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ETH ZURICH
MAS URBAN DESIGN

MIGRANT MARSEILLE

ARCHITECTURES OF SOCIAL SEGREGATION AND URBAN INCLUSIVITY

EDITED BY
MARC ANGÉLIL
CHARLOTTE MALTERRE-BARTHES
AND SOMETHING FANTASTIC

RUBY PRESS

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MARSEILLE: IS THERE A CITY BEYOND THE CLICHÉS?

Introduction

Charlotte Malterre-Barthes

Migration as Urban Identity

Tourism guides are not kind to Marseille. Indeed, The Rough Guide to Provence & the Côte d'Azur's summary is symptomatic of the city's poor reputation: "Marseille has all the social, economic and political tensions of France writ large. To some extent it is a divided city, with the ethnic French living on one side of La Canebière, and the large, vibrant North African community on the other side: needless to say, racism is rife, as are poverty, bad housing and rising unemployment, particularly among the youth."¹ A 2,600-year-old port located on the Mediterranean shores of France, Marseille was established by Greek sailors as a harbor city with few connections to its hinterland, and developed as a trading hub favoring overseas exchanges over inland trade. Historically, Marseille's politics has reflected an outsider's position, challenging ruling powers, such as supporting Pompey over Rome, countering Louis XIV or Napoleon, and setting against the Thiers government during the Commune. Despite being cliché-ridden, images of Marseille form what urbanist Marcel Roncayolo calls an imaginary (*imaginaire*), that is, an agglomeration of individual and collective images throughout history, language, and landscapes as common signs or perceptions, contributing to memory as individual psychology.² This imaginary is the substance of the city—from which



William Firebrace crafted the book *Marseille Mix*, made of urban stories.³ A city, through its architecture, urbanism, infrastructure, institutions, and monuments, as well as its everyday images and relational networks, creates a multi-scalar mental territory that changes through time.

Marseille, harbor city, city harbor, projects at the end of the eighteenth century a somewhat exaggerated image of an isolated city close to the African continent, living off maritime exchanges. With the economic crisis of the nineteenth century, the city's imaginary becomes provincial, limiting spaces and functions. The greatness of Marseille then concentrates on industrial economy and colonial activities. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the city is industrial as well as popular, and embodies visions of a hard-working labor force, tight human relations, close sociability, and everyday cosmopolitanism.⁴ It functions as an articulation between local, national, and global scales, with colonialism as a link. It is not before the late 1970s and the 1980s that a new imaginary emerges, with crime and mafia organizations painting Marseille as a Mediterranean island, sister in crime to Corsica and Sicily (i.e., Judge Michel's murder and the "French connection"), turned again toward the sea.⁵

Overlapping with this territory's imaginary, is the more trivial, affective, even sentimental picture of Marseille—which one could also call identity—founded in sports, music, and political views, and built against Paris as the ruling symbol of French authority. Residents tend to say they are "Marseillais before anything else." In the late 1990s, a rich hip-hop and reggae milieu developed in the northern and central districts, with songs whose lyrics were critical of both local and national governance politics, and which established a dual identity immigrant and as inhabitant of Marseille.^{6 7 8} The local football team, Olympique de Marseille, is revered. Internationally renowned Zinedine Zidane, born in the so-called Quartiers Nord (a term used to discriminate against the northern districts of the city) to an Algerian family who lived in the Cité la Castellane, for a decade smiled from a giant poster on the Corniche Kennedy, the coastal road south of the city. But football, as a so-called miracle that would unite all social classes for matches at the Stade Vélodrome, reproduces the social divisions of the city in the tribune placements within the stadium. However, it too contributes to the collective imaginary as a space of commoning and centrality. This imaginary as an empirical factor is rooted in time and fluctuates in a large chronological frame that is given and belongs to

the inhabitants, whether newcomers or longtime locals. Perhaps the identification phenomenon that is the feeling of belonging contributes to maintaining the precarious imbalance between a beloved city and a hated state (as a long-established enemy) and possibly mitigating socio-political tensions.⁹

"They were from Marseille before being Arabs. [...] That's what it was, the story of Marseille. Its eternity. Its utopia. The only utopia of the world. A place where anybody of any color could come off a boat or a train, suitcase in hand and pockets empty, and merge into the flow of other humans. A city where, the second that one stepped onto the ground, one could say: 'That's it. I'm home.' Marseille belongs to those who live there."¹⁰ This excerpt from Jean-Claude Izzo's crime stories paints a somewhat idyllic portrait of the city that can be easily dismissed as naive. Yet it illustrates how immigration is key to Marseille's image and identity, not only as a strong empirical component of the city's imaginary, but as a real economic motor that has shaped the city's social and urban structure for centuries.

Migrant Marseille

This is a publication interested in two types of relationships: first, how migration relates to and plays out in space, architecture, and territory, between social and spatial arrangements; and second, how design can work with and react to these sites and conditions. It argues that migration is the ideal entry point into an engaged form of spatial practice and design agency. Migration is neither a new phenomenon nor a specifically modern condition. In the quest for a better, safer life, people have always moved. But in the wake of Europe's refugee crisis and the climate emergency, it has become a pressing topic. Circulations of people, goods, and capital, as much as their resettlement, have a visible, transformative impact upon space at various scales. Aiming to uncover architectures of social segregation and urban inclusivity, this work attempts to address the relational dynamics between migration and the built environment, and how space—from architecture to territory—is shaped by, and in turn shapes, political, economic, and social practices. However, *Migrant Marseille* does not pretend to grasp such a broad matter in its entirety. Instead, it chooses to narrate an urban reality, where migration is present at every turn, in a myriad of ways.

The section "A Brief History of Housing and Migration, 1800–1975," introduces a city where newcomers have played an essential



role in shaping the socioeconomic face of the territory, but where state responses have been ambiguous. An examination of several housing estates reveals a rich modernist architectural heritage in various environments, from Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation to Alvar Aalto's forest town-inspired Le Roy d'Espagne. It is enriched by "Marseille, the Great Move," a record of the architectural production in the political context of the time, by architect Thierry Durosseau.

"Neighborhoods" are then investigated to better understand the urban and architectural fabric. These function as urban probes to tell the ongoing story of migrant Marseille and address a specific problematic: Belsunce, the arrival neighborhood; Noailles, the diverse but afflicted district; Félix Pyat and La Castellane, the Comorian- and Algerian-rich housing estates under police control and demolition programs; La Rouvière, the *pièdes-noirs*' segregated haven; Parc Kallisté, the dilapidated co-ownership home to illegal newcomers; and concluding with the zone within the Euroméditerranée urban redevelopment program under threat of gentrification. Quotations and texts from the media, militants, and residents punctuate the book, making space for local voices and contentious dialogues. Homegrown activist and urbanist Nicolas Memain delivers a vivid contextual account of the city today in "Marseille at War," and Marc Angélil and Cary Siress take a philosophical yet critical stance toward the banlieues in "La Marseillaise for All?"

In "Projects for Marseille," student works deploy strategies and tactics to address the pressing questions posed by each of the sites, with a focus on inclusivity. The final section of "Principles, Tools, and Ideas for an Inclusive Urbanism" presents distilled, illustrated thoughts that support planning and design in a more inclusive way. The essay "The Possibilities of an Inclusive Urbanism" by me and Something Fantastic concludes the publication.

Undertaken by the students of the Master of Advanced Studies in Urban Design at the chair of Marc Angélil (Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich), under my direction with Something Fantastic, *Migrant Marseille* encourages architects and planners to take into account all social, spatial, and ecological factors in their work. Presenting alternatives to conventional planning methods and concerns, it aims to redefine urban design as a discipline that holds the key to new visions of a more just, planet-conscious, and heterogeneous built environment.



- 1 *The Rough Guide to Provence & the Côte d'Azur* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 61.
- 2 Marcel Roncayolo, *Lectures de villes: Formes et temps* (Marseille: Editions Parenthèses, 2002), 358.
- 3 William Firebrace, *Marseille Mix* (London: AA Publications, 2010).
- 4 Albert Londres, *Marseille, porte du sud* (Paris: Arléa, 1999), 120.
- 5 Alfred W. McCoy, *Marseille sur héroïne* (Paris: L'Esprit Frappeur, 1999), 158.
- 6 "Immigrant" is a disputed term, as it assembles the just-arrived population as well as the first, second, third, or fourth generations of immigrants, French citizens born in France. "Of immigrant origin" is also used in the media, but is questionable as well, as it often only concerns North Africans. The term immigrant is used in this text to mean foreign nationals settled in France.
- 7 The northern districts (Quartiers Nord), north of the Canebière axis, is where most of the *habitations à loyer modéré* (rent-controlled housing, HLM) and *grands ensembles* are situated.
- 8 See, for instance, the songs "Planète Mars" by IAM, "Belsunce Breakdown" by Bouga, and "Chourmo!" by Massilia Sound System.
- 9 It is believed by many scholars that in France, violence is due to a loss of confidence in institutions and the role they traditionally play in the integration process of new populations. Therefore, violence tends to be aimed at amenities and public institutions, the state and its representatives. See, for instance, Laurent Bonelli, "Les raisons d'une colère," *Manière de voir*, October–November 2006, 6.
- 10 Jean-Claude Izzo, *Total Khéops, Série Noire* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1995).