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Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945,  
by Minayo Nasiali**

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Forum on Race and Citizenship in Postwar France

Debating *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945*, by Minayo Nasiali, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016

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The UCLA Center for the Study of International Migration is delighted to issue this working paper devoted to a discussion of a book by Minayo Nasiali, *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016). The working paper is a by-product of an “Author meets critics” session, organized by the Center and held on October 6, 2017. Given the importance of the book on which this session focused, and the quality of the ensuing debate, we thought that the results of the conversation should be opened up to the public; hence, this working paper. While the documents to follow have been revised by the authors since they were presented, they retain the informal flavor of the original exchange.

## **On *Native to the Republic***

**By**

**Lia Brozgal, Department of French and Francophone Studies, UCLA**

Minayo Nasiali's *Native to the Republic* proposes an answer to the following question: what can examining everyday life at the local level tell us about twentieth-century France?<sup>1</sup> (x) Beginning from this broad over-arching concern, the book expertly delineates a series of interrelated areas of inquiry, methodically narrowing its scope to a discreet geographic zone (the southern port city of Marseille), at a specific time (from 1945 to the early naughts), and with a particular problem, that is, the "messy" context in which the notions of "welfare and housing came to be understood" and articulated as "essential social rights." (8)

It would be fair to say that *Native to the Republic* is a book about housing. Set in the context of postwar rebuilding and grand national projects of modernization, the book zeroes in on housing crises in Marseille and state and local responses to them. Each chapter deals with an aspect of lodging and the underclasses—slum clearing; family relocation; squatter's rights (or lack thereof); modernization initiatives; low-cost housing projects such as HBM, and HLM; "reduced-norm tenements;" and so forth. The methods here involve a careful consideration of "everyday" practices, of common sense ideas, and, most importantly, of the role played by ordinary people in shaping state and institutional responses to issues of housing; that is, in deciding who deserves a home, what *kind* of home a given family deserves, and how new spatial organizations of daily life are configured and policed. Nasiali has gone looking for voices of these "ordinary people" in archives, minutes from neighborhood meetings, published interviews, the press, community-run resources, and in her own conversations with residents of Marseille. A "bottom-up" approach such as this one is somewhat novel in the context of post-war studies of French housing, which have tended to focus on "the central state, centralized institutions, and the work of elite functionaries." (8) And yet, the lines of inquiry in *Native to the Republic* are not univalent but multidirectional. Nasiali is keenly attuned to the fact that a story told from the grassroots level does important work to recuperate lost and muted voices. At the same time, it remains, nonetheless, only a *part* of the story. Thus, her work involves a judicious blending of both "bottom up" and "top down" narratives—the latter of which include urban planning documents, demographic studies, maps, minutes from meetings of local and national politicians, and debates among key actors in the housing industry, including urbanists, architects, demographers, and sociologists. This approach is best understood through Nasiali's own neat cinematographic metaphor, in which she describes alternatively "zooming in to illustrate how local-level issues have played a formative role in shaping national discussions" and then "zooming out to show how national debates have informed local politics." (17)

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<sup>1</sup> Minayo Nasiali, *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945* (Cornell UP, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> See Patrick Weil, "Le statut des musulmans en Algérie coloniale: une nationalité française dénaturée," *Histoire de*

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1, *Modernizing the Imperial City*, takes us from the early post war years up through the early 1960s, a period bookended, effectively, by “postwars”—the Algerian War having ended in 1962, with significant ramifications for Marseille and its environs. This era, not coincidentally, corresponds to what is known in France as *les trente glorieuses*, the glorious thirty, or the postwar “economic miracle” that saw important shifts in demographics and the politics of housing. These chapters chart the emergence of a “right to housing” discourse that would subsequently evolve to claim “the right to a *certain kind* of housing,” that is, not just a roof over one’s head but a home with a certain level of comfort and modern appliances. The final chapter of the first part of the book weaves a fascinating tale about the politics of clearing one particular Marseilles slum, a site known as *Peysonnel*, and the relocation of its inhabitants to Marseille’s first *reduced-norm* housing development, ironically named *La Paternelle*. In this, as in all three chapters of the first part, we are introduced to the complicated web of issues surrounding housing—patronage politics, *clientelisme*, and the import of colonial policy and institutions (such as the Constantine Plan) from Algeria to the mainland.

We are also given a glimpse of the rampant corruption for which the city is so notorious. Marseille’s status as a “mobbed-up” town with a seedy underbelly is the stuff of urban legends in France, and this odd combination of Mediterranean grit and glamour is richly encoded in cultural productions. Recent examples include the feature film *La French* (The Connection, 2014). Set in the 1970s, the historical fiction recounts the era of the “French connection,” when Marseille served as entry port and processing point for opium travelling from Turkey and then on to the rest of Europe and North America—while local government and law enforcement looked the other way (and benefitted handsomely). The Netflix noir series *Marseille* (2016) is set in murky swampland of Marseillais politicians, with Gérard Depardieu playing a junkie of a mayor running for an nth term in office. Although Nasiali does not dwell on the seamy side of the city, preferring neutral terms like “patronage politics” to “corruption,” the book does offer, now and again glimpses of what can only be called “legalized” corruption schemes. Gaston Defferre, after all, was mayor of the city for 32 years, a kind of super-mandate brought to an end only when he died in office. And during his reign, in pure French fashion, Defferre “cumulated mandates,” serving as *Ministre d’outre mer* under Guy Mollet (1956-57), *Ministre d’État, de l’intérieur et de la décentralisation* under Mitterrand (1981-1984), and as a representative of the *Bouches du Rhône* region (1962-1981).

Part 2 of *Native to the Republic*, “The Welfare City in Decline,” starts where the Algerian war ends, with the massive influx of both European and Muslim Algerians to France and specifically to Marseille (for reasons of proximity and climate). Each of the three chapters focuses on a particular decade (60s, 70s, and 80s), but never losing sight of continuities over time. Chapter 4 focuses on the nexus of housing issues related to the relocation of *piets noirs*, on one hand, and “Muslim refugees” (or “migrant workers”), on the other. Chapters 5 and 6 dive into the *grands ensembles*, or *cités*, the estates or housing projects, which, by the 70s and 80s, had fallen into gross disrepair. These chapters contend with issues explored, at an earlier moment, in the first part of the book—such as who has a right to a house, a home?—filtering them through the politics of Mitterrand-era social and urban renewal. Chapter 6 in particular

deals with daily life and youth culture in the *banlieue*, and how the work of local associations attempts, through culture and sport, to undo some of the constraints placed on the everyday by a certain politics of housing whose emergence has been traced throughout the book.

But to call *Native to the Republic* a book about housing would be like calling Said's *Orientalism* a book about the "Orient"; in other words, it would be to mostly miss the point. Housing, as Nasiali reveals, is not simply a material good, nor can it be reduced to an easy symbol of belonging, to a notion of *le foyer*, or a place to call home. It is about welfare and well being, and about who can claim these as rights. Housing in Marseille, in the post WWII era, is nothing less than the stage upon which numerous social actors—ordinary people and entrenched politicians, experts and laypeople, "français de souche," immigrants, and former colonial subjects—perform their anxieties about the end of empire and the fate of the republic. These anxieties have to do with belonging, citizenship, and equality; they are the growth pains of postcolonial modernity; they reach deep into the core of a nation that has defined itself as a champion of human rights, and for which the negotiation difference was a foundational, ethical question. And so *Native to the Republic* is not really about housing, but rather about what is done with a difference.

Now, one might argue that France writ large was the staging ground, after WWII, for working out these particular anxieties and issues. But Nasiali makes a case for Marseille as both *exemplary* (a microcosm of a broader "messy context") and *exceptional* (by virtue of its geographical position and demographics). It is a city "located at the crossroads of *metropole* and colony," and "neighborhoods in the port city of Marseille are a dynamic terrain where diverse people made sense of the broader modernizing project and the changing imperial project." (3) It is, today, the city in France with the largest Muslim population; it was, in the early 60s, the city that perhaps most closely reproduced the structures, logic, and, perhaps, the affect of the colony (namely, of Algeria). We see this, for example, in Chapter 4, which explores both the ideological and pragmatic solutions to the housing crises in the early 60s. Fast, efficient solutions were needed for both *pieds noirs* and "Muslim refugees"; both would have the "right to housing," but this right would be managed under very different regimes. The *pieds noirs* would be granted the right to *a certain kind of housing*, that is, a *home* built with higher quality, longer lasting materials. As Nasiali reminds us, "Even in the use of building materials, the ministry of the *rapatriés* (pieds-noirs) emphasized permanence: integrating the European *rapatriés* into the national fabric was to ensure their long-term status as French citizens." (91) The Algerians, however, reclassified as foreigners, or as "Muslim refugees," had no status as French citizens, thus prompting the question: would they still have access to social welfare? What were the state's responsibilities vis-à-vis what might be a temporary, transient population? The housing solutions for "Muslim refugees" or "migrant workers" did not emphasize permanence; to the contrary, the lodging structures proposed included camps, *foyers* (or dormitories), and *cités de transit* (similar to reduced-norm housing projects). Municipalities became less energetic when it came to slum clearance, allowing some of the established *bidonvilles* to remain in place, becoming semi-permanent favela-type villages.

In the immediate postwar period, modernization projects had both practical and “mythical” dimensions, and these, of course, were linked. The practical side stemmed from the fact that a war-damaged infrastructure needed to be rebuilt and a massive housing crisis needed to be addressed. Of course, at issue with the housing crisis at the time was not simply a lack of space, but rather the *nature* of that space, which was degraded and often ad hoc, lacking in the planning and technology that would ensure basic sanitation and livability. Concerns about how low-quality housing and a lack of infrastructure might create the conditions for “poverty, disease, criminality and urban blight,” which in turn contribute to the “decline of the nation,” (2) were not new to the post-war era; what was new, however, was the connection between the “everyday” (the practical) and its potential for “uplift”—the notion that a citizen with dignified living conditions is a better citizen, a citizen who will assist in rejuvenating the nation and restoring its glory. Policymakers, politicians, and other stakeholders of the era were drawn to theories such as “social citizenship,” articulated by British sociologist TH Marshall and other mid-century reformers, and defined as “the notion that every citizen deserves a certain quality of life.” (3)

I want to pause on and ponder this notion of “social citizenship,” and also “citizenship” writ large, but I’d like to frame that pause with a brief discussion of some of the most interesting primary material in *Native to the Republic*—a series of letters, most of which were written in the 50s and 60s by colonial subjects living in Marseille and in desperate need of housing. As is explained in the book, one dominant narrative of the housing question in the 1970s and 1980s focused on the “immigrant problem” as a major contributor to the decline of the welfare state and to the physical degradation of housing itself. Nasiali’s research on letters from the 1950s and 60s, however, allows her to construct a narrative that figures “immigrants” (colonial subjects) as active participants in “formative discussions about social rights” and, perhaps ironically, in propping up a particular vision of the citizen worthy of a home. (49)

For example, in a letter from Mohamed B. to the mayor of Marseille, this Algerian veteran foregrounds his request for a home by insisting on the numerous medals he received for his service in World wars I and II. (49) This is only one of several examples of individuals using their military service as evidence of their loyalty to France and thus, by extension, as evidence of their worthiness and their aptitude to receive quality housing. Other letter writers point up their families’ participation in swelling the ranks of the French populace (at the time, the birth rate in France was in decline and feeble demographics were a source of national concern). And in another letter, this one from Abdallah T., the longstanding Algerian resident of Marseille emphasizes his civic-mindedness: “I have lived in Marseille for 21 years and always conducted myself well and done my duty like all citizens.” (49)

This phrase, “like all citizens,” creates an equivalence between Abdallah T. any other “pure-blooded” Frenchman living in Marseille. But of course, the fact that Abdallah has to insist that he is “like all citizens” ironically reveals the degree to which he is, in fact, *not* like all other citizens, that is, not like those whose citizenship can be taken for granted. He is Algerian: technically French since 1946, yet in a position of having to argue for his rights.

This brings us back to where we paused, that is, to the notion of citizenship—social or otherwise. The treatment of the complexities of citizenship is an interesting tangle within the argument of *Native to the Republic*. When it comes to the Algeria, for example, the book seems to glide smoothly over the extremely rocky terrain of Empire and citizenship (with the exception, perhaps of Chapter 4). As Nasiali rightly points out, the Lamine Gueye Law of 1946 made Muslim Algerian colonial subjects French citizens. (The Jews of Algeria had been made French via the Crémieux Decree in 1870). The text of the Lamine Gueye Law reads:

À partir du 1er juin 1946, tous les ressortissants des territoires d'outre-mer (Algérie comprise) ont la qualité de citoyen, au même titre que les nationaux français de la métropole et des territoires d'outre-mer. **Des lois particulières établiront les conditions dans lesquelles ils exerceront leurs droits de citoyens.**

Beginning June 1, 1946, all *ressortissants* (nationals, citizens) of overseas territories (including Algeria) are granted citizenship, just as French nationals of the metropole and overseas territories. **Special laws will establish the conditions in which they will exercise their rights as citizens.** (Emphasis mine)

Certainly, Lamine Guèye made Algerians (and other colonial subjects) French on paper, but what of these special laws that would “establish the conditions in which they will exercise their rights as citizens”? What are the conditions of citizenship? If they were citizens just as those French nationals in the *metropole*, why would their rights be any different? Moreover, what is known about the application of Lamine Gueye? Did it enter into use, or was it an essentially empty gesture? After all, it is worth remembering that from the 40s through the early 60s, Algerians living in France were considered “FMA,” or French Muslims of Algeria. They did not enjoy the same rights as “native” French citizens, and were often targeted by the police as a minority group and subjected to racial profiling and violence. (The police massacre of October 17, 1961 is only beginning to be recognized for what it was: state-sponsored racial violence.) At the time of independence in 1962, only 10,000 Algerian Muslims were “fully French” (and those who were had either been naturalized or had a naturalized parent), and this fact suggests Lamine Gueye may have been an essentially toothless declaration.<sup>2</sup>

*Native to the Republic* perhaps misses an opportunity to engage this question on a more granular level. In the second part of the book (part 4), the quagmire of citizenship and rights is more visible. In the immediate aftermath of the Algerian War, one official observes, in an episode of classic Gaulois understatement, “the status of Algerians in France is less than completely defined.” (93) What isn’t fully problematized is whether or not this moment constitutes a significant rupture in the treatment of Algerians, and in the institutional hesitancy to consider them “French” like all citizens, or whether it represents, in fact, the continuity of a chaos that already haunted the colonial project in Algeria (and elsewhere)? As Patrick Weil has put it, “in the case of Algeria, the republican regime pushed to the maximum the confusion

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<sup>2</sup> See Patrick Weil, “Le statut des musulmans en Algérie coloniale: une nationalité française dénaturée,” *Histoire de la justice*, vol 16, no 1 (2005), 93-109.



between the word of law and the reality of lived experience, emptying the terms ‘nationality’ and ‘equality’ of their significance.”<sup>3</sup>

Beyond the particularities of colonial citizenship, or even the specifically Algerian valences of citizenship during and just after colonization, the question of social citizenship is a keyword in the book, one that could also benefit from additional contextualization and probing. A concept borrowed from English sociologist JH Marshall, social citizenship hails from the time when the structure of the British welfare system was being articulated, and was broadly defined as the understanding that every citizen deserves a certain quality of life. (3)

It seems worth wondering about the “applicability” of this notion to the French state, with its particular conception of citizenship. For Marshall, citizenship was to be understood as composed of three strands: civil citizenship, exemplified by freedom of speech, property rights, and access to justice; political citizenship, or “the right to participate in the exercise of political power,” as an elector or public servant; and social citizenship, or “a whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society.”<sup>4</sup> How does this resonate with or grate against French notions of citizenship, which seem to have been more “holistic” from the outset, at least in theory? Is “social citizenship” problematic (irrespective of national context), insofar as it pokes holes in the notion of any kind of unitary citizen? What does it mean that two individuals can both be “citizens” (in the civil sense), yet one might lay claim to a certain range of housing and social services (welfare), whereas another might not? Coming back to my initial series of questions about citizenship, how does a law like Lamine Gueye in fact reflect a more British understanding of citizenship than France may have been willing to admit, at the time?

Given the above, it seems fair to lament that the title of the book, which promises perhaps a more incisive comment about belonging, is never unpacked or mined for its metaphorical power to move beyond the quagmire of administrative notions of citizenship. What does it mean, after all, to be “native to” the “Republic”? What notions are couched in this unusual prepositional expression “to,” which more readily conjures up plants and animals than people? And yet, this may be precisely Nasiali’s point: at a given point in time, in a particular place, a group of people, irrespective of their diverse origins, may well have understood themselves as “native to” the Republic—as existing in, and belonging to it, by nature.

Founded at a site of intense cross-cultural traffic, Marseille—or Massalia, as it was known to its founding Greek fathers in 600 BC—was France’s first city. Today, it is a European Cultural Capital and the largest French city in terms of area. Situated in a region that now home to an important community of *pieds noirs* and their descendants, Marseilles is also home to the hexagon’s largest Muslim population. One of the most interesting, overarching accomplishments of *Native to the Republic* may its ability to train our gaze away from Paris and its centrality (in everything), and to remind us that there is more to France than its capital.

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<sup>3</sup> Weil, 109.

<sup>4</sup> JH Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge UP, 1950), 10-11.

**Comment on *Native to the Republic* by Minayo Nasiali**

**by**

**Swanie Potot**

**Research Unit on Migration and Society, French National Center for Scientific Research**

**1. WHAT I APPRECIATED:**

I would like to begin by saying that I really appreciate your work, Minayo, as it proposes an original approach to the problem of assimilation. By addressing the issue of French citizenship through the prism of post war housing policies, you tackle a well-known subject in a novel way. Your book asks: "How does the (re) construction of housing reconfigure the link between citizens and the state?" And by implication, it also poses the question of how the (re) construction of housing draws a border between the people of the state – whose well-being the state maintains -- and those to be kept apart from the nation? Because your material comes from letters sent by citizens and highlights the importance of local politics you manage to deal with these questions in a very convincing way. Your book reminds me of the way in which Rogers Brubaker analyzed "everyday life ethnicity" in Romania,<sup>5</sup> showing that politics has various dimensions which can be understood at the level of political leaders or at the level of ordinary people. In this light, one can understand, just as you show, how real politics carried out on the ground involves a perpetual negotiation between various actors and does not, in any manner, involve a simple top-down procedure.

While I find your book very convincing, the argument to follow reflects the moment that produced this comment, namely an encounter between an author and her critics. While I highlight points of disagreement, the criticisms to follow reflect the very great interest I had reading this fine, precise work, which relies on meticulous research and a good knowledge of the French environment.

**2. GENERAL REVIEW:**

I am a sociologist, and a French one; consequently, my review addresses the conceptual framework of your study. As the book puts you in between America (where you are likely to find most of your readers and where you received your training) and France (where you carried out your research) and you use concepts that possess different meanings in the two environments, I think that the framework, while reliable, is not fully precise, in particular as regards questions related to multiculturalism and race, issues which I will now address:

**2.1. MULTICULTURALISM:**

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<sup>5</sup> Rogers BRUBAKER, « Ethnicity, race, and nationalism », *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2009, vol. 35, p. 21–42.

In my view, the word takes on different realities and has different normative dimensions in France and in the U.S. In both places, multiculturalism says something about the place of communities and communitarianism. But in France, unlike in the Anglo-Saxon world, communitarianism is seen as a political problem, as something that is denounced. In the French context, the fact that people, especially migrants, simultaneously belong to the national (French) community as well as their own community of origin is source of social tension. For most of the French people, communitarianism is not a good way to live together, to make society. Furthermore it is in contradiction with the republican project which considers French society to be an indivisible whole. If you are to be integrated in the French nation, then you are supposed to leave all other forms of belonging to the private sphere. Since the French Revolution, communities are traditionally thought of as being opposed to the nation. From this perspective, the French people is a single entity and cannot be divided into various groups based on interest or origin. In our classes on migration a central goal is that of getting our students to understand that the Anglo-Saxon model does not reject, and even values, the existence of different communities of origin.

In France, institutions, first and foremost the school, have the function of reducing these differences so that everyone adheres to a model of common citizenship. By contrast, multiculturalism is associated with a communitarian vision of society.

You present the 1980s protests of the second generation of North African immigrants as part of multiculturalist demands for a "right to be different". I think that there is confusion here; at least for a French reader there is something that does not work, especially if we have in mind the present situation.

The 1983 Beurs' march ( "Marche des Beurs") or, later, *France Black, Blanc, Beurs* (soccer 1998), did not involve a call to communitarianism or multiculturalism, but rather a demand to enlarge the French nation so as to better integrate (or assimilate) foreigners and their descendants. These mobilizations took as point of departure the idea that immigrants would want to join the fundamental values of France: secularism, adhesion to the republican project, and membership in a single and indivisible nation. The national project is not challenged by these claims. While you write that these protestors asked for a right to be different, it was more a demand for a right to be included in the majority (a right for INdifference). In this sense, the march of the Beurs which called itself the march for equality was not at all opposed to the republican model. On the contrary, it testified to the adhesion of the children of immigrants to this model. That's why it was supported by the socialist government (just as you mention). But meanwhile, and continuing on until now, the socialist party has fought against any form of communitarianism and is opposed to a multiculturalist vision of the society.

These protests of the 1980s differ deeply from more modern, "post-colonial" demands of the current day. This new protest movement –rooted in the same social groups mentioned in your book but involving the third, not second generation -- indeed demands respect for long lasting differences, differences that are expressed in terms of cultural origins or religious

belonging. Thus, contending that it was imperative to « concentrate on the « racialized », just like us, who experience the same oppressions as us and who need to exchange opinions on just such questions,” two anti-racist activists organized a “de-colonial summer camp” in 2016, open only to those with “a personal experience of state racism.” As they saw it, the republican model may be egalitarian on the paper, but discriminates in practice, since it rejects the legitimacy of any effort by racial or ethnic sub-categories of the population to mobilize on their own.

In contrast to the mobilization of the 1980s with their call for a more expansive French nation that would include immigrants and their descendants, but within the dominant republican model, this latest struggle against discrimination instead calls on minorities to lay claim to their differences in order to better defend their access to collective resources. The French traditional republican model, which denies individual or community differences, is perceived here as an instrument of domination in the hands of whites (opposed to racialized groups). This movement, for whom the figures of reference are activists and thinkers such as Malcolm X or Frantz Fanon, holds a differentialist conception of society and anti-racism and supports the implementation of policies of positive discrimination (or affirmative action) which does not legally exist in France.<sup>6</sup>

I think that the comparison of this present movement with the period of the 1980s described in the book illuminates the nature of that earlier experience and allows us to better understand how the choice of the expressions of "right to difference" and "multiculturalism" in your book can be problematic for a French reader.

## **2.2. RACE**

My second criticism concerns your use of the notion of race. You use this term many times and sometimes, I think, with a lack of caution. While sometimes you associate the concept with empire and de-colonization, in which cases the notion of race can indeed be justified, at other times the term is equivalent to the word “nationality”.

Of course, this is also my French point of view which guides my criticism, hoping that it may interest American readers who, with the exception of a few specialists in the subject, are not disturbed by this word which is part of the current vocabulary in the USA. I refer you to an article by Hans Siebers, "Race versus ethnicity"<sup>7</sup>, in which he explains why importing the term race into the European scientific literature is problematic. His demonstration relates to the

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<sup>6</sup> Further information can be found on the project’s webpage <https://ce-decolonial.org/> . For some elements of the controversy : <https://www.marianne.net/societe/interdit-aux-blancs-le-camp-d-ete-decolonial-remet-ca> and the organizers’ answer - <http://contre-attaques.org/magazine/article/camp-d-ete> . For further background, see: Sylvia Zappi, “La non-mixité raciale, outil d’émancipation ou repli communautaire,” *Le Monde*, July 28, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Hans SIEBERS, « “Race” versus “ethnicity”? Critical race essentialism and the exclusion and oppression of migrants in the Netherlands », *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2017, vol. 40, n° 3, p. 369-387.

genocide of the Jews and the normative ideological aspect with which this word is associated. I will not develop this approach here but mention it only to underline the difficulties that we, in Europe, have with the racial narrative.

In French, the term race is banished from everyday language. Even when used by social scientists (often influenced by American literature), the word is surrounded by quotation marks, specifying that “race” is a form of categorization that is not based on natural difference but that, on the contrary, is constructed by social actors in a given situation. In the United States, although scholars of interethnic relations also question the uses of the concept of race, some authors use this term without adequate clarity or case, sometimes suggesting that race is a tangible reality, existing as such independently of the social report from which it emerged.

It seems to me that your writing oscillates between the two positions. You do not use the term without thinking about it and putting it back into context, but you consider it is enough to refer to the colonial context to justify it. However, you do not specify what this notion means for you and why you can speak of race relations between mainstream French people and the ex-colonial subjects who have migrated to France. This lacuna suggests that the racial dimension of public housing policies after World War 2 is inherently linked to the empire and the decolonization.

On the one hand, I do not disagree with you as the former colonized people who inhabited the slums were already racialized within the colonial framework. On the other hand, I would like to suggest now that the racialization of migrant and poor populations is far from being limited to the post-colonial framework.

### **2.2.1 Further thoughts on the notion of race**

For clarity, let me add a few additional words on race relations: As it is approached by most of the social scientists the notion of *race relations* relies on the idea that differences, and inequalities are natural rather than social processes, presupposing that humanity is made of different parts –races- which do not melt. In a racial perspective, the term generally assesses a form of domination which is thought of as coming from the “nature”, or at least from deep and ancient discrepancies. It assumes, then, that social positions of the groups are rigid because they rely on the fundamental nature, on the soul of the people, and can hardly be changed. Most of the time, the idea of race relations presupposes a hierarchical conception of humanity.

Thus, using the term “race relations” does make sense when one speaks of the Empire. You argue that the presence in France of foreigners from North Africa is linked to the experience of colonization / decolonization. I agree with you that colonization does rely on a conception of a dominant Europe and of racialized people in the colonies. Furthermore, this racialization of the colonized people was taken into account in the housing programs that you analyzed and led to the further racialization of the housing issue and to discrimination against North Africans.

My point, however, is that this conceptual framework works because of the period studied: the post-World War II period is marked by de-colonization and the end of the Empire. I suggest that we take some distance to see how racialization, or at least naturalization of the social differences is a long running process, especially when it comes to studying migration. I maintain that racialization is not anchored in the Empire.

You write (p.103) for example that the Arabs are the least appreciated immigrants, perceived as less inclined to integrate than the Italians, the Poles, the Portuguese... But, you must know that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Italians were seen as impossible to assimilate. I refer here to the violent racist riots that occurred in 1893 known as the *Massacres of Aigues Mortes*<sup>8</sup>. Viewing migrants as people whose fundamental, uncivilized people makes their integration into modern cities impossible is an old story.

### 2.2.2 Example of the Bas-Bretons in the city of Nantes 1851

This part of my comment relies on a paper from historian, Didier Guyvarc'h<sup>9</sup> describing a report on housing in the city of Nantes in 1851, written by a senior official, Auguste Chérot. This report was produced within the framework of the law of 13 April 1850 which had required cities to tackle unhealthy dwellings and the problem of shantytowns surrounding cities. The difficulties regarding housing concerned various populations, but the official makes a special mention of the Bretons (migrants coming from the adjacent region of Brittany) who, like the Maghrebians a century later, seem to pose more difficulty to the goodwill of the public services. They are described as asocial, culturally distant from the townspeople of Nantes and whose nature compels them to engage in behaviors that cannot be tolerated in a civilized space. Abstracts remind reports of Marseilles officials you cited in your book:

*"We are convinced that it is possible, with firm will and perseverance, to make the necessary improvements in the unhappy classes of our city penetrate; but, as we must admit, our hopes would be discouraged if the wretched districts, whose sanitation we are pursuing, were to be regularly infected, the word is not too strong, by the invasions of beggars from the countryside of the Brittany."*

Attributing the state of advanced decay of the migrants' homes to the very nature of the Bretons themselves, the rapporteur advises against offering them better housing because they would degrade them. *"Populations, foreign to our department, in which the most repulsive filth is a second nature."*

As always, the hygienic and moral order is said to be threaten: *"It is a veritable plague, a deplorable plague, that the presence among our populations of these poor people, whose moral*

<sup>8</sup> Gérard Noiriel, *Le Massacre des Italiens: Aigues-Mortes, 17 août 1893*, Fayard, 2010. See also, Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting-Pot*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Didier Guyvarc'h. "Un manifeste de 1851 contre les immigrés bretons." *Genèses* (1996): 137-144

*degradation equals physical degradation.*" The author of the article explains that the presence of these migrants threatens the entire city with contamination by cholera.

Furthermore, these migrants only understand Bas-Breton, not French.

*"When they have obtained, by begging, some coins of private charity, the father and often the mother hastened to plunge into a frightful drunkenness of brandy, and then scandalized the neighborhood by fierce struggles and acts of a revolting immorality."*

Just as you mention about the North Africans, these people are seen as illegitimate competitors for jobs: *"These nomadic hordes are disastrously competing with our working people in the search for work."* As in your book, we can notice here the difference between the good poor and the unacceptable migrants.

In conclusion, the official asks that the Bretons be expelled and that access to the city of Nantes be forbidden to them because they cannot adapt; as the Bretons' natural environment is the countryside, they must be kept there by the forces of the State.

I believe that we can speak here of a vision expressed in terms of race, even if it involves a Frenchman observing his fellow citizens. The Bretons are considered to be inferior beings who are frozen in an identity linked to their birth. The colonial relationship has no place here but obviously the problem of housing is perceived in terms very similar to those described in your book. Thus, the tendency to naturalize misery in order to extract it from the social body is an ancient and a common practice.

### **2.2.3 Roma and current slums**

My second example is drawn from my current work on Roma in France<sup>10</sup>.

It is interesting to note that your book stops around 2015 and that you have focused on the issue of housing and that you have remained focused on the future of the suburbs without even mentioning that the slums, of which you describe the eradication during the 1970's, have reappeared since fifteen years in France.

In France, the "Roma question", which concerns the arrival of Roma from Eastern Europe, has returned the issue of immigrant slums to public attention and political debate. Throughout France, 85,000 people live nowadays in makeshift dwellings, of whom "only" 25,000 comprise foreigners of Roma background. Still, the issue is treated as a problem of uncontrolled immigration just as in the 1950s the housing problem was treated as a matter of ethnicity. Two recent French Prime Ministers (Nicolas Sarkozy and Manuel Valls) mentioned in their speeches the fact that Roma could not be assimilated in France because they were of a culture too different from ours. Using the category you develop in your book, they are seen as

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<sup>10</sup> Swanie Potot, 2018, *Roms, Tsiganes, Migrants.... Catégorisations ethniques et frontières sociales en Europe*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes.

the “a-socials” of today. Up until now, the state’s main response has not been the launching of large construction programs, but simply destroying shantytowns, walling off the entrances to squats and hunting beggars in the streets.

However, a few people are chosen to benefit from a social integration program through housing. Established diagnoses are very similar to those you describe: the habits, morality, personal hygiene, ability to adopt the behaviors of the French middle class are assessed. Most are excluded from these criteria and only a few are chosen for a try in social housing.

Here too, it is undeniable that an analysis in terms of race is relevant: the Roma are considered to be naturally inferior, inappropriate for “normal” life and this justifies not taking up their social problems. Here too, it appears, as you show in the book, that housing policies are also policies of exclusion.

### 3. CONCLUSION

My conclusion is not to say that you are wrong in what you describe, but to point out the fact that the developments that you analyze in your book take place in a setting that goes beyond the end of the colonial empire. Racialization has always been a means of delegitimizing certain populations and of removing their well-being from the responsibility of the state. By describing these populations as a-social and ascribing their behavior to their nature, one transforms them into underserving poor, which in turn makes it normal to keep them out of the social contract. Through the policies of housing, one can see - and this is the strength of your work - how the republican universalistic project is caught in its own contradictions; how by choosing a particular population as the legitimate object of its social policies, it excludes the others by sustaining them permanently in a position of sub-citizens.

Hannah Arendt explains in this sense that before the Jewish genocide took place in Europe, there was a long work of racialization which consisted in removing the Jews from the common humanity<sup>11</sup>. This is the first step to be followed by inhuman treatment of a population. Indeed, this way of thinking social differences is not limited to the Empire period.

The whole point of your book is to show how this process of tracing racial and social boundaries is played out on a daily basis, not through the imposition of grand xenophobic ideologies, but rather through daily, almost innocuous, interactions involving civil servants and racialized people. The American intellectual framework that you mobilize in this book to analyze the French situation thus highlights the racist logics of a state that refuses to consider itself multicultural. From this point of view, your book provides an undeniable contribution to the understanding of French society.

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<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt., 1951, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Brace and Co.



## Response to Critics

By

**Minayo Nasiali, Department of History, UCLA**

I extend my warmest thanks to Lia Brozgal and Swanie Potot for making time to read my book. Their provocative comments have compelled me to engage anew with my research, to re-see the project, and to confront potential blind-spots in my approaches and methodologies. Most especially, their criticisms raise important questions about how—or if—citizenship and race can function as viable categories of analysis. I am also indebted to Roger Waldinger for organizing the “Author Meets Critic” session and for inviting us to post our responses in this forum.

[\*Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945\*](#), as Brozgal so delightfully put it, is not just a book about housing. It takes housing as a starting point for investigating the very foundations of the modern French welfare state. Following World War II, a grave and persistent housing crisis shaped the contours of reconstruction and modernization in metropolitan France. Ordinary people argued that a roof overhead was not only a fundamental right, but that it should be a key cornerstone of the nascent welfare state. The book argues that the only way to make sense of how welfare was institutionalized is to examine how such debates occurred within an imperial context. To this end, the port city of Marseille functions as a dynamic site at the crossroads of metropole and colony, where local-level debates about housing were also discussions about *which* residents deserved access to supposedly universal rights.

*Native to the Republic* is therefore very much a book about citizenship. Specifically, it explores how Marseille residents, including colonial subjects, local politicians, urban planners, social scientists, and central state technocrats re-imagined the relationship between citizen and state. It demonstrates how neighborhood negotiations about decent housing and minimum living standards came to be seen as social rights and elements of a more comprehensive conception of citizenship. Such debates reveal how hierarchies of difference became embedded within developing housing and welfare institutions. More broadly, this history provides insight into contemporary debates about the so-called immigrant question in France.

I thus welcome Brozgal’s direction to further problematize how the monograph deals with citizenship. On the one hand, she asks whether *Native to the Republic* engages enough with the “rocky terrain of Empire and citizenship.” On the other hand, she wonders if it is appropriate to apply T.H. Marshall’s concept of social citizenship to a French case. Let me start with Brozgal’s first criticism about the conditions of colonial citizenship: We agree that the 1946 Laine-Guèye Law is important because it abolished subject hood and granted all members of the empire citizenship. But Brozgal rightly asks if it was, in reality, a toothless declaration? She points to the example of Algeria and how, at independence in 1962, only 10,000 “French

Muslims of Algeria” were considered “fully French.” As Brozgal underscores in her comment, and as I explain in the book, the law may have granted citizenship status to former colonial subjects, “but it did not give them full access to the rights of metropolitan French citizens” (Nasiali, 24). In other words, embedded within the seemingly universalistic gesture of making citizenship a common right, were the means for continuing exclusion and state-sponsored violence. As I see it, however, it is precisely this tension which makes the law important.

As I point out in chapter one, the law was directed at all French colonial subjects, in addition to Algerians. Moreover, the fact that it was introduced—along with other pieces of legislation such as the law abolishing forced labor—by newly elected African members of the French parliament reflects how, in the wake of the war, colonial subjects renewed their demands for recognition, for political rights, and for “equal pay for equal work.” At root, then, the Lamine-Guèye law very much symbolizes the problem of citizenship. Gary Wilder offers a useful conceptualization of this problem when he argues that studies of empire and the nation-state should not focus on how universalism went wrong in the colonies, but should instead investigate how oppression, violence, and discrimination is built into the very fabric of a universalistic understanding of citizenship and rights. Colonial citizenship is not something that happens “over there” it manifests, in particular ways, everywhere within the imperial nation-state.

My task, as I saw it, was to make sense of how the colonial project manifested in Marseille and intersected with the modernization project in compelling ways. For example, the book describes how quotidian negotiations between experts and ordinary people contributed to commonsense perceptions that not everyone deserved access to housing. One example is my discussion about the evolution of the term “asocial,” which reflected both nineteenth century concerns about the floating poor and dangerous classes as well as the imperial project to “civilize” colonial subjects. In the 1950s and 1960s, “asocials” were understood to be not-yet-ready to move into modern housing, and by extension, they were not-yet-ready to assume the full duties of French citizenship. Instead, according to this logic, they needed to be educated, to be civilized, and taught how to live as responsible members of the polity. Included in this category were: impoverished French, Italians, Spanish, and colonial subjects. Examining the asocial category therefore reveals how the postwar push to create a more expansive notion of citizenship also created new spaces for exclusion. In sum, I believe Brozgal and I are fighting the same fight when it comes to problematizing citizenship and empire and I wholeheartedly embrace her suggestion to continue to push further and to probe deeper in my own research.

Which brings me to her second criticism: Does T.H. Marshall’s definition of social citizenship “resonate with or grate against French notions of citizenship, which seem to have been more ‘holistic’ from the outset, at least in theory?” In other words, is it a problem to take an ostensibly British concept and graft it onto a French context? In my study, the concept “social citizenship” operates in three key ways: First, and most simply, I saw it as an historical

artifact. It reflects a moment following World War II when France engaged in a broader, transnational conversation about a new grounds for citizenship based on the idea of social security. This discussion was shaped, in part, by the conversations of French and British social reformers including Pierre Laroque and T.H. Marshall (Nasiali, 3).

Second, my discussion of social citizenship takes its cue, not from British scholarship, but from a very French genealogy of scholars who have helped conceptualize the terrain of what they call “the social.” Building on Foucault’s ideas of governmentality, several of his former students, including Jacques Donzelot and François Ewald began, in the late 1970s and 1980s, to probe the technologies and practices central to the “art of government.” Their respective studies examined nineteenth century concerns about the social question and the origins of the French welfare state. As Paul Rabinow explains in *French Modern*, such work has explored “the emergence of certain practices of reason” in the construction of systems of social security (Rabinow quoted in Nasiali, 65).

My conception of social citizenship builds on this discourse but also takes seriously the idea that “the social” is a terrain that has a physical, spatial element. To this end, I would like to note that the working title for the book was “Building Social Space,” which was widely panned, to my chagrin, by the reviewers. Although I ultimately settled on a different title, the idea that citizenship is not just an idea, but a concept embedded within and constructed as part of the built environment remains a central point of the book. Moreover, a sense of the spatial contours of citizenship—as exemplified by the materiality of housing—also demonstrates how everyday life is an important lens for understanding how social space is fabricated. In short, the book builds on the work of Foucault and others, but also seeks to show how the actions of residents are a constitutive part of this project.

The idea of “the social” has not just been explored by scholars working in the Foucauldian tradition, it also has roots in French liberalism. Pierre Rosanvallon, drawing from Rousseau’s idea of the social contract, has examined how the modern French welfare state is premised on the consent of the people to form a system of social security based on the universal acceptance of risk. Curiously, in *La nouvelle question sociale* (The New Social Question) he laments how, in the last forty years or so, the social contract that made the welfare state possible has eroded. He joins with other experts as well as large sectors of the French public by proclaiming that the welfare state is in crisis. Now, French welfare institutions are indeed faltering as the system is crippled by high unemployment levels and by the hefty pensions of retired baby-boomers. However, Rosanvallon makes sense of these complicated issues a bit differently than I do. According to him, the old system premised on the acceptance of the universality of risk has been supplanted by a more fragmented, individualized understanding of welfare, one grounded not on common consent, but based in part on a discourse of victimization. Rosanvallon is particularly alarmed that “increased knowledge of the

differences between individuals and groups strains the bases of the social contract” (Rosanvallon, 30).

This characterization of the welfare state in crisis exemplifies the third way in which social citizenship functions in my book. Namely, I explore how the concept of social citizenship is rooted in the French notion of the public sphere, where citizens, supposedly devoid of all differences interact freely and in equality. The book explores how *this* idea of “the social” serves to obscure difference, or to put it another way, conceals the mechanisms, practices, and norms by which certain people and groups have come to be imagined as different, and therefore not entitled to full rights. As scholars of gender have shown, welfare states have always been hierarchical, and have often decoupled social benefits from political rights. My book builds on this scholarship to show how colonial subjects were integrated into—and helped to define—a differential system of welfare in France. It shows how access to housing, and by extension, one’s place in the nation, was often articulated in racialized terms.

This brings me to Swanie Potot’s criticism of book, namely that the conceptual framework, my very methodology, is inherently Anglo-Saxon, and thus I misunderstand how questions of difference—specifically of race—are conceptualized in France.

This is not the first time I have received this criticism. I am also not alone, as it is often levied against other scholars (both anglophone and francophone) who, like me, think about race in France. By way of response, I begin by engaging with a volume edited by the French scholars, Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin entitled, *De la question sociale à la question raciale? Représenter la société Française* (From the social question to the racial question? Representing French society). This 2006 book addressed, head-on, the question of whether race is a viable category of analysis in France. It explains how late twentieth century understandings of French republicanism imagine citizenship in abstract terms and how, following this logic, there are not supposed to be—in fact, there cannot be—racial problems in France, only social ones. In his contribution to the volume Pap Ndiaye explains the issue thus:

“In France, the great difference vis-a-vis the United States is primarily a republican ideology that is framed as theoretically indifferent to skin color and other physical characteristics. To be French is classically considered as a political tie to the nation, which is antithetical to all racialized visions. However, the French Empire developed by subjugating populations defined as not-white and not-civilized, such that they were denied citizenship. The line demarcating citizens and subject was political and racial...To be French, was to be white...The construction of the French nation was not exclusively founded on political terms, but equally founded on racial terms (Ndiaye, in *De la question sociale à la question raciale*, 46).

Emmanuelle Saada builds on Ndiaye in her contribution to the volume by explaining how understandings of race are not foreign to the republican project but, rather, central to it. She also explains how racialization did not just happen in the colonies and to colonial-subjects,

but was also a process at work in the metropole. She writes that in the nineteenth century, for example, “the urban ‘dangerous classes,’ peasant populations, but also immigrant workers from other European countries were all conceived from the angle of racial difference.” As Saada explains, racial formation is a process that intersects with other dynamic categories including class and gender” (Saada in *De la question sociale à la question raciale*, 60).

The contributors to *De la question sociale à la question raciale* and others are forming a new generation of French scholars committed to untangling the complexities of how difference has been historically imagined in the imperial nation-state (See: Sylvain Pattieu, Emmanuelle Sibeud, Audrey Celestine, Franck Satiert and the members of the working group *Les populations noires en France*). How then do we reconcile their research with Potot’s assertion that “In French, the term race is banished...?” Put another way, if a dominant consensus within the French academy is that talking about race is taboo—but at the same time—some French academics *are* investigating how race has been institutionalized, does this make does this make their empirically-grounded claims problematic, or even illegitimate?

Let me address some of Potot’s concerns about my book more directly, especially as they pertain to my use of the terms multiculturalism and race. She writes that in the French context, multiculturalism is associated with communitarianism which is “denounced...[because] it is in contradiction with the republican project which considers French society to be an indivisible whole...From this perspective, the French people is a single entity and cannot be divided into various groups based on interest or origin.” She takes issue with my characterization of the 1983 “Marche des Beurs” as she describes it, when young people, many of whom were the children of postcolonial migrants, staged a highly successful march from Marseille to Paris.<sup>12</sup> In response, I must point out that a major goal of my research is to listen closely to what historical actors actually say. To this end, I explain in the book how the march was coined the “Marche des Beurs” by the press, but was actually named a “March for Equality and Against Racism” by the activists themselves. My findings ally with Potot insofar as the marchers indeed were motivated by the desire for inclusion within the nation. But as with all movements, there were several different politics at work, not simply a single unifying vision for change. Namely, one branch of the movement as exemplified by the popular group SOS Racisme, broadcast a broadly antiracist message, one that was focused especially on condemning the rise of the National Front. Another, less well known group, Mémoire Fertile distanced itself from SOS Racisme and “insisted,” as they put it, “on the existence of a multicultural France [and a] rupture with the myth of a homogeneous nation” (Saïd Bouamama, former member of Mémoire Fertile, quoted in Nasiali, 139). Interestingly, Mémoire Fertile rejected what they saw as an “Anglo-Saxon” folklorisation of culture—or balkanization as they put it—of society. They tried to imagine a process for making difference—or diversity—work

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<sup>12</sup> Beur is an inversion of the derogatory term *Arabe* and can thus be seen as an appropriation of negative stereotypes in the tradition of the *Négritude* movement in interwar France and Black is Beautiful in the United States

*within* the French republican model. In short, they were trying to re-imagine republicanism in more inclusionary terms, by addressing how discrimination was structurally embedded within French institutions. This attempt to make multiculturalism work within republicanism, seemed to me, a compelling conceptual struggle, one that merited attention in my book.

Potot is also concerned with how I make use of “the notion of race.” She writes, “You use this term many times and sometimes, I think, with a lack of caution. While sometimes you associate the concept with empire and decolonization, in which cases the notion of race can indeed be justified, at other times the term is equivalent to the word ‘nationality.’” One place to locate a response is within Potot’s own comment. She writes that “even when used by social scientists...the word [race] is surrounded by quotation marks, specifying that ‘race’ is a form of categorization that is not based [on] natural differences...but that, on the contrary, is constructed by social actors in a given situation.” I absolutely agree with *this* characterization because it shows how race functions as a category of analysis. Race—of course—is not a thing. It is not an essence; it is a process, a dynamic, and it is socially and politically constructed, as Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall have explained. In other words, in different *particular* historical contexts, different constellations of meaning converge to convey specific understandings. For example, at times, as the book demonstrates, nationality *was* conceived in racialized terms. In 1950s Marseille, efforts to clear slums centered on the need to categorize and classify residents living in these “undesirable” parts of the city. Those residents were ordered in terms of their “nationality” and local functionaries labelled them: Italians, Spaniards, poor French and, curiously, “North Africans.” North Africa, as we know, is not a country. It is a region and a former part of the French empire. But state officials used it as a particular marker of difference, one that was supposed convey “North Africans” supposed inferiority, or lack of civilization. Thus “nationality” functioned as a category that drew on understandings of class, poverty, and perceived racial differences that were informed, in part, by the colonial project.

Later in the book, different constellations of meaning show race at work in other contexts. In the final chapter, I recount the tragic murder of a teenager named Ibrahim Ali Abdallah in 1995. He was gunned down by three members of the National Front while running to catch a bus home one night in northern Marseille. Following his death, the National Front falsely claimed that Ibrahim had attacked first, moreover they asserted that the seventeen year old boy exemplified the problem of immigrant male criminality threatening France. Ultimately, the three National Front members were found guilty of murdering Ibrahim. Yet, in the public conversation that followed, many made sense of Ibrahim’s death in terms of broader anxieties about immigrant young men and whether they could ever become responsible French citizens. This discussion reflected a broader, state driven effort to expand after-school programming in French *banlieues* with the goal to rehabilitate the built environment and to better integrate disenfranchised immigrant youth. Ibrahim himself was a product of this endeavor as he had just left a rehearsal at a local youth center the night he was killed. Significantly, in the media frenzy following Ibrahim’s death, few fully considered the fact that Ibrahim was not really an

immigrant. His parents had come from the Comoros, an archipelago of islands in the Indian Ocean. While one of the islands, Mayotte, remains a French territory, the others voted for independence in 1974 which triggered a wave of migration to France. This alone illuminates the complications of the postcolonial moment in France, as many who are labelled “immigrants” are either citizens or are from former colonies. In an interview uploaded to a website run by Comorians in Marseille, one of Ibrahim’s friends, who had been there the night Ibrahim died but had survived the shooting, characterized his friend’s death differently. For him, Ibrahim’s murder was not an indication that France had an immigrant problem. Instead he asserted, “Ibrahim was killed because he was black.” For him, Ibrahim’s death only makes sense if we interrogate how his very presence, on a dark street, at night—perhaps his very place in the nation—had been both racialized and criminalized.

By way of conclusion, I must recount that I wrote this final chapter as the Trayvon Martin tragedy unfolded in 2012. And I was struck, as I worked, by the terrible way in which the circumstances of the two murders resonated with each other. Ibrahim was rushing to catch the last bus home the night he was killed and unknowingly was running toward three armed members of the National Front who were sitting in a car parked next to the bus stop. They had been patrolling the area in “defense” of the nation. They concluded, as did Trayvon Martin’s murderer about Trayvon, that Ibrahim must be up to no good. Although I was continually confronted by some key similarities in the two stories, I also remember asking myself, as I wrote, if I was projecting? Was I misinterpreting Ibrahim’s story and therefore not doing him justice? Was I, in actuality, making a French narrative fit into an Anglo-Saxon framework? What does Anglo-Saxon even mean, anyway, in the context of this research?

Following the “Author Meets Critics” session last fall, Robin D.G. Kelley reminded me that in the United States (indeed also in Great Britain, in short in the so-called Anglo-Saxon world) race continues to be dismissed as a social fact “as opposed to a biological or scientific fact,” let alone a category of analysis. In an email to me he wrote: “How many times have we heard that police killings of unarmed black and brown people are not about race because they are not “racially motivated?” He does not see such dismissals of race to be unique to the United States—or even to France—but, in fact “fundamental to all Western liberalism.” For him, the irony is how “the very Western Enlightenment ideals of science and classification gave rise to the modern conception of race, the one that the self-proclaimed inheritors of this tradition now are quick to disavow.”

In sum, then, Kelley’s comments, read alongside Potot’s and Brozgal’s insights, have pushed me to reflect on my own methodological motivations and blind-spots. Does a book about housing and citizenship in Marseille engage enough with the colonial project, as I claim it should? Do I see race everywhere when other processes could be at work? These uncomfortable questions have given me pause, but have also encouraged me to consider

broader issues, including how knowledge is produced in the academy, and how certain “practices of reason” come to be seen as legitimate or not.