"A city where I have no place": Immigrant Women's Integration to the City

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Abstract
In this article, I situate the experience of immigrant women in the city, based on empirical data collected with North African immigrant women living in the cities of Montreal and Marseille. I examine their life trajectories, practices, and socio-urban experiences through the concept of the right to the city. Analysis of this data demonstrates a limited contribution outside domestic space and a fragile right to the city that resides mainly in strategies of resistance and self-identification.

An Introduction to Immigrant Women in the City

In academic literature, the question of women in the city often refers to themes of security and vulnerability of women in urban spaces (Coutras, 2003), to gendered uses of urban space (Bashevkin, 2011; Coutras, 1996; Preston & Ustundag, 2005; Raibaud, 2017), and to urban temporalities (Coutras, 1996; Haicault, 2014). If the place and participation of women in the city remains little questioned, those of immigrant women, *a fortiori* when they are racialized, are much more uncertain. In this article, I propose to situate the experience of immigrant women in the city, based on empirical data collected with North African immigrant women living in the cities of Montreal and Marseille. I will examine their life trajectories, practices, and socio-urban experiences through the concept of the right to the city.

The place occupied by immigrant women in the city remains little known and refers to multiple forms of exclusion, both spatial and social, which demonstrate the relevance of the concept of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1967, 1972) in exploring the experiences of racialized immigrant women in the city.

Examining Immigrant Women's Experiences through the Concept of the Right to the City

The right to the city is a concept coined by Henry Lefebvre in the late sixties in a context of intense urban transformation in France and the word (Lefebvre, 1967). Lefebvre's work refers to a combination of social class stratification and fights, while also questioning the future of cities as a life environment. Lefevre situated and questioned working class struggles to inhabit a city that acknowledges their social needs and to be included in the process of urban design. The city depicted in his work is a scene of complex economic struggles that find a concrete inscription in the urban space.

Since its publication, Lefebvre's work raised many controversies and developments essentially through critiques brought by Harvey (2003, 2010) whose work contributed to contextualizing the right to the city in a contemporary neoliberal world and cities. In recent contributions, Harvey proposes to expand the claim initially made by Lefebvre to encompass the right to an inclusive city responding to everyone's needs. His interpretation of the right to the city takes into consideration the reification of neoliberal global structures and poses the city as the scene of neoliberal practices strategies and divides (Harvey, 2008; 2010; 2011). However, both authors examined a depersonalized city and addressed the needs of depersonalized citizens whose gender, race, abilities, and social trajectories were not taken into consideration. A Marxist framework, focused on social class and working-class struggles, is central in both contributions.

While both authors contribute to politicizing the definition of the city and its actors and reveal the power dynamics between them, they fail to juxtapose gender and race to this reading grid.

The right to the city is little explored in its gendered and racialized dimension and little positioned in a context of immigration. This omission is significant because in mots immigration cities in the global North, working class is composed of a significant number of new-comer and long termer immigrants (Falquet, 2008; Soussi, 2013; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003). Contemporary transnational labor migration puts racialized migrants

from the global south on the route to become a new under-class of workers whose rights, work and life conditions in wealthy cities in the global north are comparable to those of the 3rd world countries they left behind them (Di Genova, 2010; Falquet, idem; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, idem).

In recent years migration studies demonstrated a growing presence of women in transnational migration waves (Kofman, 2009; 2010; Kofman & Raghuram, 2010). However, some authors suggest that it the influence of feminist theories that contributed to bring women to visibility in migration contingents (Moujoud, 2008; Kofman, 2010). These women are mots seen in second roles as accompanying spouses or dependents, care workers, or agricultural workers, whose life condition in immigration is little know in terms of their contribution to shaping the city and influencing its subjectivity.

Examining women migration experiences in cities of the global North will allow me to see which place and role they do occupy. The place, hospitality, and constructive interactions they do have are the substance of their right to the city.

This exploration of the right to the city of racialized immigrant women will be examined through empirical data collected from North African immigrant women living in Marseille (France) and Montreal (Quebec-Canada).

North African immigrant women in Western cities combine barriers related to gender and immigration in the deployment of their urban practices, and in their access to urban services; it would therefore be very interesting to consider their paths into integration into the city through the prism of the right to the city, understood as a "right to urban life, transformed, renewed"[1] (Lefebvre, 1967, p. 35); such as the right to live in a city that meets the "social needs" (p. 29), and the "specific needs" (p. 29) of socialization and civic participation of immigrants and which would give them a place and a role, as well as the "collective power to reshape urbanization processes" (Garnier, 2014, p. 62).

In the following sections, and after a brief presentation of the empirical data, I propose to examine their right to the city in the light of their experiences of integration into the city.

North African Immigrant Women on both Shores of the Atlantic

The empirical data I examine in the present contribution was collected as part of a research that explores integration processes for North African immigrant women in the cities of Montreal (Canada) and Marseille (France). These two cities historically play an important role in the entry and settlement of North African immigrants in France and Quebec (Canada) and the history of these cities are marked by successive waves of immigration (IDIQ, 2014; Temime & Echinard, 1991).

The goal of the research was to grasp the process of integration in its complex facets (spatial, economic, cultural, linguistic, social, etc.) through the perspective of immigrant women, in order to situate the mechanisms of urban integration.

This data consists of in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with first-generation immigrant women with different immigration status, different ages, education levels, social class, and residing in the cities of Montreal and Marseille since at

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[1] Personal translation from French (original text)

least one year. A total with 24 interviews (13 in Marseille and, 11 in Montreal) were conducted during the Fall 2015 and the winter 2016. The recruitment of respondents was done randomly, which allowed me to identify immigrants with very variable lengths of stay and representative of the different waves of migration, even if the respondents from Marseilles had longer stays in comparison of immigrants from Montreal.

All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed with Nvivo data analysis software. The analysis carried out consisted of a thematic analysis, which in addition to exploring the themes and the meanings associated with urban integration, allowed me to reconstruct immigration trajectories along with trajectories in the city, which were resilience trajectories despite the difficulties encountered by most respondents. Examining the respondents' integration trajectories, I could clearly see a constant, renewed capacity to face adversity and to develop survival and resistance strategies. Interviews overlapped stories of immigration and settlement, stories of the city, which consisted mainly in stories of urban and residential mobility. The semi-directive framework of the interviews served to lead discussions towards immigration, the city, integration, and the services received, while remaining flexible enough to bring an open and sensitive perspective on other meaningful experiences.

Professional profiles were very varied: they include highly educated women and women with lower levels of education, with respondents from Montreal having higher levels of education compared to those living in Marseille.

Complex Paths into Urban Integration

In the following section I will present the main findings in relation to integration processes and the role or the absence of the city in these processes.

Immigration entry routes in the respondents' narratives were extremely variable, with preponderance for family reunification. Although the sample mainly includes women with legal immigration status, several women had experienced precarious migration statuses, in some cases close to illegality. This number is very limited in our sample (2 in Montreal, and 1 in Marseille), but demonstrates the difficulties that immigrants from North Africa have in accessing a stable migratory status and explains the dominance of heterosexual family immigration in this group. If marriage seemed to be an express route for immigration (most of my respondents followed a spouse or were sponsored by him), several of them had experienced separations or major conflicts in their couples during time of the interview. Most of the participants had children, and the proportion of those who became mothers after immigration is roughly equal to that of participants who already had children at the time of immigration. The presence of children has a great influence on the capacity of these women to negotiate certain interactions in the city and mobilizes a large part of their efforts and their time.

Omnipresent Structural Barriers to Urban Citizenship

The interviews focused a lot on the barriers to accessing the city and highlighted many barriers amongst which some were omnipresent. The greatest difficulty was that of finding and securing housing, which process reveals residential and urban pathways that tend to become ghettoized, even if significant differences exist between the two examined

cities. Collected narratives also highlighted the difficulties in accessing certain essential services like health services, daycare, and culturally and linguistically competent services. These difficulties were often linked to immigration status, to a limited service offer, and also to prejudices against the Maghrebi community.

Social isolation was present in most of respondents' integration paths and seemed to result from a poor access to urban services and resources, and more importantly from a limited social network. Some interviews conducted with veiled women demonstrated that social isolation could also be the result of a continuum of circumstances which place immigrant women in situations of self-exclusion. The recurrences of certain discriminatory practices that target veiled women lead them to avoid certain urban practices or certain spaces. This avoidance in urban practices is in a certain way "self-censorship behaviors", which limit, on the long term, their socialization in their society.

Even if most participants showed limited urban practices and displayed a limited appropriation of the urban space, they revealed agency and resilience in the strategies they developed to succeed in their integration project. This resilience and creativity in facing urban adversity contribute to building their right to the city. This right builds upon the efforts deployed towards economic and social integration, as well as a feeling of well-being coupled with a strong sense of belonging.

Difficulties Accessing and Securing Decent Housing

In Marseilles, Zahiya, describes the living conditions of her cousin, a newcomer to the city, as follows:

> there was no room. When I saw her like that, I felt bad for her and I found her an apartment here [in social housing in the northern districts] …. A kind of typical route, common to both cities, seems to be emerging, which answers an impossible equation: choose suitable but outlying or expensive housing, or well-located but cramped and uncomfortable housing.

Aicha is a middle-aged mother. During the years of the war against terrorism in Algeria, she decided to settle in France to offer safer living conditions to her children. When she arrived in Marseille, she had the advantage of having French citizenship acquired by descent (a grandmother obtained the status of French citizen during the colonial period) without having ever set foot in France and without even mastering French. She then benefitted from social support and services that are not available to everyone, "…the social worker sent us directly to a family hotel. …". Aicha ended up working as an employee in this same hotel, the rent was directly deducted from her salary and that of her husband "my husband and I were working at the same time. I do the housework and he takes care of the reception...". Living in a hotel room and raising children there was not an easy thing. After a few years, Aicha is offered larger social housing in the Northern suburbs of Marseille where she had family; she moved there but, in the process, she lost her job and her social network.

Housing is also the source of major anxiety and conflicts for most of my respondents. Ahlem had been living in an apartment in Montreal North when she noticed the presence of bed bugs. She unsuccessfully contacted the owner to do the necessary. Managing a conflict before the housing board in Quebec under an appearance of ease

requires resources that most immigrants do not have; knowledge of laws and legal culture, the ability to document all the communication with the landlord when they are culturally driven to settle conflicts amicably.

Ahlem contacts the board, which assures her of her right. Exasperated by the nuisance, she leaves her home believing that this solves the problem:

> We were told you can get out as long as you have that because we had a report from our exterminator and there we made a mistake... We started [the procedure] and we got out at the same time, but... we didn't did not terminate the lease…. In the lease there was a clause which said that the rent had to be paid in cash. My spouse was giving cash to the landlords…and didn't take receipts and trusted him…Once at the board…he took legal action against us [to ask for 4 months of unpaid rent] and the judge was on his side. … we reached an agreement, … he withdraws the complaint from the management [and we] withdraw our criminal's complaint [for assault]. And he, he withdraws his complaint and afterwards... he sends us a notary to our house to say that his house has been ransacked.

Ahlem is an accountant, her job qualifies her to manage this type of conflicts to her advantage; she could have asked for proof of rent payment, but culturally she sees more interest in smoothing things over and dealing with this type of dispute amicably. This propensity to attempt to settle disputes informally is the source of most housing disputes reported by respondents in Montreal.

Housing thus becomes a central issue that denotes both the difficulty that immigrants encounter in finding a space "for themselves" in the city, but it is also the space where an intense immigrant family life unfolds with great involvement on the success of the integration. The intimate life of immigrant families and women remains little known in public debates and in research, especially when it comes to first-generation immigrant women (Boukhobza, 2005; Kofman, 1999, 2010; Kofman & Raghuram, 2010 Ray & Rose, 2011). An intersectional analysis of the experience of racialized immigrant women at the intersection of race and racism, gender, with other variables specific to the explored cities, such as housing legislation and the structure of the housing market would not only make it possible to better understand these mechanisms, but also to question intervention and service offer with immigrant women (in the provision of social services and in the formulation of adapted programs).

Immigrant Women's Presence in Public Spaces under Public Scrutiny

This narrative of over-visibility and avoidance weighs on the majority of interviews conducted in Montreal and Marseille. Several of my respondents opted to work in daycare services (in schools or day care centers) in order to be able to continue taking care of their own children while contributing to the family income, but also because these are workplaces where they feel less exposed.

Among participants with high human capital and who were able to occupy high professional jobs, several participants reported experiencing variable degrees of discomfort and may also practice some subtle forms of self-censorship. Houda is an

executive manager in an insurance company. She arrived to Montreal after a first immigration to France. She has a managerial position and a very satisfactory quality of life. Houda does not wear the veil despite this; she found her experience in France difficult, because she continuously felt under the magnifying glass,

> In France you have a lot of questions, and then you have a lot of remarks about your religion and origin etc. … it never stopped me from having friends … never excluded from society. Then after a while, it's as if I constantly needed to justify myself in relation to who I was, in relation to religion, in relation to these little details, but at the same time... it's going to be … everyone is going to have drink and I don't drink so I say: "no, I don't drink", and then you'll have to justify why you don't drink so it's little discomforts on a daily basis...

Houda did not experience "these little daily discomforts" as a barrier to economic success, because her social class privileges allowed her to overcome them, but this discomfort clearly weighed on her socialization. Now that she lives in Montreal, she admits to having a limited social network.

In Marseille, prejudice against some of my respondents, especially those who wear the veil, is the source of several barriers to their urban practices. Héla is a very active young woman with a background in IT, and an extensive work experience in her country of origin. Following her marriage and the family reunification process that brought her to Marseille, she realized that the non-recognition of her diploma and her professional experience constituted a barrier that was extremely difficult to overcome. For this woman who has never been unemployed in her life, it is imperative to work again. She engaged in a professional training that would have allowed her to requalify. Her veil is tolerated during her training, but she stumbles on the practical course, because no professional environment accepted her: "Now, I'm looking for the internship, I haven't found it yet, I have a problem with him" and she points to her veil[2]. Héla does not think that her veil should represent a barrier: "For me it is not a barrier apparently it is a barrier for them[3]". She therefore continues to seek a more "open" internship environment.

On a structural level, in France, law n°2004-228 of March 15, 2004, restricts the wearing of religious symbols in French public schools and by extension in educational institutions. There are also other laws that regulate the wearing of religious symbols in public spaces and public services. These laws constitute a major structural barrier which contributes to restrict access to education and public services, not to mention employment for veiled women. For those who manage to find a job, the veil can continue to create situations of discomfort and inadequacy, and even reactivate behaviors of self-censorship.

Kahina, who lives in Marseille, stopped looking for a job following the various discouraging experiences she had with her veil. She is confined to replacements and domestic work:

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[2] Personal translation from dialectical Arabic.

[3] Personal translation from dialectical Arabic

> I worked…once or twice…in a school, in the canteen. It is a private Catholic school…. I take off the scarf…as soon as I get there… [but], I keep the bonnet with the charlotte. It suited me... I stay with the charlotte nobody looks at my hair, with the long sleeves, the apron, the pants[4].

Self-censorship also influences incidental users of the space, such as promenading or shopping. Kahina says she no longer frequents certain stores and malls in the city to avoid certain traumatic experiences,

> They have an idea…so the scarf is…*serrakà* (thief). It's terrorist. … Sometimes [there are places] I swear, I don't go there. I feel that I am unwanted... what happened to me once was that I walked into a store... and the saleswoman came right behind me. …I don't know she thought maybe I was going to steal or something

For Nadia, another mother and professional from Montreal, who had a successful economic integration journey, the domestic workload added to her intense professional requalification journey and negatively influenced her experience of the city. To the question of whether she had a commitment or a significant activity in the city such as volunteering, her answer was the following: "Unfortunately, no… I have always studied and worked…. that leaves very little time for any social involvement or volunteering or anything. I contribute in a very passive way."

Further she explains that "unfortunately, I don't have time, my children, my work, my studies. Each time I worked, I necessarily studied at the same time, and then often I was a full-time student. The lack of time and the over-investment in "the invisible work of integration" (Author, 2018) transformed the city into a horizon that kept slipping away from her, always waiting for another day where she would have more time.

Subtle Forms of Racism

Salima, is a young mother from Montreal, a biologist by training, she tried in vain to be taken seriously by a nurse in a clinic; her new board was "all yellow" and she wanted him to be urgently examined by a physician, but the nurse did not share her view. The addition of the nurse's inexperience, her lack of empathy and "possibly" the veil worn by Salima prevented the diagnosis of a congenital malformation and contributed to the worsening of the child's state of health:

> our family doctor was on maternity leave, there was no one to replace her but… I saw a nurse, at 20 days… At a month and a half, the head nurse: "... It's normal, it's nothing, it's going to go away". Up to two and a half months… "no, I said it will go away". At two and a half months…family doctor X, who replaces my family doctor, at the first appointment, as soon as she felt her belly, the liver was huge… to the emergency, the next day at Ste-Justine, analyses… an operation… I don't know, what it was, but I know that… I will never accept that and it was intolerable

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[4] Personal translation from dialectical Arabic.

Following this experience which almost cost her child's life, Salima could not bring herself to entrust her children to a daycare center (another public service) to begin the course of academic requalification necessary for her placement on the job market. She devotes herself to her family and volunteering in a community center in her neighborhood where she meets other North African women with similar experiences. She gradually overcomes her mistrust and mourns this incident which heavily marked her first years of life in Montreal. She also remains lucid about what her new life brings her and about all that she could never have had in her country of origin to support her child with his health condition. At the time of the interview, she was participating in a series of actions within the framework of a community group of which she is a part where she was able to make connections, to have a sense of her own worth.

In both cities, several respondents noted the negative impact of the debates that cross the public space on the veil, and on the way in which they are seen and received. Ahlem, who lives in Montreal and was a student at the time of the debates on the so-called charter of Quebec values, reported the difficulty of being in the public space, and receiving "… the gaze of people. Sometimes when you even go shopping in the mall… bickering…lots of bickering…".

The paths of these women did not stop under the weight of discrimination, but they were influenced by it. This influence could take the shape of a withdrawal into their nuclear family and an overinvestment in their maternal role. The city shies away from these immigrant women, because it does not offer them a place that they can invest. Female immigrant spaces can then be seen as spaces of retreat. It could also be spaces of respite, of work on oneself, and of solicitude for loved ones; a real invisible and domestic work of integration which makes it possible to overcome the barriers linked to immigration and discrimination: supporting a spouse in a process of requalification, caring for and taking care of themselves, healing, and initiating more solid positions for their lives in construction.

Spatializing Race: Staying Home

What the participants' stories reveal is how the needs of everyday life, housing, health care, education for oneself and one's children, and even initiating a casual discussion in the street, can become the seat of a multitude of expression of what Garneau calls "protoracism" which she defines as the set of situations where immigrants "…are brought back, in their daily life, to their position of exteriority and foreignness… (Garneau, 2017, p. 16).

Few studies document the impact of racism with its different forms and expressions on the integration process of immigrants and even fewer on socio-spatial structures. Peake and Ray (2001) note the lack of theoretical interest in the way in which race, racism, and whiteness, as well as the resistances they produce, contribute to creating and transforming urban territories. They also recognize that these racial dynamics have a paradoxical effect on racialized immigrants who are "simultaneously invisible and over exposed…" (Peake & Ray, 2001, p. 180). This lack of interest in questioning race is counterbalanced by more "soft" categories of analysis, which intersect with questions of social inequality or "living together" and under catch-all terms such as "diversity"

(Ahmed, 2012). As such, Ahmed whose work largely contributed to criticizing the vacuity of the notion of diversity (Ahmed, 2012) by which the question of racism is evacuated, and the assignment to happiness which weighs on racialized immigrants (Ahmed, 2008). This situation echoes the image of the "melancholic immigrant" evoked by Ahmed (2008) whose unhappiness points to the inconsistencies in policies and programs which are meant to welcome immigrants in the city, but also unwelcoming social practices. Criticisms, sorrows, and complaints expose blind spots of immigration policies and social policies social in France and Quebec. This gloom sheds new light on the debates on immigration, on the veil of Muslim immigrant women; it is the voice of feminism from below that carries concerns for survival, and which emanates from a positionality of solicitude.

An Insular City Revolving Around the Domestic Space

The urban condition that emerges from urban practices and representation of the immigrant women we interviewed reveals and insular and functional city where the domestic and intimate space has a central role and place; it's towards the domestic space that the practices of these immigrant women converge, and it is also from it that the strategies of survival and resilience emanate. This centrality is mainly explained by the importance of this space for the settlement of these immigrant women and their families. The domestic space is a space from which unfolds an "invisible work of integration" performed by Maghrebi immigrant women for the benefit of their families (Author 2018). This work is essential to rooting the lives of immigrant women and their families in their city of immigration: finding a job, a home, a school for the children, building memories in the city is a way of building these roots. This domestic work of integration will allow the installation of routines and sociability which not only root the life of these women in the city, but which are also a form of social action from below. In the long term, this domestic investment establishes these immigrant women in concrete forms of action and commitment in their social and urban communities. Many of them end up, in fact, by getting involved in community groups or in community activities for the benefit of newcomers, even to professionalize their personal commitment by thus widening the area of their concern.

The fact remains that this invisible work of integration also indirectly contributes to alienating these women from the city, in terms of presence and civic participation. The "solicitude" (Gilligan, 2008) behind this work leads Maghrebi immigrant women to provide care work inside their families and on the labor market as they tend to accept deskilling jobs to make ends meet. Thus, they find themselves in employment sectors reinforcing their "domestic" role: day care, domestic work, childcare, etc. That said, it is often this domestic dimension that will lead them to formulate strategies to overcome barriers, and that will lead their spouses and children to succeed in their integration:

An intersectional reading of the urban condition of immigrant women is necessary. It would make it possible to better understand their urban experience, to situate the factors of exclusion, as well as the resilience of these immigrant women. However, the urban experience of my respondents, springs from the intimate space, and highlights the main difficulty which is that of finding "good housing". Most people interviewed in

Marseille and Montreal report the difficulty of finding quality accommodation that is spacious enough for a family with children.

The City of Others

To my questions about her long life in the city of Marseille, Zahiya answered "My life …well, I got married, I had children and I took care of my children …". The whole work she's done in her long immigration life emerged from her home and evolved around her family.

It is a home where she cooked, cleaned, and took care of a large nuclear and extended family while sustaining her husband who was a very active union organizer. The extent of her participation in the city could not be measured but she's part of the city through the number of persons she accompanied, she helped, through a family she raised amongst other things. She herself could not see her contribution and her place in any different way. The informality of her contribution does not revoke its value and importance.

The city of immigrants, which looms at the intersection of gender, race and social class, is strewn with obstacles, but it is a city that has a place to offer…Despite the intensity of the barriers encountered, immigrant women we've met developed strategies for reclaiming their own private place in the city. It is a subtle reappropriation that emerges from the intimate space in which most of the integration work takes place.

The stories of life in the city collected from North African immigrant women in Marseille and Montreal reveal the centrality of intimate space and its influence on the urban integration paths of immigrant women and their families.

The centrality of family intimacy and intimate space in the integration paths of immigrant women. Housing is the space-place where the daily intimate life of these women takes place, and it is also a place where these women perform an invisible work of integration which concretely allows them to root their lives in their host cities. (Author, 2018), and create the conditions for the projection of future family life in the urban space, which is in line with the deep meaning of what integration is.

These daily struggles for survival, and resistance to discrimination, are very far from collective struggles for rights and resources, they are far from scholarly and militant feminist discourses, but they are undeniably forms of social action and a sort of feminism form below that emerges everyday life struggles. The domestic and invisible work performed by immigrant women has a direct impact on the success of the integration of these women and their families.

Immigrant women's right to the city is a fragile right that follows a subtle and long-term work by which these women manage to inscribe their lives in the city, to hold a place for them and their families. This right is expressed through the claim to identify as Montrealer and Marseilles despite everything.

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