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# The Temporary Accommodation of Homeless Families in Ile-de-France: Between Social Emergency and Immigration Management<sup>1</sup>

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› **Abstract** *In France, an increasing number of homeless people are immigrants. Since the late 1990s in the Paris region, some homeless immigrant families with children have been looked after by a care and temporary accommodation system in motels. This article focuses on the development and functioning of a public policy that brings the management of migratory flows and the world of social emergency closer together.*

› **Keywords** *Families; migrants; motels; temporary accommodation*

We are heading for the stadium with Amadou. On our way, we walk past a nursery and primary school. I ask him whether he has ever tried to register his daughters here. He says: “No, the city council doesn’t want motel children. Also, if we are ‘moved’ by the Samusocial, it means we’ll have to put them down for another school. That’s why we are keeping them in their school in the 13<sup>th</sup> district in Paris”. Amadou adds that he is waiting to be granted a dwelling by the APTM (Association pour l’accompagnement social et administrative des migrants et leurs familles – an organization that assists migrants) before enrolling his children somewhere else.

(Field journal, November 2011, a Parisian suburb).

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## Introduction

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The number of homeless families with children represents an increasing proportion of the homeless population in Ile-de-France, a Parisian Region; <sup>2</sup> there are now estimated to be at least 20 000 such homeless families. Parents with children under the age of 18 are entitled to be taken into care as a family, and they are also eligible to be granted accommodation, whatever their administrative status (Guyavarch and Le Méner, forthcoming); this is contrary to what happens in other European countries, where public services for homeless people are not always accessible to foreigners and undocumented migrants (Sprakel, 2010). These families are essentially made up of immigrants, asylum seekers, undocumented individuals, and those with residence permits.

The link between homelessness and immigration in EU member States was explored by Edgar *et al.* (2004) and the accumulated research evidence demonstrates that immigration modifies the profile of homelessness (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010). This is notably the case in France (Brousse, 2009). It remains the case, however, that in comparison with the USA, migrant and homeless families are under-researched in the European context (Toro, 2007). This is particularly notable in the French specialized literature (Le Méner, forthcoming). The limited documentation of homeless families in the academic world and the low visibility of the issue in the public space – at least until relatively recently, as shall be seen later – raise a question that needs to be discussed, and that acts as an invitation to explore the complex mechanisms of public policy with regard to homeless families.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to more adequately document the structures of contemporary homelessness, as well as the actors involved in providing services for homeless families in Ile-de-France. The first aim is to provide a descriptive account thereof, inasmuch we do not know how the homeless families are taken into care. Using a political sociology of public policies perspective (Duran, 2010), the aim is to identify the actors involved, their interests, objectives and means of action, as well as the consequences of their actions. Thus, this article particularly probes the relationships between the State, the associative sphere and the private sector in a context of the transformation of homelessness on the European scale.

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## Context and Methodology

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An expansion in services for homeless people occurred during the same period that the 'social exclusion' issue appeared on the political agenda (Paugam, 1996) – when the economic crisis and unemployment were beginning to affect hitherto protected social classes. The increasingly visible presence of homeless people in public spaces was perceived as a call to action, particularly by physicians who established emergency services. Day and night centres, outreach teams, and emergency telephone contact points were created and managed by associations, which were amply funded by the State, as was the case for the Paris Samusocial, created in 1993 by Dr. Xavier Emmanuelli. Along with the institutionalization of social emergency, the emergency accommodation sector that targeted the most destitute among the population (Damon, 2001) moved progressively away from integrated accommodation, which was mostly dedicated to people experiencing difficulties in finding social housing (Houard, 2011.) The innovative Housing First policy broke with the idea of the staircase model and it demonstrated that immediate access to housing is the primary answer to homelessness (Houard, 2011). Social or private rented accommodation was then acquired by the authorities (the State or town councils) for homeless couples, and notably for families. For those who would otherwise not fulfil the required conditions to remain in their accommodation, special terms of access were devised. Associations and social services, through collaborative relationships set up in 2010 (SIAO, Integrated Systems of Reception and Orientation), settled people in long-term accommodation as well as in vacant lodgings.

Homeless families could then benefit from these measures, but with certain conditions, such as the possession of a residence permit. Moreover, supply appeared not to be meeting demand as a result of the structural shortage of social housing. Indeed, many families still had to be accommodated by the social emergency sector. More accurately, they were mainly taken into care by 'social' motels that were owned and managed by private actors, but had commercial relationships with, or booking services through various homeless associations – of these the Paris Samusocial was predominant in Ile-de-France.

The paper is based on recent multidisciplinary action research on children and homeless families led by six researchers: two sociologists, two epidemiologists, one demographer and one statistician. The research includes fieldwork that began in September 2011 in a Parisian suburban motel that accommodates homeless families; an epidemiological and sociological survey of a randomized sample of 1000 families living in Ile-de-France; and finally, an analysis of relevant policy. This paper mainly relies on the latter, which is based on about fifty interviews – begun in July 2010 – of major actors involved in the provision of temporary accommoda-

tion and the social follow-up of families in Paris. Analyses of institutional archives and a corpus of press articles are also included, and other materials from observations of families and social contributors are employed selectively.

The paper commences by identifying various actors within the care system for homeless families: a homeless family; a provider of temporary accommodation; the Samusocial of Paris, which is commissioned by the State; an accommodation site (in this case a motel); a city in Seine-Saint-Denis; a school located in another department, namely Paris' 13th district; a social service that provides access to temporary accommodation for certain immigrant families; the APTM (Association pour l'accompagnement social et administratif des migrants et de leurs familles), an organization specialized in the integration of migrants, notably migrant families other than asylum-seekers. This list suggests a noticeable transformation of French policy on homelessness, which has moved away from a singular focus on single homeless people to include immigrant families, who should be dealt with *a priori* under immigration and asylum policies. How can we account for the fact that these families have ended up in the charge of structures usually targeted at single homeless people? This question becomes even more significant when one considers that it goes beyond the French frame alone; at the European level, there is a discernible increase in reliance on homeless services within migration management policies (Edgar *et al.*, 2004.)

To answer that question necessitates looking first at the historical circumstances that established the Samusocial of Paris as having a central role in the care of these predominantly migrant families, when the skills and reputation of the organization were developed around outreach work for single homeless people considered to be isolated. The paper will examine how motels have become the almost exclusive accommodation model for these families. Next, it will show that taking these families into care results in a division of labour between specialized organizations and a central accommodation operator. We shall call the specialized organizations 'platforms', as those in the field do; these are involved in the social, and sometimes legal, affairs of families, depending on their administrative status. The central accommodation operator, the PHRH (Pôle d'Hébergement et de Réservation Hôtelière), an accommodation and booking service that is integrated within the Samusocial, is responsible for assigning families to, or moving them between, available motels. Finally, it will be suggested that this work division, in a context of increasing demand, is a source of complexity and emerging problems for those involved.

## **Increasing Numbers of Families in the Accommodation System: the Samusocial and Motels as Front Doors and Modes of Accommodation**

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The Samusocial of Paris (SSP) was created in November 1993 in order to help “those who do not ask for anything.” Mainly administered by the State and the City, the organization was the spearhead of a medical emergency intervention shaped by Xavier Emmanuelli. Until recently, the public action undertaken by the organization in addressing homelessness was mainly inspired by the ‘social emergency’ model (Cefai and Gardella, 2011). It first defines itself through a matrix analysis of the desocialization of single people living on the streets (Damon, 2001), yet today, while continuing to underscore the importance of social emergency and of directing its communication to the roofless, the SSP devotes more than three quarters of its budget to the housing of families. It is the principal housing provider for homeless families in Ile-de-France. For the first time ever, more than 17 000 parents and children have been taken into care by this organization since the beginning of winter 2011. In addition, the families who are allotted temporary accommodation by the SSP are mainly immigrant families that should more logically be the responsibility of migration and asylum seeker services, not of through social emergency services. Remarkably, 90% of the heads of family accommodated after having dialled the Parisian 115 number for emergency accommodation<sup>3</sup> state that they were born abroad.

According to those working in the Parisian Samusocial and Parisian social services, families began to appear in the social emergency structures on a large scale at the end of the 1990s, though social establishments have been accommodating families for a long time; for instance, the CHRS was open to families with children as early as 1974, while there are also the centres specifically for mothers with children under the age of three who are experiencing financial difficulties and educational problems with their children. Such families could also, however, be sheltered in unregulated structures or in cheap motels, which led to anxiety that was made public by a number of organizations at the end of the 1980s when ATD Quart Monde, for example, set up a colloquium concerning the fate of homeless families. The presence of families on the streets then became perceived as the new face of a poverty (Wodon, 1992) that affected people who lost their rental accommodation, or women who had been through a divorce or suffered spousal violence. The families that field workers were encountering by the end of the 1990s were different, however, in being foreign. This flow of families into the social services occurred during the increase in immigration that began in 1997 (Thierry, 2004). In 1997, the Samusocial started to take a small number of families into care, some of which had

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<sup>3</sup> The 115 are free emergency call-centres, open 24/7, that enable homeless people to request temporary accommodation. In Paris, the 115-centre is administered by the Samusocial.

irregular immigration status, yet it would be another two years before the increasing number of families accommodated, and the alerts that ensued, led to the institutionalization of admitting these families. It was only under exceptional circumstances that the Samusocial officially became the 'front door' for families seeking temporary accommodation, when on a particular October night, approximately forty parents and children were met on the street and taken into care by outreach teams. The central administration decided then to entrust the emergency accommodation of families to the SSP.

As an answer to an out of the ordinary and yet predictable situation, the State granted the responsibility for homeless families to an organization dedicated to humanitarian intervention that, while having experience in providing temporary accommodation and emergency care, had traditionally targeted isolated individuals. The way in which this new policy was integrated into the sphere of social emergency services is not unique, but is another case of a humanitarian response to exceptional conditions, where the State then resorts, on a long-term basis, to systems already in place.

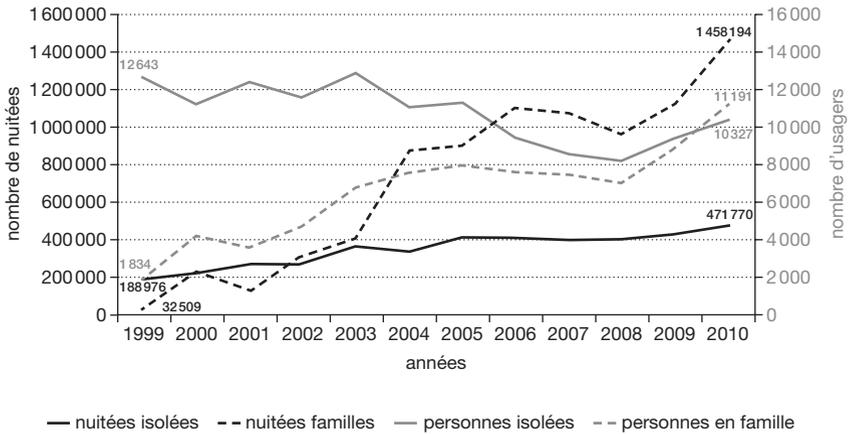
As early as 1999, the 'Paris 115 services' (as interviewees call them) became the front door, portal, screen or filter for the accommodation system. This necessitated an overview and adjustment of their modes of operation, as instead of having to reach isolated individuals on the streets, they now had to find temporary accommodation for families. Some of the 115 staff progressively improved their competencies in accessing temporary accommodation (primarily motels at this point) and in the provision of advice for families, thus favouring the formalization of a 115 family centre.

This was undoubtedly an opportunity for that organization to reach out to a swiftly expanding population that was only a marginal focus of public action at that time. It was also an opportunity that could not be refused as it came directly from the State – the main funder of SSP. Today, some members regret that the focus of their organization was diverted from its original mission to tackle the issue of street homelessness. Conversely, others consider that the change allowed the organization to target one of society's most underprivileged groups, namely people with children who immigrated under constraint, who are mostly undocumented and whose administrative status is uncertain. Be it as it may, the Paris 115 services have become, for a growing number of primarily foreign families, the road by which to access housing through temporary accommodation.

As figure 1 shows, the numbers and the length of the stays of the families have increased considerably since the end of the 1990s. In 1999, families represented 13% of 115 service users, and 15% of overnight stays. The number of families

accommodated by 115 services therefore saw an increase of about 500% between 1999 and 2009, while the average annual length of stay jumped from 18 to 130 days. In 2009, families represented 52% of the users and 76% of overnight stays.

**Figure 1: Evolution of services and overnight stays between 1999 and 2010**



Data source: Paris 115 services

The families in question consider the temporary accommodation provided as a step towards housing. It remains the case that their being taken into care, as happens today in the Paris region, owes much to the emergency action model in place when they entered the system at the beginning of the 1990s. The State thus left the defining and administration of the issue to local associations, when it was, in fact, the State's domain. In doing so, it was following a pattern of delegation that was thoroughly analysed through the political sociology of public action (Duran and Thoenig, 1994), as well as shrewdly described by Damon who studied the issue of homelessness (Damon, 2001). A feature, albeit little recognised, of that care is temporary accommodation in motels. From 1999 onwards, motels became the almost exclusive mode of temporary accommodation for homeless families, as the accommodation structures that had been used until then could not cope with the constant increase in requests. In the 1990s, homeless families were either taken into care through a structure designed for asylum seekers or through a 'non-specific' structure that addressed the homeless issue.

On the one hand, accommodation capacity grew in the 1990s through the multiplication of emergency shelters in large collective centres where accommodation was distributed on a nightly basis; these aimed at first to meet the needs of single men (Damon, 2001) and were rarely open to families. In theory, they provided accommodation unconditionally, but they were considered poorly adapted to families both

by social workers and the State. As a former manager of accommodation for asylum-seeking families puts it, sheltering children in these places was “simply unthinkable”; “we would find a direct solution, even in a motel.” Indeed, some families were then accommodated in motels for short stays – families stayed for an average of 18 nights in 1999 – or in centres designed for long-term stays. On the other hand, the accommodation of asylum seekers was assured by specialized centres, reception centres for asylum seekers (Centre d’Accueil pour Demandeurs d’Asile (CADA)), which were created in 1991. Theoretically, people were accepted according to the degree of emergency involved (Kobelinsky, 2010), and families with children were given priority over single people.

The two national structures combining temporary accommodation and the social follow-up of families were inundated by the constantly increasing number of requests. Even if capacity was markedly increased in the CADA, it was still insufficient to contain the demand. The saturation of these establishments was one of the major reasons that motels became the chief source of temporary accommodation for families in Ile-de-France at the end of the 1990s. The ‘social motels’ (furnished motels, former tourism establishments converted for the reception of homeless people, and motel residences) were then used as a supply of temporary accommodation in place of the non-specific structures and reception centres for asylum seekers. At the end of the 1990s, social motels were called ‘hotels secs’, a phrase that can be found in interviews with the protagonists of the time, in the archives of the associations, or in the reports of meetings between the associations and the supervising administration. The phrase expresses quite well the function of the motels: basic temporary accommodation intended to provide help but without any other supplementary services. These establishments were declining in number, though were still relatively numerous compared to the other types of temporary accommodation (Jankel and Lévy-Vroelant, 2007), but their commercial nature and their locations allowed temporary and flexible use, which had the consequence of involving the State to a much lesser level than specifically adapted centres and services. The motels, as they were used then and continue to be used today, were seen by the State as emergency temporary accommodation catering to needs created by the unavailability of places in more adapted centres. As the number of furnished, temporary accommodation centres began to decrease dramatically, the state acknowledged their *de facto* social function.

That function of ‘transitory accommodation’ (Lévy-Vroelant, 2004) as provided by the motels is not new. In the large French cities and the Paris region first, motels have been receiving migrants and destitute people since the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Roche, 2000; Faure and Lévy-Vroelant, 2007). Since the 1980s in Paris, associations have provided motel accommodation to individuals who, in some circumstances, have lived there for whole years, and, on a more limited basis, to families in dire straits.

Yet, from 1999 onwards, the massive recourse to social motels to accommodate asylum-seeking or undocumented families contributed to the coming together of, and even the cross-over between, asylum policy and homelessness policy (Noblet, 2000; Frigoli, 2004). The temporary accommodation of these families, even those in irregular immigration situations, was perceived as an obligation by the ministries in charge of immigration and asylum – a humanitarian obligation arising due to the presence of children. Yet, these families became the beneficiaries of social emergency because there were no more places available in the structures dedicated to the reception of migrants. This is another well-documented phenomenon at the European level (Edgar *et al.*, 2004): the strong influence on homeless services of migration management policies. While homeless services have compensated for deficiencies in the reception structures for migrants, according to European recommendations, installations for homeless people should not be considered adequate substitutes for dedicated asylum-seeker services.

The confusion between asylum policy and action for homeless people corresponds to the confusion between asylum policy and the management of migratory flows. In Europe as in France from the 1980s, the increase in the number of asylum seekers has been a matter of debate (Düvell and Jordan, 2002), and asylum seekers have been treated with growing suspicion. In France, this meant restricting the entry of foreigners, whatever their motivations, to French territory, such that the State then took the risk of failing to differentiate between the management of migratory flows and asylum policy; this risk has been growing since the end of work immigration in 1974. When one considers the number of foreigners that were accommodated in such motels, it is surprising that this type of accommodation is largely absent from research on contemporary places in which foreigners are ‘enclosed’ (Kobelinisky and Marakemi, 2009).

Temporary motel accommodation was almost exclusively used for immigrant families and therefore became a substitutive solution both for homeless centres and centres designed for asylum seekers. Notably, being able to receive families without the need to demonstrate a residence permit or asylum request receipt meant that this type of temporary accommodation also enabled the ‘protection’ of families with children, famously known as the ‘neither-nor’, as they were barely in a position to be sorted out and scarcely in a position to be deported. Different from CADA or reception centres for other homeless people; temporary accommodation in motels did not involve a follow-up by social workers. Coupled with an increase in the numbers of homeless families, the perpetuation of that temporary accommodation solution then led to a progressive separation of temporary family accommodation by the Samusocial and social follow-up on those families, depending on their administrative status, which was looked after by associations specialized in helping migrants.

## **The Progressive Separation of the Social Follow-Up of Families and their Temporary Accommodation**

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Three channels were created in the early 2000s in order to cope with the increasing numbers of foreign families calling the Paris 115, and to ensure social follow-up with families according to their administrative status, and not related to emergency or exclusion criteria, as was the case for individuals. These three channels were the Coordinating Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seeking Families (CAFDA), which was administered by CASP (Centre d'action sociale protestant/The Protestant Social Action Centre); the 'family platform' of the Order of Malta; and the Reception and Support Platform of the APTM (Association pour l'accompagnement social et administrative des migrants et leurs familles).

Though the Paris 115 services were used at that time by families as a front door into structures of care, the staff had no, and remain without, training in the social follow-up of these families, whose needs differed from the usual requirements of the few families previously resorting to the 115 services. As a current manager of the 'family service', who also took part in its development, says: "we all cracked up when we started to take the families seeking asylum into care." The high numbers of homeless families seeking asylum justified the creation of a second platform in August 2000: the CAFDA, the mission of which was to ensure the social follow-up with, as well as the social and legal support of, these families. From March 2001, it also looked after their temporary accommodation. That platform was entrusted to CASP, an association dedicated to the support of the most destitute. The CASP had already been responsible for the reception of Kosovar families, who arrived in the context of an emergency and because there was nowhere else to accommodate them. It seems that this experience was the deciding factor in entrusting CAFDA to CASP.

For the asylum seeking families, the Paris 115 services still remained the front door to the temporary accommodation structure, but after a few nights in a motel reserved through 115 services, their temporary accommodation was theoretically ensured by CAFDA. This platform was, however, rapidly confronted with a triple problem. First, according to an activity report of the time, there was a lack of places in CADA on the national level; second, some families became stuck within the structure, largely because of the lengthening of the time necessary to be acknowledged as an asylum seeker and because of the presence of families requesting territorial asylum who could not be granted their request (this difficulty was later reinforced by a hindrance to domiciliation and the increasing time necessary to conduct the investigations). Finally, the third problem was the presence of families unconcerned with seeking asylum, which meant that some requests for care addressed to CAFDA were left unsatisfied. A current general manager of the CASP reports that they "realized that there were not only asylum seekers in the popula-

tion. There were refugees, who therefore had a status. There were also people who were not eligible for asylum. There were even French people who were lost there for reasons we knew nothing about.”

That difficulty led to a further division of families according to their administrative statuses. In 2002, two new platforms were then created: one for the ineligible families and another for families in an ‘irregular’ immigration situation, or in the midst of being processed (depending on how their situation was viewed).

The family platform of the Order of Malta was therefore organized specifically to provide temporary accommodation, and the follow-up and support of families definitively ineligible for asylum.<sup>4</sup> The choice of that organization can first be explained by the social activities it had been developing over a number of years with homeless people, notably in partnership with the SSP. It also had the advantage of existing in a number of countries from which, it was thought, many people ineligible for asylum came. According to the personal archives of the former manager of that platform, “the Order of Malta was asked to become the operator of a ‘family’ mission. It would be a public service mission either aiming at the integration of certain families in France or at the organization of their departure (training, amount of money necessary, return to the home country) according to the choices of the families”.<sup>5</sup> The Order hesitated to accept the proposal, however, as it had no experience with migrants, but the Board accepted the mission submitted by the government, connecting it with one of the secular missions of the Order, that of assisting ‘displaced families’. Nevertheless, the platform quickly understood that assisting the return of families to their home countries would not be very successful, and it then focussed on the first aspect of its mission – assistance with the integration of families.

Another platform was created at the same time to help undocumented families who had not applied for asylum. It was administered by the Association pour l’accompagnement social et administrative des migrants et leurs familles (APTM), an association created in 1967 to facilitate the rehabilitation of migrant workers, and according to its current manager (and former temporary accommodation manager), this platform is “a support unit dedicated to foreigners in precarious situations. That activity was created in 2002. So, at that time, the State had appealed to the APTM, since the SSP was coping with quite a number of foreigners, that is to say undocumented foreign families. So, as for temporary accommodation, the Samusocial had indeed an answer, but there was a problem with the social follow-up.”

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<sup>4</sup> The French Office for Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons; then by the National Court of Asylum.

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Sep 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002 meeting, which took place at the Ministry in charge of the fight against exclusion.

At the beginning, the procedures for shifting between platforms seemed to be working quite well. The division of people and care seemed to be fully achieved, and migrants then came under these three new channels for both temporary accommodation and social work. Contrary to the Paris 115 services, which oriented families towards sectorized social services or adequate actors, these platforms initially offered migrant families 'comprehensive care', ensuring not only their social follow-up, but also their temporary accommodation. However, almost ten years later, one service of the SSP – the temporary accommodation and booking service (Le Pôle d'Hébergement et de Réservation Hôtelière – PHRH) – today regulates the temporary accommodation of families within the jurisdiction of the Paris 115 services, but it also receives families that fall within the jurisdiction of the three channels. How can one account for this evolution, which resulted in the centralization of temporary accommodation for families and a refocus on finding shelter?

Centralization resulted from the professionalization of temporary accommodation provision. In interviews with various platforms, the "amateurism", the "absence of formalization" and the "rushed job style" characterizing temporary accommodation work over the first years was denounced. Each platform had developed its own group of motels without any outside consultation, and without harmonizing the selection criteria of comfort, healthiness, safety and prices. Negotiations with motel owners were also done directly to the best of their ability, and prices fluctuated from one place to the other, as did the quality of motels, where some 'slum landlords' made a prosperous business out of the reception of families.

One particularly tragic event, which was given wide media coverage, led to a change in the way these platforms approached temporary accommodation. It was a fire that occurred in March 2005 in the Paris Opéra Motel, and which killed 20 of the 79 people then accommodated by the SSP for the City of Paris -10 were children. After that fire and after other fires that occurred the same year, several measures were taken by the State to control the use of motels (Revenue Court, 2007). The most important objective was to make sure that motels were safe, healthy and in good financial standing, thereby creating a quality chart. The Prefecture, or the state administration in charge, drew up a list of rejected motels, which was sent to the platforms. The motels of the Paris 115 services, those of the APTM and those of the Order of Malta were audited, with the audit being carried out by the 'motel service' of the SSP, which had started its own internal securization of the motels right before the Paris-Opéra fire. It took six months for four people to visit all the motels. Jobs such as 'mediators' and 'checkers' were created; mediators would visit the families in motels and ask them about their living conditions, while checkers would make sure that the services charged for were, indeed, the services provided.

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This experiment was the brain-child of the PHRH, which was born in January 2007. The acknowledgement of the work done by the SSP motel services on the occasion of that experiment led to this organization being entrusted with the temporary accommodation of families from the APTM and the Order of Malta in 2007, while these platforms had obvious problems with accounting for overnight stays in motels. The temporary accommodation of the CAFDA was absorbed in 2009. The PHRH recruited for, and attached a 'commercial and development' service to its existing services, and subsequently became "a very big social tour operator", as one of its members put it.

That service fits perfectly in the SSP's culture of social emergency, which was the organization under which it came. The PHRH was thus in charge of a simple mission, that of finding shelters without any discrimination and without having to do any social follow-up. For the State, with a logic based on safety and rationalized costs, the temporary accommodation of families became a matter of booking, managing and controlling motels. The PHRH was to consider all families on the same grounds, whatever their association of origin, the instruction being not to favour any platform. "This is as if we had, indeed, mixed the asylum seeking families with the homeless population without any distinction," a manager of an association says. Another manager agrees: "what's more, as it's administered by the same service, by the Samusocial, we treat them as we treat the homeless. Let me repeat myself, this is not at all derogatory for the homeless but I do think that some things are mixed up and that it's not making sense." Emergency temporary accommodation, administered by the PHRH, thus became autonomous from the social work done by the platforms for immigrant families. That division of work, in a context of increasing demand, then engendered new problems that the various actors working with homeless people would have to face.

## **A Source of Difficulties for Actors**

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The division of social work and temporary accommodation, in a context of constantly increasing requests, notably increased the issue of geographical distance, as it raised the problem of the different professional cultures between actors working with the families. The geographical scattering of the PHRH places of temporary accommodation was all the more crucial in that it established the importance of cities and departments in the care system. The importance of the part played by local communities made it harder, once again, for the platforms to work. It also, naturally, made the daily lives of the families more difficult.

The increase in the number of people accommodated necessitated the platforms, and subsequently the PHRH, to increase the number of motels that were more and more spread out geographically. It also led to their working “relentlessly”, as one booking agent put it. The rooms provided had to be adapted to the structure of the families in question, and owing to the scarcity of available places, families might well be sent quite far away from where they expected to be accommodated.

When each platform managed temporary accommodation independently, there were arrangements between the social workers and the families to maintain the families in a favourable environment, even if they were staying in ‘over-occupied’ rooms. The orienting towards temporary accommodation appears to have been discussed more with the families, and the social workers proved to have been more sensitive to the wishes of their interlocutors than the current bookers are. The most directive and least opposable aspect of the PHRH temporary accommodation decisions was justified by the restrictive and non-dispensatory conditions that any accommodation in a motel must fulfil (safety, health, and comfort). The State supervisor regularly reminds the PHRH of these shelter conditions while demanding that exceptions be made in answer to particular circumstances, such as media-covered evacuation of squats, families followed by accommodation rights associations etc.; as such, the technical normalization of accommodation seemed to become increasingly imperative. The difficulty in meeting requests certainly reinforced that proclivity, but it led to ever increasing opposition between the professional ways of the PHRH and those of the platforms in charge of the social follow-up of families. What follows is testimony to that fact.

At the beginning of 2011, two people accommodated by the SSP in a Parisian motel died in a fire. The State asked the PHRH for explanations on the spot: was it a case of over-occupation? Did the motel comply with the norms? The motel had been visited a short time before, it had been judged to be in conformity with the safety standards, and no case of over occupation had been detected. Yet, everyone in the PHRH, whether on the platforms or in the bureaucracies or cabinets, was aware that, due to children being born during stays in the motels, there were some over-occupied rooms. Everyone was also aware that some motels were dysfunctional.

This episode legitimized intense and on-going work in the identification of problematic situations. Consequently, numerous families were moved from one motel to another for reasons of safety or over-occupation, as decided by the State. These forced movements caused problems for the platforms’ social workers and for many families, who often saw the orientations as damaging. Moving away from their places of work, social networks, schools, and sometimes having to find another job and/or other schools in the middle of the year, upset the lives of these families. While acknowledging the necessary traceability of accommodation – prescribed

by the State – and the necessary consultations involved between the platforms and the PHRH, the manager of one platform considers that these “structures sheltering people are as expeditious as they are sometimes perilous. Not only perilous in connection to the safety norms, but perilous also as far as the continuity, the admission, the reception and the sanitary situations related to the temporary accommodation conditions are concerned.”

The geographical scattering of the PHRH motels, often outside the reference department of the families, also signalled the appearance of a new actor in the system of care – the City, which reinforced the weight of another actor – the Department (Trostiansky, 2010). The part played by these actors were likely to make things harder for the platforms and, obviously, for the daily lives of the families. The sudden arrival of families in a city, at times in their hundreds, did not necessarily go unnoticed. As one commercial and development manager (formerly in charge of tariff negotiations and of extending the number of motels), put it: “at a given time, we sped up, some things were done at the beginning to answer the important needs. In Seine-Saint-Denis, we have settled on two sites and we’ve had to orient almost 800 people!” Some cities are well known by the PHRH and by platforms for deterring the establishment of some motels in order to make it more difficult for the ‘Samu children’ to join the city’s classrooms.<sup>6</sup> The PHRH learnt to show more diplomacy, as underlined by the same speaker: “so, today, we try not to overdo it, we must be clever, for if we behave just like brutes, we are going to undermine the cities and there’s no interest in that, I mean no interest in putting them into tremendous debts because of school canteen bills.” Yet, the hospitality of cities tends to fluctuate, no matter what their political tendencies. As a consequence, even if cities did not play a direct part in the evolution of motel availability, they could play a determining role in the regulation of the market, as they possess a centrality of position, to use the sociological terms of social network analysis.

The extension of the number of motels located outside Paris also gave increased importance to the Department. In principle, for families in France, whether refugees or of stable immigration status, social follow-up must be performed in the Department and in the sector where the families have an address; the Departments balked at accommodating ‘Samu families’ based on the assertion that these families were not the Department’s responsibility, though some of them had been living there for years. They chose to consider them as the responsibility of the City of Paris, as they had been managed by the Paris 115 services. Characteristically, the Departments put a limit to the “pouring of Parisian misery” into their territories; these families would create a considerable cost for the Departments, which were

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<sup>6</sup> A city cannot legally refuse to enrol a child in a primary class, yet it has the power to delay his/her integration.

already dedicating large amounts of money to temporary accommodation in motels for families residing in their own territories – almost 90% of the departmental budgets for childcare may be used for the accommodation of families.

The increase in the number of people to be accommodated thus raised a financial question, and it was up to each payer, whether the Department or State, to curb expenditure. The average price for an overnight stay has decreased, but the number of stays was constantly increasing. On one side, the platform quotas had risen, while on the other, the temporary accommodation of the 115 services had been provided with an 'open envelope', that is to say, with no financial restrictions, and the budget rose well beyond the budget initially allotted. That profusion notably allowed for the accommodation of families pending their shift to other platforms. The managers of the SSP confirmed that the State had been warning the 115 services for years that, just like other departments, Paris 115 had to work with a closed envelope and as such so, that it had to limit the temporary accommodation for families. Leaving the motels to go to asylum seeker reception centres or housing was difficult. An ever larger number of families had to be accommodated. The warnings were ignored until last spring.

In May 2011, the minister in charge of accommodation, Benoist Apparu, announced the reduction by one quarter of emergency accommodation funds, which directly concerned the families in motels. That announcement provoked uproar in the associative world, and a severe reaction from Bertrand Delanoë, Mayor of Paris and President of the Paris Department. The other mayors and presidents of Seine-Saint-Denis, Val-de-Marne and Val d'Oise reacted similarly. 'Homeless families', 'families without shelter', and 'families on the streets' were discussed in the public space as well as the media, and their accommodation became a public concern. A fight ensued in the media between the State – responsible for emergency accommodation – and the Departments – responsible for child care, and thus likely to accommodate some families.

Benoist Apparu intended to facilitate access to housing for families not considered to be in a social emergency along 'Housing First' lines.<sup>7</sup> Bertrand Delanoë identified the risk of families returning to the streets because of a lack of available social housing and budgetary cuts in the temporary accommodation sector. Indeed, the unanswered requests of the 115, once rare, had become part of their daily reality. The platforms were faced with the discontent of the families. The lobby of the

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<sup>7</sup> Created in 2006, the Don Quichotte movement shook the social emergency intervention (Cefai and Gardella, 2011). The measures that were taken afterwards symbolized a redirection of public action addressed to the homeless, less dedicated to answering immediate needs, and more interested in the access to rights, particularly housing rights: homeless people must get into permanent housing as soon as possible.

CAFDA became a place where homeless families were allowed to stay for nights on end. Police stations and the emergency wards of hospitals also sheltered families. The outreach work of the SSP met some of these families without being able to provide them with shelter. A social movement led by SSP workers and the DAL (Droit au logement/Right to Housing, an advocacy organization) made a big splash. Xavier Emmanuelli resigned from the presidency of the SSP, denouncing the short-term decisions of the “little men in grey” and creating a sensation. Paris released exceptional funds and thought about replacing the State. The State replied that the presence of children obliged the Departments to handle the families. The State and the City stuck to their guns while re-crediting the accounts of accommodation. In a pre-electoral year, the conflict took a political turn between a right-wing minister and a socialist elected member. The news was fuelled by the opposition between the State and Paris: in conflict on the question of responsibility when a newborn baby died on the street after its parents had failed to find temporary accommodation; at war again at the SSP board of directors when the City refused to vote for the budget for the coming year as it was considered “insufficient to handle the homeless families”, as was published in a press release from the city council. In terms of temporary accommodation, the question of responsibility – whether of the State or of Departments – had never been so important.

## Conclusion

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Describing the construction of the system of temporary accommodation for families brings to light the close link between the social emergency sector, and immigration and asylum policies. The emergency accommodation provided by SSP via the 115 services first became, at the end of the 1990s, the front door for families to the social work of various organizations targeting different categories of migrants. The platforms dedicated to supporting migrant families initially took charge of accommodation and social follow-up, but they externalized the accommodation function after the tragic fires of 2005. Accommodation in motels became professionalized and was entrusted to the PHRH as sole operator, as well as SSP, the mission of which was restricted to providing shelter without regard to the diversity of the people involved. The division between accommodation and social follow-up engendered difficulties for those working with the families, particularly due to the rising numbers of motels and people being accommodated.

In this context, the accommodation issue seems to have taken on a different status. Until recently, accommodation was presented as a means to act in favour of the families, in the hope of finding a solution to their administrative problems and also hoping to facilitate their access to housing. Now, it has become an end in itself in the public action arena, raising the issue of sharing funding and responsibility

between the State and the Department. Put another way, the issue that public powers were ostensibly seeking to solve was less the social follow-up of migrants and asylum seekers than the treatment of an excessive homeless population. One may wonder, then, if homeless families, mainly foreign families, did not end up being treated as homeless persons for whom shelter must be found when there was no solution to house them. That sudden visibility of the families, seen as homeless, in the public debate raises the question of their former invisibility as migrant families. The increased difficulties of regularization of status and of asylum seeking in terms of lengthened paper work, hardened social work and delayed exits from motels may lead one to think that problems are far from being solved and that, on the contrary, they are in a process of perpetuating themselves. We could then talk about a process of invisibilization of foreign families amongst homeless families as temporary motel accommodation mixes and scatters people first defined by public powers as asylum seekers, as people ineligible for asylum, or as migrants in an irregular immigration situation. Thus, social emergency could be seen as recycling the older issue of the reception of migrant families into a new problem – that of accommodating homeless families on whom an audience and a legitimacy are conferred that did not exist previously. It would be interesting to determine whether this recycling is relevant to other European countries as in most of them there is a clear increase in the numbers of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants amongst the homeless population.

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