



HAL
open science

Migration between Europe and North Africa and the Hybridization of Urban and Domestic Practices

Daniel Pinson, Rabbia Bekkar

► **To cite this version:**

Daniel Pinson, Rabbia Bekkar. Migration between Europe and North Africa and the Hybridization of Urban and Domestic Practices. Urban renewal, ethnicity and social exclusion in Europe, Ashgate, p.103-125., 1998. halshs-01519420

HAL Id: halshs-01519420

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01519420>

Submitted on 7 May 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

“Migration between Europe and North Africa and the Hybridization of Urban and Domestic Practices”

in *Urban renewal, ethnicity and social exclusion in Europe*
(A. Khakee, P. Somma, H. Thomas, Ed.), Ashgate, Aldershot (GB) & Brookfield (USA),
1998, p.103-125.

by *Daniel Pinson, Rabbia Bekkar*

Much of what has been written about North African immigration in Europe focuses on policies of integration and their effects, and on problems experienced by North African subjects in the areas of employment, training, urban life, and civil rights in the host country. Often the scholars who are interested in these questions know little about the societies of origin of the immigrants they study, and rare are those scholars of Arab/Muslim society who are interested in the situation of emigrant groups in Europe. It may be interesting, then, to study the cultural evolutions of these migrants, looking at the nature of the exchanges that take place between one society to another, and the marks left by these exchanges on the subjects themselves, or, more precisely, on their domestic universe, and on their relationship to the public world, to urban space. This is what we propose to do in this article, based on a small research project on housing in the country of origin¹ and in the host country. This preliminary study will be followed by a more systematic research project on this question. (2)

The culture of the country of origin and that of the host country are two extremes; it is in the movement between them that new identities are coming into being.

North African migration towards Europe is made up of a long series of comings and goings between the country of origin and the so-called "host" country. In the 1960s was the "great departure," caused by the industrial demand of the "Thirty Glorious Years" (1945-1975). Then came a period of family reunification in the 1970s. Since then, every summer one can see the convoys of cars, their trunks and overhead racks heavily laden with gifts, streaming down the highways of France and Spain. These are the immigrants taking advantage of their paid summer vacations to return to North Africa. These "small returns" maintain ties with the family and country of origin.

We consider these "small" returns, and the movements and exchanges that go along with them, as vectors importing Western cultural values to the families remaining in the country and at the same time as mediators of a periodic return to the resources of the culture of origin for the emigrants themselves.

Situated temporally between the "great departure" and a possible "great return," and situated spatially between two contrasting cultural areas, these "small returns" structure the economy of a profound transformation, made up of acculturation, deculturation, and hybridization.

Domestic space as an expression of social change

It is through the evolution of domestic space that we hope to get at these changes. We have deliberately chosen to work with the broad, generic term "domestic space," so as not to limit the categories with which it might be concerned.

Claude Levi-Strauss reminds us of the primary and no doubt universal meaning of the concept of "house": it designates the lineage, the extended family (as in "the House of York"), and it originally was used more to refer to the social entity than to its locale. "The house," Levi-Strauss explains, "is first and foremost a moral person, holder of a domain composed of material and immaterial goods. By 'immaterial goods' I mean that which arises from traditions; by material goods, I mean the possession of an actual property..." (3)

Arab society expresses the same conceptual category with the vocable *aila*, the extended agnatic family. Maurice Borrmans remarks upon this bivalence of the term *aila*: "It normally designates the group of people who are 'dependent' on one individual: wife, children, parents, divorced sisters, young brothers, and even the households of certain children or of one of the brothers of the head of the family. Since everyone lives in the same unit of residence, the word 'house' best expresses this family reality." (4)

The term "house" in developed societies refers to a purely historical reality, which has now disappeared with the spread of the nuclear family. However, in Morocco the term still refers to a social entity which has not yet been torn apart, although it is not untouched by the modernization of Moroccan society.

The residential system and the evolution of kinship structure

Emigrants, most of whom come from rural regions where agnatic bonds are strong, experience very intensely the disturbance of family ties. Their departure contributes to this disturbance by adding the element of distance, but even more important is the element of immersion in modern society. The individuality of the subject in a society deemed free (according to law) counts more than membership in a family group. For an emigrant family, the younger generation (i.e. the second generation), while brought up to respect the progenitor, the father, at the same time believes in modern values which put the individual success of the subject before the interests of the group (this applies to everything from marriage to education). As Carmel Camilleri put it, "the family progressively loses its quality of exclusive affiliation, as the children participate more and more in the groups of the host society; still, the family remains a point of reference of much greater importance than is the case for French people... The group, at the center of the traditional system as a source of guidance and prescription, is not challenged for its intervention in the life of its members. As young people reject more and more the transcendence of the family, they reinterpret it as a supporter of the individual: the collective, the motor of the previous model, has to reckon with the subject who is striving for autonomy, essential value of the Western model." (5)

This contradiction between the two models cuts across the immigrant family, which finds itself torn between the desire of the parents to return home and that of the children, deculturated from their parents' society of origin, who want to be recognized in the host country.

These anthropological considerations (extended family, emergence of the subject) lead us to the following hypothesis: emigrant domestic space should be seen as a residential system, an overall articulated system which alternates between:

- the house of origin, which we call the mother house; and,
 - living quarters in the country of emigration, which we call the interim house;
- as well as, in some cases:

- the house of return; and/or,
- the permanent home in the host country.

Based on empirical studies of habitat in countries of origin and host countries, we have come to see the richness and complexity of the transformations in habitat and modes of life influenced by the dialogue between the loan culture and the culture of origin.

The mother house in the country of origin

In the residential system of the emigrant, the house which one leaves is the house of one's kin, of one's parents who remain behind. It is a point of reference and an indispensable refuge if the precarious adventure of emigration ends up as a failure. It is also a reservoir for the values of the culture of origin. This is particularly true in Arab-Muslim culture, where the house is of great importance: in the midst of an exterior world presumed to be hostile, the house is a protected microcosm, in which the family can flourish. Access is regulated by strict codes, still in operation today, as numerous studies have shown (6).

The meaning and the value attached to the home matrix (the mother house) are directly related to the form of emigration. Two basic forms of emigration can be clearly distinguished: individual emigration, and family emigration. The following examples illustrate the role of the mother house in maintaining solidarity between the part of the family remaining in the country and those living abroad.

Individual Emigration

The first example concerns emigrants who leave their spouses at home.

A house in Khouribga, in Morocco, constantly improved with the revenues of work abroad, becomes the home base for an extended family: the paternal grand-mother presides over a space provided by her two married sons (who spend eight months out of twelve in Italy), in which nine people are in permanent residence (the grand-mother, her two daughters-in-law, and the seven young children of the two couples). Within the building, there is a common space for the extended family, situated on the top floor; each son also has a distinct conjugal space separated by the guest room. In the layout of this house, one can see the reproduction of a traditional system, linking the conjugal space to the guest reception area, all of which is marked with the seal of a masculinity here temporarily delegated to the mother-in-law.

Family emigration

The mother house is also of great importance to those who go abroad with their families. Our second example illustrates the repercussions of the exodus to Germany of three sons from among the seven children of a teacher (*mu'allim*) living in El Jadida, Morocco. The oldest son, who is married, lives on the ground floor, the father on the second floor. The family being a fundamental entity, its unity is essential and the presence of the oldest son under the same roof as his father represents the father's wishes freely accepted by the son. The conception of the building illustrates the nature of this solidarity: the son on the ground floor and the father on the second floor are bound in a relationship of respect, expressed by the hierarchical pair above/below. In spite of the identical arrangement of their rooms around the same rather large central space (20 square meters), conspicuous differences express the difference in family status and generation. Therefore there is a guest room (*bit al-diaf*) in the son's part of the house as well as in the father's. However, the father's guest room is considerably bigger than that of the son. Thus is expressed the preeminence of the patriarch over his son.

Furthermore, it is this room which functions periodically as a gathering place for the extended family, in a situation in which the absence of part of the family is painfully felt (all the more so since there are no definite plans of return).

Here modern furnishings coexist, in a minor way, with traditional forms: a European living room in the central space, a modern bath room with a Turkish-style toilet.

The house in the host country

Preliminary research results show two dominant approaches to the house in the host country. These are determined by the type of family concerned, the national/ethnic origin of the spouse, and the professional and educational future of the children.

The interim house

Immigrant workers often live in rent-controlled housing projects (Habitation Loyer Moyen, known as HLMs). The experience of the HLM is shaped by the prospect of a possible, but difficult, return to the country of origin, and/or by the prospect of buying a home in the host country. If this prospect turns out to be impossible, the HLM, originally a temporary abode, out of necessity becomes a place of permanent residence.

Ambivalence thus marks the projects of an unemployed mason, a Moroccan immigrant interviewed in a large apartment complex in the Urban Development Zone (ZUP) of Bellevue in the region of Nantes. He had arrived alone in France in 1969, and his wife had joined him in 1970. Their original project of a house in the country of origin is now being realized, making concrete the parents' desire to return to the ancestral country. However, this prospect is contradicted, year by year, by the progressive rooting of the children in the country of emigration. In spite of educational, professional, and other difficulties, many of them have found husband, wife, or career in the host city.

Between permanent settlement and house of return

The HLM is not necessarily the conclusion of the trajectory of the immigrant. The immigrant's life history, past and present; the character (mixed or not) of the couple; and the degree of assimilation of Western cultural values, are all significant factors.

Buying a house in the host country

In the context of a research project on worker housing in two factories in the region of Nantes, we interviewed an Algerian worker, a representative for a major French union (the CFDT), who is married to a social worker (of French origin and working part-time). This man is one of those who has stayed in the HLM, hoping for a larger apartment, and is ambivalent about his future plans, hesitating between purchase of a small private home and definitive return to his country. Another worker, also Algerian, also married to a French woman, is one of the few to leave the HLM to move to a house of his own.

Once permanent settlement is decided upon, the project of home-ownership expresses adherence to a Western way of life and to Western kinds of spatial arrangements. The references to the culture of origin become purely anecdotal: for example, in this house which the inhabitants are in the process of buying, the low silver table (*ma'ida*) set with a tea service and covered with a table cloth of light tulle.

In a Moroccan family living in a large apartment building in Brittany, the divergence of prospects cuts across the descendants: the oldest two children (41 and 36 years old, both married) are committed to a future in France, but the parents follow two younger sons (32 and 31 years old, the first of whom is married), very attached to traditional

values, who have taken on the work of a large neo-traditional house in the country of origin.

The house of return

The land is bought, the blueprints for the houses are drawn. On the second floor of the building will be the apartment of the parents, composed of an enormous guest reception area and an area strictly for the family. On the upper story, the two sons will share two apartments which connect directly to the terrace, while the ground floor will be a large commercial area. It is intended to be a tea house which would solve the problem of professional reconversion.

The house of return is much more likely to be one of a rediscovered and therefore sublimated culture, than to be that of a modernity discovered during the experience of living in Western society and then imported to the country of return. This hypothesis, suggested by a certain number of research projects on economic habitat, remains to be verified through more extensive research.

We can however draw some conclusions about the factors that contribute to the traditional references in the house of return.

With these references, the emigrant himself seems to be inscribing, with his often considerable means, an intense and sincere nostalgia ("homesickness"). At the same time, he marks his legitimate sense of national, ethnic, or familial belonging, which has been shattered in terms of kinship and other relationships by the act of departure. Thus the explicit reference to traditional architecture constitutes for the emigrant a means of re-inscribing himself in his milieu of origin, which often sees the emigrant as a parvenu.

It must be taken into account that the emigrant is strictly dependent on relatives remaining in the country for the realization of the house of return. It is to them that he entrusts the task of overseeing the building of the house. Only in summer, when the emigrant comes to visit during his paid vacation, is he able to control the proper progress of the construction, to speed up certain jobs, modify others, and clarify with the masons (*maallem*) certain prestations (7).

There are clearly an ensemble of determining factors outside the control of the emigrant which come to bear on the manifestation of his project.

The house of the forced return

A long residential experience in Europe, concretized by home ownership, can sometimes be counteracted by a marital separation. This is the destiny of certain mixed couples for whom separation leads to the return of the emigrant partner.

In such cases, the house of return may reflect a profound internalization of an European way of life. A house built in El Jadida, in a lot developed by a semi-public developer, and occupied by a returning emigrant, thus is an exception to the rule which puts the guest reception area on an upper story. Elements of European culture seem to play an essential role in their choice. In fact, one can see in the position of the guest room on the ground floor, and the bed room on the upper story, the reproduction of a Western form of spatial organization. Such a layout is not unrelated to the returning emigrant's long sojourn (1960-1975) and his experience of a first household in France (8). A series of other indications of the centers of interest of this ex-emigrant confirms such an interpretation: his room is also an office and a music room, in which he plays the electronic organ. This Western dimension of his way of life clashes with the strongly traditional traits of the family of his second wife. Her grandmothers and her two

younger brothers (26 and 22 years old), live with the couple, occupying the family room on the ground floor.

Ambivalence and hybridization

Ambivalence between permanent settlement and the prospect of return make the interim house (often in a housing complex) something provisional. The interim house is not the place where one spends money on furniture or other useless and cumbersome articles. Most of one's savings are hoarded up for the purchase of land and construction materials in order to build the house of return. The purchase of furniture is limited to basic necessities, from kitchen equipment to audio-visual equipment (which in any case can be transported), and sometimes extends to the purchase of European living room furniture, which in Morocco characterizes the domestic space of the middle and upper classes (which are the points of reference for the emigrant) and symbolizes their social success.

This provisionality, which sometimes is almost Spartan, does not keep the cultural models of origin from expressing themselves in the organization and layout of the apartment. Thus we can find, in a family living in Bellevue, adapted to the context of an apartment in a housing project, that very clear separation which exists in Morocco between guest rooms and family rooms. The living room thus plays the role of guest room (*bit al-diaf*), and the television which normally reigns over this room in French interior arrangements, is relegated to another room far back in this large apartment inhabited by a big family. This back room, which is laid out with mattresses (*meterbat*) on the floor and which is protected by difficulty of access, is clearly part of the ensemble of intimate rooms which Moroccans classify as *dar haram*.

Conclusion: hybridity and the ubiquity of domestic space

For the North African immigrant particularly, domestic space is conceived as the spatial referent of family unity. A place of refuge, a place of temporary residence, a base for bringing together the family, domestic space cannot be reduced to the housing inhabited in the host country. Each element of the immigrant's residential system sets itself in opposition to public space, which may be familiar (in the country of origin) or foreign (in the host country), but is always a place of exposure to various forms of more or less intense danger (space of the "evil eye" in the Arab-Muslim imagination, space of visibility of one's own otherness in the West). In the various forms discussed above: mother house, interim house, house of return, permanent home, in whichever geographic location, but with different effects, habitat constitutes for the members of the immigrant family a matrix of reinterpretation of new values and old traditions.

Depending on the immigrant's situation (how long in the host country, the region immigrated to, the work context...), the generations concerned, the life cycle, the conception of the family, of the place of the sexes, of the individual in relation to the ethnic group, the role and the vision of domestic space will change profoundly. Throughout the stages of the great voyage taken on by the emigrant, domestic space will incorporate different meanings at different times. These will be constructed in function of circumstances independent of his control, but also in function of the greater or lesser degree of mastery that he has over his life project, and the evolution of this project as it comes into contact with Western society.

For first generation immigrants, the great return remains a very strongly anticipated goal, maintained by the small returns of vacations and by ongoing investment in the project of a house in the country of origin. Twenty years in Europe may elapse without

inducing the immigrant to abandon this project, which on the contrary comforts those who find themselves unemployed before reaching retirement age. On the other hand, those who manage to retire, may wait patiently for the end of their children's education and for their involvement in adult life in order to make a decision which, in reality, is again and again deferred.

Among the second generation, many children resist their parents' project of return, and start a household with the intention of settling permanently in France. This is especially likely to occur when employment is assured in this new family. But for some, the difficulties found in getting work, and the experience of racial discrimination that may accompany the employment search, make conceivable the idea of return. The qualifications acquired in the host country are then considered as capital which can be invested in the country of origin, in spite of the handicaps of a modified cultural identity, revealed in accent, comportment, and dress. For this generation, the inherited capital of the house, the domestic investment as a witness to family solidarity -- values precious to their fathers -- these are supplanted by cultural capital, an expression of the realization of the person as a subject, according to the model of modern Western society.

It may seem obvious that the investment in and the appropriation of the housing occupied in Europe would depend on whether one is building a house of return (as is the case usually for parents) or settling in the country of emigration (as is often the case for children). But in reality, as we have said, things are not that simple: while it may be rare for children to return definitively, it is far less rare for parents, all the while nourishing their dream of definitive return, to transform their interim house into a permanent home. The house of return then becomes a secondary residence, a distant and episodic connection to the phratry.

These decision are based on the nature of the immigrant's residential experience, the rapidity with which the immigrant has taken on the social and cultural values of the host country (the acculturation of young people by education means that they outstrip their parents in this area), and the chances for reinsertion in the country of origin (which are less sure for young people who progressively have lost, in their daily immersion, the references, the words, the customs, of the culture of origin). Other factors also intervene, depending not only on age, but on the place of origin, which may be a remote countryside or a highly-urbanized agglomeration -- places which differ profoundly in terms of the strength of family ties as well as the perception of the immigrant adventure. These hesitations and uncertainties are expressed in the space of the house, its investment in furniture and the presence of different objects, which bring to mind the society of origin and that of the host country, from the banquette (*sdader*) that lines the room to the stereo equipment that faces it. Domestic space, here or elsewhere, is an expression of the family debate between departure and return: but these words have the opposite meanings the youth and his father. The compromise, in this time of uncertainty, is to live in a space that is at once real and imaginary, marked by cultural ubiquity and hybridity. The here-and-now can become the elsewhere-yesterday-tomorrow, the elsewhere-yesterday-tomorrow can become the here-and-now.

Notes :

1. Daniel Pinson, *Modèles d'habitat et contre-types domestiques au Maroc*, Fascicule de recherche no. 24, URBAMA-UA CNRS 365, Université de Tours, 1992, pp. 37 sq.

2. Rabia Bekkar, Nadir Boumaza, Daniel Pinson, "Urbanité, habiter et trajectoires migrantes Europe-Maghreb," research in progress for Plan Construction and Architecture, Paris, 1991.

3. "La maison est d'abord une personne morale, détentrice ensuite d'un domaine composé de biens matériels et immatériels. Par immatériel, j'entends ce qui relève des traditions, par matériel, la possession d'un domaine réel...
« La notion de maison », Interview with Claude Levi-Strauss and Pierre Lamaison, in *Terrain*, no. 9, Paris, Mission du patrimoine ethnologique, October 1987, pp. 34-39.

4. Maurice Borrmans, *Statut personnel et famille au Maghreb de 1940 à nos jours*, Paris-la-Haye, Mouton, 1977, 708 p.

5. "La famille perd progressivement sa qualité de groupe d'appartenance exclusive, du fait de la participation grandissante des enfants aux groupes de la société d'accueil, mais demeure un pôle de référence beaucoup plus fort et beaucoup plus large que chez les Français... Le groupe, placé au centre du système traditionnel en tant qu'agent directeur et prescripteur, n'est pas récusé quant à son intervention dans la vie de ses membres. Cependant les jeunes, rejetant toujours plus sa transcendance, veulent le considérer comme de l'aval de l'individu: le collectif, moteur de l'ancien modèle doit compter avec le sujet qui tend vers l'autonomie, valeur essentiel du modèle occidental." Carmel Camilleri, « Evolution des structures familiales chez les maghrébins et les portugais en France », in *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, MIGRINTER-URA CNRS 1145, Poitiers, Vol. 8-No. 2, 1992, pp. 133-146.

6. Germaine Tillion, *Le harem et les cousins*, Paris, Seuil, 1968; Colette Petonnet, Espace, distance, et dimension, dans une société musulmane, in "L'Homme," XII, Paris, 1972, pp. 47-84; Mohamed Boughali, La représentation de l'espace chez le marocain illettré, Paris, Anthropos, 1974; Dale F. Eickelman, Formes symboliques et espace social urbain, le cas du Maroc, in "Système urbain et développement au Maghreb," Actes du séminaire international de Hammamet, organized by the Social Science Research Council and the Centre culturel International de Hammamet (22-23 June 1976) and edited by A. Rassam and A. Zghal, Tunis, Cérès Productions, 1980, pp. 199-218; Philippe Fargues, Le monde arabe: La citadelle domestique in *Histoire de la Famille*, Tome II, André Burdiere, Christiane Clapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen and Françoise Zonabend, eds., Paris, Armand Colin, 1986, pp. 339-371; Daniel Pinson, Mohamed Zakrani, Maroc: l'espace centré et le passage de la maison médinale à l'immeuble urbain, in *Les Cahiers de la Recherche Architecturale*, no. 20/21, Marseille, 1987, pp. 104-111.

7. Mohamed Berriane, Hans Hopfinger, Migration internationale de travail et croissance urbaine, in "Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales," MIGRINTER-URA CNRS 1145, Poitiers, Vol. 8 No. 2, 1992, pp. 171-190.

8. From this first marriage, this person had three children, one of whom, aged 9, lives with his father's new family.