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Title: Aspirations and hope distribution in the emigration of Maghrebi Europeans in Montreal.

Abstract

The article addresses contemporary forms of European emigration more specifically of Belgian and French 'second-generation' migrant youngsters of Maghrebi background leaving Europe for Montreal (Canada). Building on an ethnographic field research conducted in France, Belgium and Montreal over a period of four years, this article explores the aspirations that participants pursued through migration and how these aspirations evolved in the course of the migration trajectory. This article describes young Maghrebi European's experiences as unfolding in different configurations of hope distribution in Europe and Canada. While the emergence of emigration desires is connected with the shrinking hope for desirable futures in Europe, moving to Montreal is experienced as an opening of new hopes albeit with mixed results in terms of actual economic or professional upward mobility.

Keywords

Emigration, Montreal, hope, Maghrebi Europeans.

Aspirations and hope distribution in the emigration of Maghrebi Europeans in Montreal.

Introduction

When it comes to migrations, Western European countries such as France and Belgium have typically been depicted as countries of destination and associated with visions of desirable life, promising futures and potential for the realization of hopes (Boccagni, 2017; Vigh, 2009; Willems, 2014). Yet, especially after the 2008 financial and economic crisis the characterization of Western Europe as a place of hope has been destabilized. A sense of crisis has also been identified regarding the *de facto* multicultural composition of European societies (Martiniello, 1993) where new forms of racism have been articulated (Lentin & Titley, 2011). These different dynamics seem to particularly affect some segments of European societies like the so called "second" and "third generation" of Maghrebi background who continue to suffer many forms of discrimination including in the job market (DARES, 2016).

Very few studies have addressed the relation between European migrations and the unstable futures produced by these different crises (for an exception, see Lafleur and Stanek 2017). In this article, I unpack the relations between the aforementioned dynamics of crisis and inequality and the emergence of emigration desires in European societies. I build on extensive ethnographic fieldwork among French and Belgian youngsters of Maghrebi background who decided to move to Montreal (Canada). I will conceptualize "emigration desires" in terms of "aspirations" in the sense given by Boccagni (2017): [Aspirations are] "Emotionally thick representations of what one's future *might* and *should* look like, given the present circumstances and the experience of the past as re-codified from the 'here-and-

now'." I will specifically focus on the aspirations that are expressed by Maghrebi Europeans to explain their migration to Montreal, or, put differently, the aspirations "pursued *through migration*" (Carling & Collins, 2017, p. 917).

Boccagni conceptualizes aspirations as a "research field on the interaction between structure and agency; [or] put differently, between mutually interconnected structural factors (i.e. family backgrounds, education, social class, employment etc.) and individual orientation to social action" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 3). In this perspective the representations of what the future "might" and "should" look like cannot be understood only as the expression of purely individual and personal inclinations but rather as the expression of these inclinations within specific social environments that encourage some course of action and discourage others. Carling and Collins (2017) adopt a similar understanding, reminding us that aspirations refer to "socially sanctioned behaviors" that depend on the development of "social mechanisms of diffusion" (Carling & Collins, 2017, p. 916). Aspirations are socially and culturally embedded views of the future (Bal & Willems, 2014). This means that aspirations are always situated in specific systems of values, or, to use Boccagni's words, in a "broader texture of pervasive social representations and shared aspirations" (Boccagni, 2017, p. 9).

A similar concern for structure-agency balance can be found in Hage's (2003; 2004) conceptualization of "hope" as "the way we construct a meaningful future of ourselves" (Hage, 2003, p. 15). While Boccagni, in his 2017 article, puts his focus on the subjective expression of aspirations and its evolution during the migration process, Hage (2003; 2004) asks further attention to the "societal" dimension of the construction of meaningful futures. Hage suggests that the construction of meaningful futures is also a matter of societal "production" and "distribution" (Hage, 2003). A society, Hage argues, "works as a mechanism for the distribution of hope" (Hage, 2003, p. 15). This socially produced and distributed hope is called by Hage (2003) "societal hope." This relation between the development of migration aspirations and specific modes of distribution of societal hope is what this article seeks to look into. In this perspective, it reflects on the relation between subjective desires (referred to as aspirations) and structural dynamics shaping the unequal distribution of hope in European societies. The latter is framed within what I will call "regimes of hope distribution." In migration studies, the concept of "regime" has been used in relation with mobility (Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Shamir, 2005). In Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) "regimes of mobility", the word "regime" conveys two complementary elements. The first being "the role both of individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations that affect human mobility". The second being "a notion of governmentality and hegemony in which there are constant struggles to understand, query, embody, celebrate and transform categories of similarity, difference, belonging and strangeness" (Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 189). This second element seems close to Shamir's (2005) understanding of "regime" as a configuration of "cultural/normative global" principles (Shamir, 2005, p. 199). In this article, I apply this multidimensional understanding of regime to the notion of hope. In relation with migrants' aspirations – which refers to representations of the future as expressed by the migrants – the "regimes of hope

distribution" designate the different institutional contexts that contribute to the unequal distribution of desirables futures which migrants experience at different stages of the migration process. Put differently, in this article, 'aspiration' refers to subjective (yet socially and culturally informed) representation of the future and 'regime of hope distribution' evokes the societal framework within which these representations of the future are articulated.

Hage's 2003 work on hope is mainly focused on the distribution of hope in national contexts (Hage, 2003). By using the concept of regime, I also try to expand the exploration of societal hope to other scales. Indeed, "regimes of hope distribution" can include local configurations of hope distribution (at the level of a city example) as well as configuration of hope distribution that operate at a more transnational or global level as I will suggest in this article.

Furthermore, by looking into migrant's into migrant's aspirations at different stages of the migration process (before and after migration) this article also illustrates how representations of the future evolve in relation with the migrants' evolving life conditions and with the experience of different local or more global regimes of hope distribution.

Building on biographic interviews realized with young Maghrebi Europeans who moved to Montreal, this article is an attempt to reflect on the migration practices of European minorities European emigration. The nexus aspirations/regimes of hope distribution is explored through context-sensitive analyses of the interviewees' account of their migration. This approach, I suggest, allows to shed a new light on Europe and its migrations as the experiences of young Maghrebi Europeans interrogate Europe as a place of hope and instead project their desire for a desirable future abroad.

1. When the future is not as expected: emigration and the distribution of hope

In this first part, I will specifically address the emergence of emigration aspiration among young Maghrebi French and Belgians in Europe. I will build my analysis on what Hage has coined as experiences of possibility (Hage, 2003,).I will refer to two other concepts developed by Hage (Hage, 2009): the concept of "existential mobility" defined as a feeling of "going somewhere" and its opposite that has been described as a sense of "existential stuckedness" (Hage, 2009) which refers to the feeling that things are not moving or not moving fast enough.

1.1 - "La galère": displacing one's aspirations of social mobility outside Europe

> "Sonia: And then, the troubles [*la galère*] began.
>
> J.: Ok and so when you say "troubles", it was a time when you were looking for a job, right?
>
> Sonia: Well in fact, I ended up in this company where I have been harassed, in September 2009. Between 2009 and 2011, I did some temporary contracts. It was really very, very short contracts. One month, two months, etc.
>
> J.: So, precarious, not something which could…

> Sonia: Precarious exactly. I was actively looking for a job though, and people were satisfied with my work. And there was always something that didn't work. And so… and it started in January 2011, I don't remember the month, then, impossible to find any job. When I say impossible, it was impossible! So impossible that after a while, I stopped looking because my motivation was so low and all." (Sonia 23/05/2017, Montreal) [1]

Sonia is a 37-year-old woman whom I met in Montreal. At the time of the interview, she was staying in the city for the second time. In the above quote, she explains how she decided to apply for a Canadian visa for the first time. The expression, "la galère," that she is using to describe her professional situation in Paris (France) before coming to Montreal, was regularly used by interviewees in both Europe and Canada. Typically, this expression was used to describe a situation of precariousness characterized either by unemployment or by a succession of temporary jobs. It is important to note that "la galère" does not only involve an economic and material precariousness but also, very often, a social and psychological one. Sonia explained this later in the interview:

> "Sonia: I was unemployed for one year and a half, I… I couldn't endure it actually. At one point you feel almost pathetic.
>
> J.: Ok, ok yes.
>
> Sonia: You see? You see the others moving forward and you, you are here "Ok, well listen…" You always wanted an expatriation… a try, a try abroad, well it is the occasion to try." (Sonia 23/05/2017, Montreal)

The sense of precariousness experienced by Sonia was compared with what she considered as normal and stable modes of life. Or what the future "should look like" (Boccagni 2017). During an interview, Leila, a 30 year old French woman of Algerian background working in customer services in Montreal, describes some features of what one's future should look like:

> "Leila: In France, it really is a job issue you see, because you study, you play by the rules… I did five years in University, this is something, and I don't find a job. Then, I get depressed! You can't avoid the truth, I was gaining weight, I was doing nothing anymore, you have time when you are completely demotivated, you regret the curriculum you chose. And you don't have… I turned thirty, no job, no permanent contract, no way to think about an apartment, a loan… you don't have… you don't have perspective." (Leila 22/03/2016, Montreal)

Leila's frustration is not only produced by the difficulty she has in trying to access better life conditions in France. It is also produced by the fact that – as she expresses it – she "played by the rules." Indeed, Leila's aspirations, in terms of her socio-economic situation, are built on a central societal hope: the hope that a high level of education allows the access to a stable job which ensures a certain level of material and economic comfort. Sonia's and Leila's experiences of precariousness also needs to be contextualized in the socio-economic dynamics of Paris where the dramatic augmentation of the housing prices contributed to

make the future more uncertain for significant portions of the lower middle class (Cusin, 2012) that are forced into alternative strategies of residential mobility (Collet, 2013).

The idea that aspiration for a stable socio-economic situation is difficult to fulfil in the European context, resonates with the structural transformation of the modality of social mobility in Europe during the last decades. Regarding the effect of the 2008 crisis, Northern countries such as France and Belgium were less impacted than other countries. Still, between 2007 and 2015 for example, the youth unemployment rate rose from 18.9% to 24.7% in France and from 18.9% to 22.1% in Belgium. At the same time, situations of underemployment were also on the rise, especially for workers under 30 years old. The situation of Sonia and Leila also reflect more durable transformations of the job market in Europe with the increase of non-standard and temporary contracts (Gallie, 2013). This evolution has produced a multiplication of situations of durable socio-professional precariousness (especially among the younger generations) characterized by an alternation between employment and unemployment and that has contributed to increased uncertainty about the future (Castel, 2013). The diminishing of the hope for a stable socio-economic situation for French and Belgian citizens in general is aggravated by the fact that the descendants of immigrants also face higher unemployment rates and lower wages than the average population, even when they have the same qualifications (Beauchemin et al. 2016).

Sonia's and Leila's accounts of their situation in France before moving to Montreal illustrate one dimension of the sense of "stuckedness" (Hage, 2009) shared by many of the Maghrebi Europeans I met during the research: the lack of opportunity for upward socio-economic mobility and – more broadly – the increasingly uncertain outcome of aspirations to stable economic situation. In this sense, their sense of stuckedness illustrates the failure of a major dimension of the distribution of hope within capitalist societies: the "ability to maintain an *experience* of the *possibility* of upward social mobility" (Hage, 2003, p. 13)

1.2 – "We will never be home here": stuck into hyper-recognition.

> "Nadir: Well because my parents, they came [in Belgium] in another context. They came asking something. […] So they didn't have the same expectations, they were more job seekers and so they are grateful to Belgium because you know, Belgium allowed them to escape poverty. That is the case for my father, […] it allowed him to have a decent life, to make some money, etcetera. So, I think that they are grateful. But what they don't understand is that Belgium cannot offer us what it has offered them. Why? Because their expectations are different from ours. […] But also because we are born in Belgium. We have this idea that the country has to accept us as we are while they [his parents] didn't come with this idea that Belgium had to accept them. They still consider themselves immigrants. We are born here, so if [Belgium] continues to identify us as immigrants, it means that we will never be home!" (Nadir, 16/01/2016, Montreal)

Nadir is a man from Belgium whose parents emigrated from Morocco. His father worked in a car factory and his mother was a cleaner. During his university curriculum, he moved to Montreal first as an exchange student and then started to work in several HR companies. In

the quote above, Nadir also shares his exasperation with the fact that – despite being born in Belgium – he is continuously identified as an "immigrant". During our discussion, Nadir also explains how the specific political context of his city of origin, Antwerp, contributed to encourage him to move abroad. Indeed, in the local election of 1988, the city experienced a rise of the far right party *Vlaams Blok* renamed *Vlaams Belang* in 2004. The electoral success of the party and its enduring influence in the city political life is mentioned by Nadir as a central element in its own experience of racism during his youth. As illustrated by Nadir's quote, the sense of being stuck in a precarious and uncertain situation was not only expressed in relation to material and/or economic aspirations. It was also often linked with questions of belonging and recognition.

In the course of my fieldwork, the political and media spaces in France and in Belgium were saturated by discourses about Muslim-Maghrebi minorities.

In October 2014, a 2011 Facebook publication of Theo Francken, the Belgian State Secretary for Asylum and Migrations, came to public attention. In this publication, the Flemish Nationalist political figure responded to an article of The Economist encouraging governments to focus on the benefits of immigration rather than to adopt restrictive immigration policies. In his reaction to the article, Theo Francken compared the "added value" of different Belgian communities: "I can see the added value of the Jewish, Chinese and Indian diasporas, but less the added value of Moroccan, Congolese or Algerian diasporas."[2]

The 26th of September 2015, Nadine Morano, a French member of the European Parliament and former Minister during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency, stated on public television that France was a "Judeo-Christian country" of "white race." In reaction to one of the show's commentators' remark that there was no such thing as an "everlasting France" and that one day France could be Muslim too. Nadine Morano added: "I want that France stays France. I don't want France to become Muslim."[3]

These two examples do not come from marginal actors. This suggests a banalization of these discourses characterized by the construction of "non-white" and Muslim minorities as figures of alterity. Such process of "othering" (Fellag, 2014) echoes what Fassin and Fassin (2006) describe as a logic of "racial assignation" that "differentiate the individuals without their consent depending of their origin, of the color of their skin, of their clothing" (Fassin & Fassin, 2006, p. 11 my translation) and produce a categorization of French and Belgian of Maghrebi background as "others", despite the fact that they were actually born in France or in Belgium.[4]

As many studies have shown, French and Belgian citizens of Maghrebi background are recognized through a number of labels that do not always reflect their own modes of identification. Among these labels, the religious one ("Muslim") is of great importance (Fellag, 2014; Fernando, 2014) along with ethnicity ("Arab", "Beur") and the supposed national origin ("Moroccan", "Algerian", etc.). Another predominant label, more specific to the French context, is the label of "la cité"[5] attached to the identification of Maghrebi youth (especially young men). 'La cité' carries the connotations of impoverished urban suburbs and

stereotypical representations of places of crime, insecurity and low levels of education. These modes of recognition, as Fernando (2014) points out, "*fixes* the meaning of one's self before one even has had the opportunity to *live* and *make* a self more nearly of one's own choosing" (Holt 1995, 2 cited in Fernando 2014, 48).

For Nadir, being labelled as Arab is experienced both as a lack of recognition as Belgian but also as a form of reification (Fraser, 2000) of his identity. It echoes Fernando's observations about Muslim French being both "invisible" as French citizens and "hyper visible" as Muslims (Fernando, 2014, p. 70). Indeed, Nadir's sense of stuckedness in a single identity is not a sense of not being recognized as Arab or Muslim per se but rather a sense of being constantly recognized (most of the time negatively) through these identities. In this perspective, Nadir's experience is very much about a form of "hyper-recognition." For Maghrebi Europeans, this form of hyper recognition also meant a disadvantaged position within the French and Belgian regimes of hope distribution which was experienced on a daily basis by facing practices of discrimination on the job market, for example.

1.3 – International mobility and the aspiration to self-realization and indifference

The previous paragraphs lead me to another question which touches upon the types of aspirations pursued through these emigration projects.

Sana, a woman in her 30's who arrived in France in her early youth as a refugee and who worked as a researcher in Montreal , described one of such aspiration: her aspiration to "fulfilment."

> "Sana: [Moving to Montreal] was a statement. The idea was: I refuse to live in a country which is openly racist… which… well, it doesn't even try to hide that because it is institutionalized, but I have to say, this was part of the story.
>
> J.: Yeah, yeah, but in what sense?
>
> Sana: Well in the sense that I think that what interested me first was to be in an environment where… where I was feeling that I would have a certain quality of life.
>
> J.: Ok.
>
> Sana: A form of… I don't know, of fulfilment, of well-being… I don't know, I was really seeing it like that.
>
> J.: Could you define that a bit? Because actually, a lot of people tell me about fulfilment. And it is funny because people actually use the very word "fulfilment".
>
> Sana: Ok, well, what I experienced the first time [in Montreal], I didn't have the feeling of a constant burden when… when I was speaking about my origins for example. I didn't have the impression to be very rapidly and very directly or immediately… with something which brought me to an elsewhere if you want, even if this elsewhere, I assume it you know!" (Sana, 08/07/2015, Skype Interview)

Sana grew up in a middle class city of the Parisian periphery and then moved to Paris. In this quote, Sana's aspiration to acquire a form of fulfilment was strongly associated with her

experience of being identified as "other" in France. The fulfilment aspired to by Sana included diverse criteria such as being able to access a proper job, being able to freely live one's religious faith, etc. Jamila, a young Belgian woman of Moroccan origin, described what she meant by fulfilment a term that she used regularly during our discussions:

> "Jamila: Why I want to go to Canada? It is mainly for a personal fulfilment, not even for a professional one. Because I know that if I abandon my culture, if I take off my headscarf… it is a bit extreme. Not if I abandon my culture but if I take off my headscarf, I know that I would be able to find a job here, well… […]
>
> It is really about… the journey that I would undertake, it is really for a fulfilment in every level. At the religious level, at the cultural level, and at the professional level. It would be really… I don't leave like that… I leave to have a better career, I don't leave to have better financial opportunities. It is really for myself, to feel that I can do something while being accepted actually." (Jamila 14/06/2015, Brussel)

At the time of the interview, Jamila was still a student in Brussels, the city where she grew up. Due to her headscarf, she experienced several obstacles to finding an internship in her field. After being refused several internship in Brussels, because of her headscarf, she was forced to take a position in France and she grew anxious about her future professional opportunities in Belgium. This anxiety was illustrated by Jamila's conviction that she would soon have to face a choice between wearing the headscarf (something that – in the quote above – she hesitated to identify with her "culture") or finding a job. When we met in 2015, moving to Canada still seemed to be a distant project for her and she had not really taken any steps toward realizing such a move. However, Canada still held a sort of fascination for her, in particular because of her impression that living her faith would be easier there.

For Sana and Jamila, the aspiration for fulfilment projected in Canada was less an aspiration for a positive recognition of their ethnic and/or religious backgrounds than it was a desire to "be accepted," as Jamila puts it. In other words, the key factor was that they were able to fully participate in society whatever their ethnic background or their religious practices. In this perspective, the aspiration for fulfilment and self-realization was mainly linked with an aspiration to experience what Fernando calls an "indifference to difference" (Fernando, 2014, p. 79). Indeed, for many of my informants, moving to Montreal was connected with an aspiration to live in a society which would be relatively indifferent to their ethnic or religious background, or, more precisely, to live in a society where all the different dimensions of their identity could be recognized.

The vignettes presented in this first part suggest that the emergence of emigration aspirations among young Maghrebi Belgians and French is deeply linked with the experience of a gap between socially validated aspirations and the actual distribution of hope within the French and Belgian societies. It also suggests the importance of racial and religious stratifications in the French and Belgium regime of hope distribution. Despite their effort in pursuing higher education, in becoming involved in associations or put in other words, in fulfilling many of the steps that are supposed to allow one access to a certain level of socio-economic upward mobility as well as some form of recognition as part of the national

society, Sonia, Nadir, Sana and Jamila experienced obstacles to the fulfilment of their aspirations.

2. Experiencing the Montreal regime of hope distribution: a sense of new possible futures

I move know from the emergence of emigration aspirations in France and in Belgium to the actual effect of emigration on Maghrebi French and Belgians representations of the future. The question that will be addressed in the following paragraphs is how the aspirations of young Maghrebi French and Belgians evolve when confronted to the specific regime of hope distribution in Montreal.

2.1 – Out of the dangerous class: the "normalization" of everyday life in Montreal

> "Nadir: The day I arrived [in Montreal], I understood that I was not an Arab, that I was an individual who was – among other things – Arab but who had a multitude of other identities.
>
> J.: And what made you think that? Do you have an anecdote that comes to your mind? A small thing?
>
> Nadir: The fact of not being constantly brought back to jokes about my origins. Also the fact that… when you go out for a party, to not constantly need three girls around you or to know the bouncer to be able to enter. You know, everyday life things. Even the fact to walk without feeling suspicion around you." (Nadir 16/01/2016, Montreal)

This is how Nadir, who I presented above, described to me his experience of every-day life in Montreal. In the quote, he refers to two aspects of this experience. The first aspect is his feeling to be recognized as an individual with multiple identities and not only through ethnic labels like in Europe. This was experienced as a huge difference with the environment in which he grew up described earlier in this article. The second aspect is a sense of relief from the social scrutiny that Maghrebi Muslim populations has to face in Belgium. Nadir's reference to the absence of suspicion that he experienced in Montreal's streets echoes a typical example given by Maghrebi French and Belgians to describe the differences between their life in Montreal and their life in Europe: the relation with the police. This point was raised by Noham, a French man of Algerian background during a discussion:

> "J.: I don't know, do you have any examples from your daily life that came back to your mind about what is different? That you experienced, say, in the northern districts (*quartiers nord*) of Marseille and that you don't experience here?
>
> Noham: Well you know, I don't want to sound "cliché" but… I don't know if there is a link with immigration but it is certain that racism is practically non-existent here. It is really non-existent. I would say, first, that I have never been arrested [by the police] here. Never! It's been seven years that I am in Montreal, seven years that I am in Canada, nobody ever arrested me. In Marseille, when I was coming out of my training session, with my bag on me, I was arrested [by the police]. I assure you, it is not a cliché eh! (Noham 03/04/2017, Montreal)

Noham grew up in a working class suburb of Marseille. His parents came to France from Algeria. His father was a factory worker and his mother, a social worker. Noham came to Canada as a student. At the time of my interview with him, he was working as an IT manager in a non-profit organization. It was Noham who proposed the place of our meeting: a famous and trendy coffee shop situated in Le Plateau, a neighborhood famous for its trendy bars, restaurants and food shops, and its popularity among middle class French population. In the immediate surroundings of the place where we met, one finds organic grocery stores, book shops and a music store selling vinyl records. Noham explained to me that he liked going out in this part of the city, even if he lived in another, less trendy neighborhood. For him, as for many of the Maghrebi European men I met in Montreal, difficult relations with the police was a common experience in his city of origin. Like Paris or Lyon, Marseille is characterized by an important immigrant population and by a high level of segregation between affluent (in the South of the city) and working class district (in the North) identified by the police as dangerous places. In France, studies have shown that young, working class men of foreign background – are more frequently arrested for "control check" than the rest of the population (Défenseur des droits, 2017; Fassin, 2011). Besides the often humiliating and violent dimension of this experience, this stop-and-frisk operates as a way for institutions to – using the words of one of my interlocutor – "question [my interlocutors] presence in the public space."

Nadir's and Noham's positive experience about Montreal need to be understood within the social dynamics of the city and in relation to their situation in it. Both of them are "desired immigrants" according to the standards of the city institutions and of the Quebec government. They are French speakers, they are young and they completed a university degree. At the time of the research, they both had relatively stable and well-paid jobs. In other words, they perfectly fit with the profile of the French-speaking, skilled professionals that Quebec authorities were looking for to secure a competitive position in a global economy (Houle, 2014).

Nadir's and Noham's account also illustrate different dynamics of racialization of Maghrebi-Muslim minorities in Europe and in Canada. In Western Europe, ethno-racial division are largely centered on a "national/postcolonial foreigner division" (Wacquant, 2014, p. 1695). In France and in Belgium, Maghrebi minorities have been consistently categorized as irreducible 'others' especially in France (Lamont, 2003). This categorization, built on various and intersecting racial categories (Silverstein, 2005) cannot be separated from the legacies of the colonial past (Bancel & Blanchard, 1997). Class is an important dimension of the racialization of Maghrebi minorities and one that is allegedly inherited from the recruitment of Maghrebi workers after World War II. Following widespread labour migration in the 1950 and 1960s, French and Belgian Maghrebi are strongly identified as working class and associated with "poverty, crimes, delinquency and social exclusion" (Galonnier, 2015, p. 578). While several studies tell us that these associations are association very much present in stigmatizing certain neighborhood of Montreal (Manaï, 2015), the absence of historical colonial relations and the active selection of immigrants by Canadian and Quebec authorities resulted in Maghrebi populations being much more easily associated with middle or upper

classes in a context where the Arab population in Canada remains highly educated (Eid, 2007, p. 17).

Nadir and Noham are not identified as part of a "problematic group" by the city authorities and the structure of their everyday lives usually keeps them away from districts that are considered as dangerous or requiring specific control from the authorities such as "Montreal Nord" (González Castillo & Goyette, 2015) or "The small Maghreb" (Manaï, 2015) to take two examples that has been studied.

2.2 – Canadian multiculturalism and the distribution of hope

When I asked my interlocutors about the differences between their country of origin and Montreal, I often received a specific type of anecdotes. An example of such an anecdote is given by Lounès, a French man of Algerian background who grew up in a small city of South Eastern France:

> "Lounès: If you go to a bank, your financial adviser can wear a veil, nobody cares! In 2012 when I came here, at the bank, I was in the *line-up* (in English in the interview) here to go to the counter and here, I questioned the Quebecker before me: "Sir, just a small question, don't take it personally, what do you think of this woman at the counter with her headscarf?" He says… I say: "Sorry, my name is Lounès, I am French from Algerian origin and Maghrebi of Muslim faith." He says to me: "Everybody do what they want here, it doesn't bother anyone." He says "Does she bother anyone this woman?" He says to me: "This is debates from France, we'll leave it to you (*on vous laisse ça chez vous*)!" I say: "Ah thank you sir, I really appreciate this, your answer makes me happy!" (Lounès 25/02/2016, Montreal)

A popular variant of this anecdote involves not a financial adviser but a customs officer of Montreal airport wearing an Islamic veil. In conversations, many of my interlocutors described their amazement and the sense of relief upon seeing that a figure of State authority could wear a religious piece of clothing, a situation that would be inconceivable in France or Belgium.

For many Maghrebi French and Belgians, moving to Montreal is experienced as an opening to new possibilities that are perceived as impossible to achieve in Europe because of the pervasive racism and discrimination practices described in the first part of the paper. This sense of new possibilities is illustrated by the frequent reference – during the interviews – to public figures of the elite coming from minority groups. At the time of my research – which coincided with the accession of Justin Trudeau to the function of prime-minister of Canada – Harjit Singh Sajjan was a figure frequently refered to by my French and Belgian interlocutors to illustrate the openness of Canada to cultural and religious diversity. Singh Sajjan was born in India, wears a dastaar (the sikh turban) and managed to become a Canadian military and police officer.

The importance that my interlocutors attributed to the visibility of figures coming from minority groups illustrate the differences between the Canadian and the European models of incorporation of immigrant minorities (Eid, 2007). While the 'republican model' of

integration implemented in France promote the assimilation of newcomers into the hegemonic French culture (Schnapper, 1991), Canada adopted a policy of multiculturalism of which one of the dimension is to encourage minorities to develop their identity (Rocher & White, 2014). Authors have noted that the Canadian liberal and individual centered definition of multiculturalism had largely infused the dominant discourses about the Canadian identity (Winter, 2011). And while the province of Quebec developed its own model of minorities incorporation labeled as "interculturalism" (Bouchard, 2011; Rocher & White, 2014; Taylor, 2012) this relative openness to the idea of a culturally diverse and pluralist society also contributed to positive attitudes of public opinion toward immigration in Canada (Reitz, 2011).

During my research, I was surprised to note that some of my interlocutors continued to describe Montreal as a city full of opportunities for people from ethnic and/or religious minorities even when their own migration trajectory (or pathway) was not characterized by any real upward social mobility. Many persons that I met were indeed still occupying low skilled jobs or temporary contracts, a situation that they had fled in Europe. What seemed to be experienced by many French and Belgian of Maghrebi origin arriving in Montreal is the sentiment that here they can "do something" – thus echoing a form of existential mobility (Hage, 2009) that not necessarily translated into concrete socio-economic mobility. In other words, they experienced the return of the possibility to foresee desirable futures that were unimaginable in Europe.

2.3. The limits of openness: the transatlantic convergence of anti-Muslim discourses.

While most of the French and Belgians encountered during my research would typically agree on the fact that being of Maghrebi and Muslim origin is easier to live with in Montreal as compared to Europe, many also recognize an evolution in the public attention toward Islam. Sana, who I already presented above, perceived an evolution of the political context in Quebec:

> "Sana: Yes, it evolved, and most of all, it evolved very fast. […] I made a joke once saying: I took the plane for Paris and I felt as if […] I was in a province and that I was coming back to the metropole! You know, I really had the impression that Quebec was just becoming a French province again.
>
> J.: Ok, yes, yes.
>
> Sana: The debates were so similar. It really annoys me. I find it upsetting to have lost a form of quality of life. […] In any case, there is a sort of liberation of many racist things." (Sana 08/07/2015, Skype interview)

Sana's account of what she identifies as a convergence of French and Quebec public discourses on Islam echoes recent evolutions in the Quebec debates about Islam and Muslim minorities. Both in Quebec and Canada, the Maghrebi population has largely been categorized through an articulation between ethnicity and religion (Eid, 2007). The effect of events such as the terrorist attack of 9/11 contributed to the production of a symbolic association of Islam and terrorism on a global scale. But more local dynamics also

contributed to the evolution of public attention toward Muslim minorities. In Quebec, during the second half of the 2000s, debates emerged regarding the legal concept of "reasonable accommodation" that "refers to the limited obligation by public and private institutions to adapt to the diversity of their workforce without causing undue hardship to the institutions (Jamil, 2014, p. 2325). As Jamil (2014) notes, the discussion about reasonable accommodation was rapidly focused on the question of cultural and religious diversity. A number of controversies around emblematic cases emerged and contributed to the creation of a consultation commission in 2007 headed by a sociologist and a philosopher of multiculturalism: Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor. Public consultations were organized. According to some authors, these consultations contributed to focusing the debates on identity and to facilitate the voicing of racist and xenophobic comments, which could have paved the way for policies targeting religious and immigrants minorities (Jamil, 2014; Mahrouse, 2010). Another important political sequence was the heated debate about the project of a "Charter of Quebec Values" introduced by the governing *Parti Québécois* in 2013. This document included a proposition to restrict the right of public sector employees to wear religious symbols. Rapidly, the debate focused on the case of Muslims and in particular on the case of the Islamic veil. The effect of this debate was widely discussed during my time in Montreal. Even if the Charter project was abandoned in 2014 traces of the heated debates that it produced was still very much present in my interlocutors' memory.

The increasing public anxiety about Islam and Muslim minorities in Quebec was also experienced during everyday life. Redouane, a French man who grew up in a working class district of the periphery of Caen and who was living in Montreal with his family described the islamophobic remarks that he sometimes faced.

> "Redouane: Look for example, the other day, when Trudeau had been elected, I brought my daughter to school and there is a father who passes near me. Well, he was talking alone so I don't know if he actually talked to me but it is nevertheless strange that he speaks this way when he is close to me. He passes by and says to me: "Anyway it is terrorists who voted for liberals." You see.
>
> J.: Ok, yes
>
> Redouane: No but he tells this to me because it is the Arabs, the terrorists, well you see. So… And well it is the kind of stuff… stupid stuff you see. And it can happen to you. My wife told me… just imagine this, there is a four years old girl… It is a friend of her who told her this. A little four year old girl who is here at school in Quebec eh. And children are telling to her "It is your fault! It is because of people like you what happened in France [The terrorist attacks in Paris]" Four year old ! (Redouane 01/12/2015, Montreal)

These accounts suggest that the migration of French citizens of Maghrebi origin in Montreal is often experienced as an ambivalent experience combining a sense of renewed possibilities as well as the persistence of discriminatory practices. This observation echoes with the work

of Le Renard (2016) about the experiences of French racialized people in Dubaï. In Dubaï, she argues, elements of nationality, ethnicity, professional status and religious practices are re-articulated to produce an ambivalent experience of accessing a relatively privileged status as "occidental" while still being caught in complex dynamics of ethnic categorization coming from both the "French community" and the Dubaï society. In Montreal, my data suggest that the experiences of French and Belgian Maghrebi are informed by a re-articulation of elements of ethnicity, class and religion. While experiencing new possibilities in terms of class position, my interlocutors also experienced discriminatory practices based on the common categorization of Maghrebi minorities as "Muslims."

At the time of the research, it was still unclear how this evolution of public discourses and everyday experiences impacted my interlocutors' migration projects. Redouane, like many people I met would argue that despite the recent evolutions, his life in Montreal was still easier than in Europe. Sometimes however, interlocutors mentioned their disillusions regarding Quebec supposed "openness" but such disillusions seldom resulted in aspirations to return to Europe. Rather it seemed to encourage further mobility toward other Canadian destinations such as Toronto perceived as still more welcoming for Muslim minorities.

Conclusion:

This paper argues that for many Maghrebi Europeans, moving from Europe to Montreal means experiencing a different regime of hope distribution where personal attributes such as ethnicity, religion and class are articulated in different ways and open to different possible futures.

The article first focuses on the experience of possibility expressed by Maghrebi European both in their country of origin and in Montreal. It is argued that Europe and its futures were mainly experienced through existential stuckedness (Hage, 2009). This is deeply related to structural dynamics of increasing socio-professional precariousness and discriminations impacting Maghrebi minorities in Europe. In contrast, Montreal was often associated with a renewed "experience of the possibility for upward social mobility" (Hage, 2003, p. 13). This renewed sense of the possibility for desirable future was not always translated into actual upward evolution in terms of socio-professional mobility but remained nevertheless a powerful experience for many of my interlocutors.

Many Maghrebi Europeans also encountered racial and religious stigma in Montreal, often experienced as a form of transatlantic convergence of negative discourses and practices directed against Maghrebi Muslim minorities both in Europe and in Canada. The aspirations and sense of possibility developed by Maghrebi Europeans moving to Montreal appear to be shaped by a dynamic of hope distribution that occurs at different scale levels. At the national level of course, but also at the local or city level or at a more transnational level when the global convergence of anti-Muslim discourses tends to make it more difficult to imagine a desirable future in large portion of the western world.

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1. All of the interviews were conducted in French and translated into English by me. For privacy reasons, the names of the respondents have been changed.
2. My translation. See: https://www.rtbf.be/info/societe/detail_theo-francken-doute-de-la-valeur-ajoutee-des-marocains-et-des-congolais?id=8378856.
3. TV show "On est pas couché", France 2, 26 September 2015.
4. The construction of Muslim minorities as "others", at least in France, also involved important continuities with the colonial period (Amiraux, 2010).
5. "La cité" is a term used to name the working class suburbs of the big French cities, often characterized by a high concentration of social housing.