migrant population, and expulse those considered unwanted from French territory.³³ Moreover, it allowed the authorities to re-purpose the land on which the centres was built if deemed desired (Ginesy-Galano, 1984). By putting these families in *cités de transit*, sometimes for long periods of time, the French administration marked their difference, precariousness, and their inassimilability while at the same time arguing that these practices are necessary for assimilation.

Whereas segregationist policies excluded migrant men and so-called ‘inadapted’ families, housing policies also hyper-focused on *cohabitation* between ‘adaptable’ north African

families and French families. A policy similar to the urban planning in the colonial context in French Algeria that enforced *cohabitation* through special housing policies for the Muslim Algerians through which the colonial government could craft and control Muslim domesticity, administrators in the metropole saw *cohabitation* as a way to insert Algerian families within the French community, and calm nationalist sentiments amidst the Algerian war (Blanc-Chaléard, 2016). The FAS and the Sonacotral promoted technocratic mechanisms to enforce *brassage* of Muslim Algerian families to counter segregation and promote assimilation into the French community.

This notion of the necessity to place a maximum of Algerian families in neighbourhoods and buildings was more about the crafting of a racial balance that reinforced racial boundaries than about inclusion. After Algerian independence, the notions of the *seuil de tolérance* [tolerance threshold] became widely popularized. Problematizing "*the well-known tendency of Algerians to gather in a certain number of districts which they quickly transformed into a medina*", politicians and bureaucrats alike believed that above a certain threshold, assimilation was impossible, and the (white) French community would not tolerate migrants' presence.³⁴ These concerns revolved mostly around housing, but also around schools and children's camps, and around local shops and restaurants in a given neighbourhood.³⁵ This logic reveals a colonial undertone, illustrated by the frequent usage of the term *medina*, of the former colonized subjects' presence in the metropole. Moreover, this discourse and the policies that followed invisibilized interracialization within North African households so to racially differentiate between North Africans and the rest of the population.

This motivated policies in HLM housing (and not for *cités de transit*) that set in place a semi-formal system under which the Logi-group (part of the SONACOTRA) built HLM housing, and traded housing with regular HLM services. In 1962, two housing organizations agreed semi-formally that the HLM housing should only house one "Muslim household" for every 10 "metropolitan households".³⁶ The Prefet of the department du Nord argues that this would 'fix' the problem of the presence of Muslim families in his department. The Minister of construction wrote that he agreed with this measure, and underlines the necessity to 'exchange' families between HLM organizations that target "Muslim families" on the one hand, and "European" families (that is: white) on the other hand, to avoid segregation.³⁷

The Logi-group built and funded social housing specifically for migrant families. Officially, migrants were eligible for regular HLM housing and should be considered without difference from the French population. However, very few North African families obtained housing through the regular application routes. The sociologist Zehraoui estimates in his research in 1976 that 2 or 3 per cent of Algerian migrant households were successful in their housing application (Zehraoui, 1976). He remarks "*a certain attitude of the relevant authority on the matter*".³⁸ Most North African households obtained HLM housing through the special projects and agreements developed under the efforts to resorb informal housing. And through these specialized institutions, the HLM authorities could enforce the 'cap' on north African families.

The authorities asserted that the quotas and the tolerance threshold should not be discriminatory, but at the same time, implemented discriminatory quotas through discretionary measures. The 'cap' was never a mandatory policy across France, but more a rule of thumb used by officials, allowing discretion. Whereas the discussions between high-

ranked officials placed the ‘cap’ on fifteen per cent, in reality, only about five per cent of apartments were attributed to migrants. The tolerance threshold did however translate into local circulars that prohibited new migrant families to live in certain neighbourhoods, referred to as *medinas*, where the local governments considered that the threshold had been reached.³⁹ This latter circular mentioned explicitly that it is prohibited to implement “*discriminatory measures that apply the rule only to Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian families*”. However, throughout the policy documents and discussions, it targeted almost exclusively these families. The authorities thus had an awareness of its discriminatory workings, but continued to implement caps that were concerned with the finding of a right ‘racial balance’ in urban space under the guise of assimilation and tolerance.

6. Sterilized assimilation

Housing policies were based on a version of assimilation that promoted a racial balance and difference between north African migrants and the rest of the French population. This prevented interracialized intimacies and invisibilized interracialized households, all the while obsessing with ‘adapting’ families, the necessity of quotas so as not to surpass a tolerance threshold, and segregation of inassimilable men and families. Mixture in urban space was thus dependent on and intertwined with the negation of interracialisation in domestic space. The segregation of families in *cités de transit* and the obsession with the tolerance threshold and quotas in HLM housing was dependent on the construction of the “North African household” as a racialized monolithic category that could be segregated and/or spatially distributed through quotas – and controlled.

The authorities did not respond favourably to interracialized families who made themselves visible outside of their identification as a North African family. Monique Hervo, an activist militant who lived for years in the informal settlements of Nanterre, describes in her journal the experience of Jeanette, who was married to an Algerian man and arrived in the “bidonville de Nanterre” in 1957.⁴⁰ In 1968, after 11 years of living in a make-shift home, Jeanette went once again to the social housing services (HLM) to ask about her application for an HLM apartment. At the prefecture de la Seine, the official responsible for social housing applications responded to her demand by proclaiming that he will not help her because the HLM is “*not for ‘small goats’*” [pejorative, racist term for Arabs]⁴¹. He went on to exclaim that “*Negros, and all that, is not my area*”.⁴² Because she lives in the informal settlement, she is not seen as French: “*Are there any French people in the bidonville? Of course not!*” He found it her fault for living in the informal settlement, as she chooses to live with ‘Arabs’.

In this encounter, the official saw Jeanette as the wife of a North African labourer – and mixed couples with a French woman and North African man were subsumed under the ‘North African household’ category. The housing policies make Jeanette’s situation unthinkable, unintelligible within the system. Her Frenchness does not challenge the conflation of the bidonville with racialized bodies, nor does it challenge the exclusion of north African families from HLM housing outside of the quota system. Rather, her presence in the bidonville and the interracialisation in her domestic sphere marks Jeanette as racialized, and she is placed outside of the French community. This shows an investment in the negation of interracialisation within the household. This legitimized the separation

of north African families from the rest of the French population through the housing policies, which in its turn were carefully administered in terms of policies on spatial distribution across urban space.

The policies on cohabitation and quotas on the one hand, and segregation, on the other hand, allowed the French authorities to codify racialized difference within urban space. Interracialisation within the domestic sphere and interracialized intimacies transgressed these racialized boundaries. The invisibilization and prevention of interracialisation in the domestic space while at the same time hyper-focusing on *brassage* and a racial balance in domestic space reveal that the policies encouraged what I argue to be sterilized assimilation. This refers to a type of inclusion that reinforces perpetuates and reinforces racial and gender boundaries, more about proximity and control than inclusion. Whereas the official discussions about the housing policies revolved around assimilation, ‘evolution’, ‘adaptation’, and tolerance, the policies did not have the effect, nor the intended effect, of including the North African population into the French community. Rather, the regulation of domestic and urban space through housing policies functions as a tool of governance that reinforces the racialized difference between the white French families and the north African families (whose tolerability was assumed to have a threshold) all the while promoting assimilation.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued the French administration employed colonial practices to regulate the presence of migrant from North Africa in the hexagon through housing policies, that brought together the regulation of urban space with the domestic space. Housing policies for families differentiated between ‘adaptable’ and ‘inadapted families’, by measuring and intervening in the domestic space. Moreover, housing policies differentiated between families and single men. Reading the regulation of the domestic space and urban space together reveals that policies that aimed to encourage cohabitation and ‘mixture’ in urban space were dependent on the invisibilization and prevention of interracialization in domestic space.

Housing policies for single north African men segregated single migrant spatially and intervened in their intimate lives in a way that it did not allow for the construction of domesticity, which worked to prevent interracialized intimacies. By tracing fragmented information in the government archive, and informed by feminist research on the regulation of intimacy and domesticity, I was able to retrieve invisibilized presence of interracialized households. Housing policies for families negated interracialization in the domestic space all the while encouraging a form of ‘mixture’ in urban space that is based on an understanding of the racialized difference between North African families and white families. Through these policies, the authorities could enforce sterilized assimilation, which worked to reinforce racial boundaries rather than encourage inclusion.

The current anxieties about *communautarisme*, the lack of integration and the necessity of *mixité sociale* that are the dominant paradigm today are built upon this history of the frantic regulation of inclusion and exclusion through spatial politics and the crafting of domesticity. The ways in which the French administration targeted the North African migrant population in the 1960s and 1970s was based on and perpetuated racialized difference of these migrants all the while promising assimilation.

The apparent ‘contradiction’ between the encouragement of *mixité sociale* and the reality of marginalisation and segregation is a consequence of sterilized assimilation. Concerns and policies on spatial distribution should be understood as intertwined with the regulation of the domestic space. Feminist insights on French Empire taught us that French colonial governance promised an equality that could never be completed within the civilizing mission while reinforcing racial boundaries within the domestic sphere. These insights reveal in a postcolonial context that the encouragement of sterilized assimilation perpetuates rather than breaks down racialized and gendered exclusion. As a consequence, contemporary discussions on *mixité sociale* and concerns about unassimilated segregated communities build on and reactivate racial boundaries.

8. Endnotes

¹ Métropole stands for the central territory of a colonial empire. In this case, it refers to the European French territory.

² In this paper I will use “North Africans” to designate people born in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (both before and after independence) who were regulated under the local Muslim status before independence, and their children. This does not necessarily correspond to their nationality status. This is in line with the categorization in the archive that refers to these people as one group, namely “North Africans”, albeit incoherently and inconsistently.

³ Bidonville was the common used term to refer to low-income informal housing with poor living conditions. I will use the term bidonville when I paraphrase or cite policy documents. However, I will use the term “informal low-income housing settlement”.

⁴ Synthèse de rapports des charges de mission du service de liaison et de promotion des migrants, ministry of interior, 1966, in Archives Nationales 19770346/10. Translated by author from French “Les migrants originaires d’Afrique du Nord et d’Afrique No re comptent un nombre relativement élevé d’a sociaux dont l’adaptation semble, a priori, exclue. [...] Cette population est composée essentiellement d’actifs masculins célibataires. La présence des familles, élément de stabilisation, leur fait particulièrement défaut.”

⁵ For example, the circular of 5 October 1972 (on the “preparation for the resorption of unsanitary housing and for the housing of immigrants) differentiates between “the foyers for isolate workers” and “family housing”.

⁶ Lettre de Michel Massenet, délégué aux affaires sociales en Métropole to the secretariat général pour les affaires algériennes, 25 mars 1960, in Archives Nationales 19770391/6

⁷ Lettre du fonds d’action social au monsieur le directeur de la Socatral, 21 juillet 1961, in Archives Nationales 19770391/6.

⁸ Rapport Correard de la CETRAFA SLPM, octobre 1965, Les cites de transit pour famille. Sent to the F.A.S. on 5 october 1965, in Archives Nationales 19770391/6. . This report was compiled by the former CTAM officer Jean Correard. Translated by author from French “pas le degré nécessaire d’évolution”.

⁹ E.g. in Etudes « La cohabitation des familles françaises et étrangères », Ministère de l’Équipement et du Logement, August 1970, in Archives Nationales 19771141/17

¹⁰ E.g. in Lettre F.A.S. au directeur général de la Sonacotral, « immeuble destiné au logement de 180 travailleurs musulmans algériens et de 10 familles, 21 juillet 1961, in Archives Nationales 19770391/6

¹¹ E.g. in Etudes « La cohabitation des familles françaises et étrangères », Ministère de l’Équipement et du Logement, August 1970, in Archives Nationales 19771141/17. Translated by author from French « initier les familles à la vie moderne »

¹² Rapport Correard de la CETRAFA SLPM, octobre 1965, Les cites de transit pour famille. Sent to the F.A.S. on 5 october 1965, in Archives Nationales 19770391/6.

¹³ For example, one of the reasons/examples given of the assimilability of European migrants is the high prevalence of mixed marriages between Italians or Polish and French people. Synthèse des rapports trimestriels établis par les conseillers techniques pour les affaires musulmanes, July 1967,

ministère de l'intérieur. Service des affaires musulmanes et de l'action sociale, confidentiel. In Archives Nationales 19770346/10

^{14 14} Synthèse des rapports trimestriels établis par les conseillers techniques pour les affaires musulmanes, 1959-1965. ministère de l'intérieur. Service des affaires musulmanes et de l'action sociale, confidentiel. In Archives Nationales 19760133.

¹⁵ Etudes sociales nord africaines, compte rendu d'activité association d'entraide nord-africaine d'Indre et Loire année 1961, 30 juin 1962, in the private archives of Monique Hervo, ARC-3019-11

¹⁶ In (Cohen, 2013), p. 477

¹⁷ Rapports Trimestriels du Conseillers techniques pour les affaires musulmane, 1958-1963, in Archives Nationales 19760133/14

¹⁸ ESNA recherches les africains du nord a Grenevilliers 1963, in Archives Municipale Seine-Saint-Denis 37AC17

¹⁹ Accordingly, of all 205 families categorized as 'North African', 30.7% of 'mixed families' in Le Havre live in HLM, and only 18% of 'Muslim' families live in HLM. The earlier mentioned research from the ESNA from 1963 shows that in their sample, 17 North African families live in HLM housing, of which seven are "mixed".

Prefet de la Seine-Maritime a le ministre de l'intérieur, services des affaires musulmanes. Objet : Logement des travailleurs musulmans et leurs familles. 1960. In Archives Nationales 19770391/6

²⁰ Translated from French by author: "Si les ménages mixtes paraissent avatagés dans cette répartition, cela tient, la plupart du temps, à ce que les épouses européennes bénéficient d'un préjugé favorable pour la tenue du foyer, par rapport aux musulmanes, qui, sans leur être inférieures, dans beaucoup de cas, ont néanmoins besoin d'une période d'adaptation plus ou moins prolongée à la vie occidentale. ", *ibid.*

²¹ Translated by author from French " Il serait également susceptible de réaliser une meilleure surveillance par la Police du foyer lui-meme et de ses abords, surveillance à laquelle son implantation actuelle se prete mal." Prefet de l'Ain, a monsieur le premier ministre delegation de l'action sociale pour les travailleurs etrangers et pour information a ministre de l'intérieur, 7 may 1961, objet : hebergements des travailleurs d'outre mer et notamment des travailleurs algériens. In Archives Nationales 19770391/6.

²² Translated by author from French "C'était la grande question de l'époque : les visites et notamment les visites féminines " In (Bernardot, 2008), p. 126.

²³ Translated by author from French "Pas de visite dans le foyer. C'est le règlement ! Ils ont pourtant passé l'âge de l'internat. " Le Figaro, 19 janvier 1973, la fin d'un foyer-taudis. In the archives of the ministry of interior include newspaper clippings on the rent strikes, collected by the director of public liberty and juridical affairs. In Archives Nationales 19960134/3.

²⁴ E.g. Synthèse des rapports trimestriels établis par les conseillers techniques pour les affaires musulmanes, 1^e trimestre 1959, ministère de l'intérieur. Service des affaires musulmanes et de l'action sociale, confidentiel. In Archives Nationales 19760133/14.

²⁵ SLPM, Note sur l'immigration entrangere dans le rhone, 1971. In Archives Nationales 19860269/11

²⁶ In (Shepard, 2018) p 233.

²⁷ circulaire 19 avril 1972 relative aux cités de transit stipulates "Obviously the cités de transit are likely to receive foreign families as well as families of French origin", translated from French by author: "Bien evidemment les cités de transit sont susceptibles de recevoir aussi bien des familles etrangeres que des familles d'origine francaise. "

²⁸ Rapport a Monsieur le Préfet de la Region Parisienne sur la Résorption des bidonvilles et les problèmes des migrants, 1971. In Archives Nationales 19770317/1. Translated from French by author " Cette facon de procéder doit etre prohibé et il ne doit meme etre toléré aucune exception. "

²⁹ Translated from French by author : " Avec le cite de transit, on assiste a une politique deliberée et planifiée de deportation et de parquage de ces couches de population, voire meme de fabrication d'une frange marginale exclue du monde du travail ". Liberation 11 june 1974, Claude Liscia et Gérard Melchior. In Blanc-Chaléard 2016, p. 357.

³⁰ Asti, info sur les cités de transit, 1974, , Info sur les cités de transit, personal documents of Monique Hervo (undated), In private archives of Monique Hervo ARC-3019-11

³¹ Personal documents « la cité de transit solution pratique pour le relogement des travailleurs immigrés » by Monique Hervo, undated but probably 1974, , In private archives of Monique Hervo ARC-3019-11

³² ESNA recherches les africains du nord a Grenevilliers 1963, In Archives Municipale Seine-Saint-Denis ASD-37AC17

³³ In Liscia, C (1977) l'enferment des cités de transit, edited by the migrant organization La Cimade. In the private archives of Monique Hervo, ARC3019/11. This booklet explains how the gérants of the centers kept a close eye on the residents and in cooperation with the police, expelled undesired migrants to Algeria, including children who had never been to Algeria.

³⁴ Prefet de la region rhone-alpes, péfet du Rhone a Monsieur le Premier Minsitre, Le Ministre de l'Interieur, le Ministre du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Population, 5 january 1972, letter no subject, in Archives Nationales 19860269/11

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Prefecture du Nord, 27 avril 1962. In Archives Nationales 19770391/6.

³⁷ Ministre de la construction a prefet du nord, 1962, Construction par les offices et societes HLM de logements destinés a des familles musulmanes. In Archives Nationales 19770391/6.

³⁸ Translated from French by author " Une certaine attitude des autorités sur la question".

³⁹ Circulaire 15 june 1970, « limitation de l'admission des familles étrangères. »

⁴⁰ Monique Hervo kept notes on all the families that passed through the bidonville. She has recorded 10 'mixed couples' in the bidonville of Nanterre, out of (about) 210 couples/families. In private archives of Monique Hervo, 1968, ARC-3019-4. I have changed the names to comply with privacy requirements of the archives.

⁴¹ Translated from French by author : "pas pour les bicots ", ibid.

⁴² Translated from French by author : "les negres, tout ca, c'est pas mon rayon! ", ibid.

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