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Intervening on « problem » areas and their inhabitants: the socio-political and security logics behind census and shack-counting in the Algiers shantytowns, 1941-1962.

Intervenir quand des quartiers et leurs habitants posent « problème » : les logiques socio-politiques et sécuritaires des recensements et dénombrements dans les bidonvilles d'Alger, 1941-1962.

Abstract

This paper examines the different socio-political contexts in which public authorities in colonial Algiers from 1941 onwards constructed shantytowns and their inhabitants as a problem of public health, urbanism, containment, rehousing, migration control and security and then produced statistical information in an attempt to address these issues. It analyses the evolving respective weight between such logics, highlighting the increasing role of the military during the war of independence (1954-1962). It underlines the wide range of actors involved in collecting such information, the different types of data produced, their highly variable quality and diverse uses.

Keywords. Shantytowns. Algiers. Census. Counting. Rehousing.

Résumé. Intervenir quand des quartiers et leurs habitants posent « problème » : les logiques socio-politiques et sécuritaires des recensements et dénombrements dans les bidonvilles d'Alger, 1941-1962.

Cet article examine les différents contextes socio-politiques au sein desquels les autorités coloniales algéroises ont construit les bidonvilles et leurs habitants comme un problème de santé publique, d'urbanisme, d'endiguement, de relogement, de sécurité et de régulation des flux migratoires à partir de 1941. Sont aussi étudiées les données statistiques que lesdites autorités ont produites afin d'essayer de résoudre ces questions. À travers une analyse de l'évolution du poids respectif donné à chacune, l'examen proposé souligne le renforcement du rôle des militaires pendant la guerre d'indépendance (1954-1962). Il met aussi en lumière le large éventail d'acteurs impliqués dans la collecte de données, les différents types d'informations ainsi produites, la qualité très variable de celles-ci, et leur exploitation à des fins variées.

Mots-clés. Bidonvilles. Alger. Recensement. Dénombrement. Relogement.

Introduction

Colonial authorities in Algeria as elsewhere, viewed the city environment with some ambivalence and even trepidation. On the one hand, colonialism enabled the creation of showcase cities, symbols of European power. The city environment also accelerated the westernisation of the colonised through their close proximity to Europeans, culturally and economically. At the same time, however, the economic logics of this systemically unequal society often translated into segregated residential spaces such as shantytowns that might be what the European population preferred in terms of residential separation, but which could be used by anti-colonial critics to denounce the colonial situation, just as such spaces might shelter pro-independence activities and prove a public health problem.¹ Since the authorities did not prioritise rehousing for the colonised Algerians until the 1950s, these were long-standing issues. Furthermore, the relatively mobile urban population, at a time of political ferment, was deemed to pose significant security problems.

This article provides an original point of entry through which to analyse such key questions of the colonial urban relation, through its focus on the different ways in which the colonial authorities and Europeans more widely constructed both informal settlements (*bidonvilles*) and their inhabitants as a problem, and the way in which statistics were then used in an attempt to address these questions. In Algiers, counting shacks and collecting information on those who lived in them emerged as important aspects of colonial governmentality from 1941 onwards, as the shantytown inhabitants became both « objects of knowledge and sites of intervention². » Over the period on which this article focuses, running from World War Two to the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962), this intervention was undertaken for a number of stated objectives that reveal shifting priorities according to the political and social context: public health, colonial urbanism, shantytown containment, rehousing, migration control / forced returns, police surveillance and, latterly, military repression. This study highlights the evolving respective weight between such motivations for collecting statistics on shantytowns and their inhabitants, alongside the type and quality of the information thus

¹ For comparable colonial contexts, see (for example) studies on Casablanca (J. House 2012 ; Cohen & Eleb, 2004) and New Delhi (S. Legg, 2007).

² T. Bennett, B. Dibley & R. Harrison, 2014, p. 139.

produced, the uses made of such data, and the range of actors involved in their production and analysis.

This recourse to statistics formed what Michel Foucault described as a technology of bio-power that targeted the population for which predictive as well as responsive measures were needed³. Different policies often required distinct types of information: rehousing, where planned, needed the most detailed statistics on families and incomes, followed by migration control to see how long people had been in Algiers and whether they were « gainfully » employed. Where rehousing or migration control were not central, however, simply counting the shacks, or the inhabitants, or indeed simply the ever-growing number of shantytowns, might suffice. In reality, the French term for census, « *recensement* », was often used in a highly extensive and vague manner by both civilian and military actors to designate any form of study aiming to ascertain more about shantytowns and their inhabitants, and could also in effect simply involve counting the numbers of people and shacks.

The analysis here focuses on Mahieddine (*see Figure 1*), until the mid-1950s Algiers' largest and best-known shantytown, while situating this area within its wider Algiers context, as well as briefly discussing Algeria's second city, Oran, for comparative purposes. These local scales allow for an original perspective on urban colonial governance, studies on which, in the Algerian case, have rarely focussed on information-gathering when colonial urbanism, rehousing, reform, repression and migration control are considered⁴. This article then connects these local scales to the wider Algerian colonial context without which they cannot be understood.

This context goes from 1941, when Algerian Muslims remained colonial subjects under an authoritarian Vichy regime, to be followed by planned political incorporation via greater civic rights after 1944-1947, accompanied by inclusive socio-economic / welfare measures. However, Algerians' political, alongside socio-economic inequality certainly remained, with the war situation after 1954 further underlining their status as second-class citizens. This colonial situation manifested itself in the highly ethnicised stratification of the labour market, giving vastly inferior earning power to the colonised⁵: this significantly

³ M. Foucault, 2007, p. 219.

⁴ Z. Çeylik, 1997 ; T. Avermaete, S. Karakayali & M. von Osten, 2010 ; C. Jelidi, 2014. For brief mentions of censuses in Algiers, see S. Henni, 2017, p. 150-153 ; B. C. Brower, 2018, p. 101-103.

⁵ See R. Descloîtres, J.-C. Reverdy & C. Descloîtres, 1961 ; R. Sidi Boumedine, 2016.

constrained Algerians' residential trajectories, explaining why they, and not Europeans, were living in shantytowns as various survival strategies led them to the cities. Colonial power differentials in Algeria were also expressed in the idea that Europeans could « act upon » colonial populations whenever needed (for example via forced returns), through the administration's explicit ethnicisation of the colonised, and Europeans' fixation on the urban « ethnic balance » (Muslim Algerians / Europeans).

This article shows how the logics behind statistical interest in the shantytowns changed considerably between 1941 and 1962. The detailed census of 1941, analysed in the first part of this article, and carried out by Algiers City Council, mainly sought to calculate re-housing needs, but also aimed to contain shantytown growth, remove the jobless urban poor, and better control in-migration⁶. All such aims proved unsuccessful, and shantytown growth continued apace between 1942 and 1957, on which the second section of this article focusses. Yet, in the absence of mass rehousing programmes before 1953, what mattered most for the city council was to identify any new shantytowns, their location, and how many shacks each shantytown contained, as part of on-going (albeit half-hearted) containment. From the late 1940s onwards, as well as the existing local and European staff working for the city council or housing agencies, urbanists advising the city council, sociologists, and non-state actors such as humanitarian workers and architects all produced and / or used statistical information on shantytowns.

This range or 'mix' of actors changed again from 1957 onwards especially, during the war of independence, analysed in this article's third section. At this point, the colonial State very deliberately militarised and reinforced its presence in these shantytown areas, undertaking containment, rehousing, and forced returns alongside repression of the perceived security threat. Henceforth, the inhabitants were of keen interest to the army's *Sections administratives urbaines* (Urban administrative units, SAU) that had a dual role of reform and repression, as well as to the municipality and housing agencies, with the intervention of these city-level authorities, and the non-official actors, decreasing as a result.

This article shows that, in order to counter « spatial unintelligibility » in colonial cities, the authorities elaborated an information-seeking plan in order to move from what

⁶ The author warmly thanks James McDougall for first drawing his attention to this census. The 178-page census document can be found in Archives nationales d'outre-mer (henceforth ANOM) Aix-en-Provence, Département d'Alger, Préfecture, Administration des indigènes, 10I/10.

James C. Scott calls « illegible » and opaque « nonstate spaces » such as shantytowns – which, like Mahieddine, might nonetheless be situated in close proximity to the central spaces of the colonial capital - and to make these areas into (more) « legible » and « transparent » state spaces⁷. However, the colonial administration itself admitted difficulties in making the colonial population « legible » through census and in producing « urban order » where there was deemed to be « disorder⁸. » Shantytowns were considered more challenging to assess than other urban areas⁹: the colonial authorities suffered from an inter-cultural deficit that was most meaningfully seen in European officials' frequent reliance on interpreters. Furthermore, the authorities tended to over-exaggerate the inhabitants' mobility – assuming in particular that all residents were recent arrivals in the city - and, after 1954, to exaggerate the security danger that such areas purportedly represented.

While often empirically dubious since very incomplete, the statistical documentation therefore tells us much about the various colonial encounters that enabled (or disabled) the production of « colonial knowledge » at local level¹⁰. This article charts an interesting shift in colonial governance in Algeria between an approach that had been highly de-individualised, and dealt with collectives such as 'tribe', to much more individualised ways of 'managing' people (and territory).¹¹ Statistics produced on the shantytowns also show the considerable tensions between the colonial authorities' stated desire for total social, political and demographic control of the colonised urban poor - a desire that stemmed from a range of European fears - and the practical impossibility of implementing many of these objectives. These limitations stemmed initially from self-imposed financial stringencies (lack of regional development, little rehousing in the cities) that created scores of continually-growing informal settlements across the city. Latterly, the tensions inherent between reformist and repressive policies when undertaken simultaneously as part of counter-insurgency generated, amongst other consequences, a further urbanising push which, historically, the State and local authorities had ill-equipped themselves to manage as we see in the first two sections.

⁷ J. C. Scott, 1998, p. 55, 76-83.

⁸ On these themes, see also S. Legg, 2007.

⁹ K. Kateb, 2001, p. 106-109, 223-227.

¹⁰ R. Roque & K. A. Wagner, 2012, p. 1-34.

¹¹ F. Cooper, 2005, p. 143.

Note on sources

At Algiers municipal level, the rich 1941 city-wide census is available in its entirety (French colonial archives, henceforth ANOM), hence the attention given to it in this article.¹² Much relevant documentation (including city council documents) has been found in the archives produced by the colonial Prefecture of Algiers and central colonial administration and that are held at the Algiers Prefecture (Wilāya) Archives (henceforth AWA), Algerian National Archives (henceforth ANA) and ANOM, just as the army's SAU archives contain much relevant documentation. For Algiers, none of the key archival material on shantytowns at the ANOM, nor the many debates at the Algiers city council or monograph studies refer directly to general census material for Algiers shantytowns before 1954. From 1954 onwards, specific statistics for at least some shantytowns were used by René Pelletier¹³: however, the records for 1954 were destroyed in a fire. Detailed Algiers city council housing agency archives (*Office public d'Habitation à bon marché de la Ville d'Alger* (OPHBMVA)) – most probably still in Algiers – relating to the rehousing of families in Algiers are similarly unavailable. Many of the Algiers municipal archives, including those of the council's Shantytown Department and Public Health Office (PHO) of the late 1940s / early-to-mid 1950s, most of which appear to be stored at the AWA, are unfortunately unclassified, but as stated above, duplicate copies of some of this correspondence exist in other archives. All of this official material naturally reveals the perspectives of a range of European actors. In contrast, some information used in this article includes the perspectives of Algerian shantytown inhabitants: a range of non-state actors produced material on the shantytowns, for example humanitarian workers such as Marie-Renée Chéné, and architects from the late 1940s onwards, such as Roland Simounet's 1953 study of Mahieddine¹⁴. This author's oral history interviews, undertaken in the Mahieddine shantytown between 2012 and 2017, similarly provide more bottom-up perspectives.

¹² R. Descloîtres, J.-C. Reverdy & C. Descloîtres, 1961 refer (p. 86) to a municipal census of shantytowns undertaken in 1938: this confirms what Mayor Rozis stated at a meeting held on 13 March 1941, referring to municipal censuses being undertaken in Algiers since 1936 or 1937 (ANOM, Alger 10I/10, *Le problème des « bidonvilles ». Commission du 13 mars 1941*, p. 32). However, no archival trace of these early censuses has been located.

¹³ R. Pelletier, 2015.

¹⁴ M.-R. Chéné, 1963 ; Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris (henceforth FLC), Grille du groupe Alger du Congrès international d'architecture moderne, Aix-en-Provence, 1953.

1. Algiers city council's 1941 shantytown census: prioritising rehousing, containment, and forced returns

The 1941 municipal census is a clear example of the political uses made of statistics. It was undertaken at a moment when shantytowns in Algiers inspired intervention as never before. However, the chronologies of problematisation regarding shantytowns were not necessarily simultaneous with the chronologies of intervention: shantytowns had in fact been stigmatised and generated Europeans fears regarding public health (informed by hygienist logics), urban growth, land and property speculation, rogue landlordism, and aesthetic « faults » from the late 1920s onwards¹⁵. To celebrate the centenary of French rule, René Lespes had published in 1930 what remains the most detailed history of Algiers, but shantytowns are absent from his book. By 1935, however, Lespes, in alarmed tones, was calling for studies to measure how migration into the city was affecting demographic, social and spatial dynamics¹⁶. Due to their perceived « invasion » of the city, shantytown inhabitants, many of whom were internal migrants, were seen to threaten European demographic dominance in Algiers: beyond the Casbah, Algiers, in the mind of colonial urbanists, was supposed to be a flagship city made by and for Europeans. In turn, shantytowns complicated colonial urbanism predicated on distinct residential areas, even if such zoning was often more implicit and complex for the urban poor in Algiers than in North Africa's other key colonial city, Casablanca¹⁷.

During the Popular Front (1936-1938), political attention was drawn to the terrible material conditions in which growing numbers of Algerian Muslims lived. However, right-wing Mayor Albin Rozis, who had come into power in 1935, while publicly stating that alleviative measures would be taken, had achieved little. Such inaction on the rehousing question had generated considerable criticism¹⁸. There was therefore a significant time lag between the material emergence of the phenomenon during the late 1910s and the decision to intervene in 1941.

What therefore changed in 1941? Despite widespread censorship and persecution of the political opposition, in early 1941 the Vichy regime in Algeria felt insecure due to a

¹⁵ On inter-war Algiers, see J.-L. Planche, 2004 ; M. Kaddache 1970 ; F. Benatia 1980.

¹⁶ R. Lespes, 1930 and 1935.

¹⁷ See R. Pelletier, 2015 ; J.-L. Cohen & M. Eleb, 2004 ; J. House, 2012.

¹⁸ See *Annexe du Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville d'Alger* (henceforth *BMOVA*), 5-20 February 1939, council meeting of 23 December 1938, p. 506-529, especially p. 513-4, 524. On housing policy during this period, see B. Aïche, 2014.

critical socio-economic situation and growing Algerian nationalist feeling. Crucially, however, Italian and German propaganda had internationalised the shantytowns issue to undermine France's imperial image. The Prefecture's managing administrator (« *Secrétaire général* ») confirmed the potential dangers of this outside interest in Algiers especially, which he described as « métropole de l'Afrique du Nord et de l'Afrique française » (« capital of North Africa and of French Africa »)¹⁹. This threat motivated the Vichy leadership, with the Delegate General for the French Government in (colonial) Africa, Maxime Weygand, being keen to improve housing²⁰. Weygand had support from Pétain in pressuring the Algerian Governor General Jean-Marie Abrial to act. Both Weygand and Abrial undertook an official visit to Algiers' two largest shantytowns, El-Kettar and Mahieddine (*see Figure 1*) on 1 March 1941, accompanied by the city's mayor, Rozis, a member of the pro-Vichy hard right, whose electoral mandate from 1935 had been converted into an appointed role in 1940²¹.

Rozis henceforth sought to prioritise policy targeting shantytowns²². In his correspondence with the Vichy colonial administration, Rozis requested state financial support for rehousing initiatives. In his view, the lack of sufficient central funding explained why the shantytowns question had not been addressed heretofore. While not without foundation, this argument also served to deflect responsibility for little priority having been given to the shantytowns issue at local level, arguably since Europeans came first for any housing, and also due to rehousing needs relating to the run-down Casbah and Ancienne Préfecture districts²³. In Algiers, this led to a *de facto* policy whereby most shacks were tolerated. Given the pressing wartime political climate, Weygand supported the council's action, discussed throughout the March-September 1941 period, to address the shantytown problem.

Undertaken by teams of city council employees, the 1941 census was needed to address a new, multi-stranded policy regarding housing for the colonised and hence re-

¹⁹ ANOM, Alger 10I/10, *Le problème des « bidonvilles ». Commission du 13 mars 1941.*

²⁰ See ANA, Direction des Travaux Publics (henceforth DTP) 1286, Bidonvilles, relogement (1938-1941), report by Charles Ettori, *Problème de l'habitat indigène et plus spécialement des 'bidonvilles' à Alger*, 11 April 1941. On the wider context, see J. Cantier, 2002, p. 33-35, 106-117, 346-354.

²¹ J. Cantier, 2002, p. 89; ANOM, Département d'Alger, Préfecture, Administration des indigènes, 10I/9, *Visite du Général Weygand et de l'Amiral Abrial aux Bidonvilles (1^{er} mars 1941).*

²² J. Cantier, 2002, p. 109; ANOM, 10I/10; 10I/9.

²³ See ANOM, 10I/9.

establish colonial control. The key idea was to make shantytowns disappear and, as a tool of governance, the census therefore played a key role²⁴. This objective was to be achieved by rehousing those shantytown dwellers considered deserving through the building of new estates. The containment / destruction of informal settlements was to be facilitated via a meaningful regulatory framework involving increased surveillance of shack-building, detailed in a series of decrees later in 1941-1942 that in effect criminalised informal settlements, introducing fines²⁵. Forced returns of those without jobs, and measures to prevent rural-urban migration in the first place were also envisaged²⁶.

Unsurprisingly therefore, the data gathered by the 1941 census closely reflects such priorities. The information for each shantytown detailed the number of houses and families, the names of people in these houses and the relationship between them, where the head of household (and at times other family members) had been born, their profession, overall household incomes, amount of rent paid, and how long people had been living in Algiers and that specific shantytown. Under the special « Comments » column, the most frequent remark stated that the head of household was « *propriétaire* » (owner) or « *principal locataire* » - a main landlord/landlady who sub-let part of a landowner's property, renting it out to « *sous-locataires* » (sub-letters): these owners or main landlords / landladies were the groups seen as responsible for shantytown growth and financial exploitation.

Accompanied by a map locating these « problem » areas, the statistical information from the census was put to immediate political use. As he presented the housing programme to the city council meeting only weeks later, on 4 April 1941, Mayor Rozis said that his proposals were based on the census results that had identified 4 805 people and 1 259 families across 16 informal settlements within Algiers city limits: the results, he stated, had led them to observe that « une discrimination s'imposait dans le recasement, car elle doit porter à la fois sur les ressources des intéressés et sur la raison de leur présence à Alger. Tous les éléments nécessaires ont été recueillis par nos services (situation de famille, origine, gain, loyer payé) » (« categories needed to be created for rehousing purposes, to be linked to

²⁴ ANOM, 10I/10, *Commission en vue d'étudier les mesures propres à amener la disparition des agglomérations de gourbis indigènes connues sous le nom de "Bidonvilles"*, minutes of meeting held 13 March 1941, p. 31.

²⁵ ANOM, 10I/10, Gubernatorial decree of 13 September 1941, Algiers municipal decrees of 28 October and 28 November 1941.

²⁶ ANA, DTP 1286, *Problème de l'habitat indigène et plus spécialement des 'bidonvilles' à Alger*, 11 April 1941.

people's incomes and reason for their presence in Algiers. Our departments have gathered all the necessary information (family situation, geographical origin, earnings, rent paid)²⁷. » Alongside the two largest shantytowns, Mahieddine (1 820 inhabitants) and El-Kettar (762), the 1941 census showed that 7 of the remaining 14 shantytowns had less than 100 inhabitants.

Starting here with the question of incomes: this issue was paramount for budgetary reasons since the public authorities were interested in the levels of rent that shantytown dwellers could afford for any new housing, and this in turn determined the size and type of rehousing to be provided. Here, Rozis was keen to use the census to re-establish a clear distinction between deserving and undeserving shantytown residents. Firstly, the census had confirmed the existence of what Rozis called « des familles très intéressantes du point de vue social » (« very socially-interesting families »), for whom rehousing estates were needed and, secondly, « des isolés, travailleurs honnêtes » (« honest, single workers ») who needed dormitories.

Several factors, commencing here with unemployment, helped to define the « underserving » group: Rozis pointed to internal migrants unable to find jobs and who then further swelled the number reliant on welfare. It is true that unemployment was a real problem for the inhabitants: Georges Torres, using these 1941 census figures, found that only 23.7% of those in Mahieddine were economically active²⁸. Shantytown residents might also be considered undeserving due to their recent arrival in the city: the 1930s had seen political reluctance from Algiers politicians like Rozis to rehouse any new arrivals not seen as their welfare responsibility²⁹. The head of Algiers social housing (OPHBMVA) told the Algiers Préfet that knowing the make-up of family groups, their resources, length of stay in Algiers, previous place of residency and means of existence would enable « mesures de police nécessaires à l'éviction et au refoulement des indésirables. De plus, elle situera exactement le problème du recasement » (« the police intervention needed for eviction and forced return of undesirable elements. Furthermore, it will help accurately situate the rehousing problem »)³⁰.

²⁷ *Annexe BMOVA*, 5-20 April 1941, minutes of 4 April 1941 city council debates, p. 177-180, for this and all subsequent references from Rozis' speech.

²⁸ G. Torres, 1953, p. 117. The author thanks Kaltoum Meidane for making this publication available.

²⁹ For example, see Rozis' speech in *Annexe BMOVA* 5-20 November 1936, minutes of 10 Septembre 1936 city council debates, p. 262.

³⁰ ANOM, 10I/10, Président OPHBMVA to Algiers Prefect, 17 March 1941.

Among the « undeserving » elements of the shantytown community, Rozis, basing himself on the census results, also underlined men who formed « une masse d'indésirables sans profession avouable, sans famille qui, la nuit venue, s'entassent dans les baraques et échappent aux investigations » (« a mass of undesirable elements without any honest occupation and without family who, when night comes, crowd into shacks and escape investigation »), thereby admitting the council's inability to make this mobile group statistically « legible » or « transparent ». In the mayor's view, such people were a matter for the police, not for the council and rehousing. This was the second espoused element of the shantytowns issue: the aim of forcibly sending the « undesirable » elements back to their home regions. However, prior to 1954, these men, albeit difficult to record, were not perceived by the city council as significant political or security threats.

While in most instances the census duly recorded – albeit approximately – not only the date of arrival in Algiers but also when residents had started living in the particular shantytown, Rozis made no mention of these specific census findings when speaking before the council meeting. Perhaps this was a conscious omission, since the figures showed that many heads of household had actually been in Algiers for considerable periods. For example, in Mahieddine, a small majority (53%) of heads of household declared they had arrived in the shantytown before 1936, and many of these had lived in other areas of Algiers before moving into the shacks, showing complex migratory trajectories and residential strategies³¹.

It is not straightforward to assess how many people were excluded from the census calculations, which, for Mahieddine, Algiers' largest shantytown, identified 186 houses (units often containing several or multiple shacks), 456 families and 1 820 people. However, in July 1941, the company owning the land on which the Mahieddine shantytown was built undertook its own census (the results of which are unavailable), but the local police chief estimated the total population there at 2 500 people based on his knowledge of this informal settlement³².

³¹ ANOM, 10I/10. The archives do not state whether the respondents to the 1941 census had been made aware of the possibility of rehousing, a factor that could have enabled inhabitants to adapt their responses accordingly.

³² ANOM, 10I/10, Commissaire central (Algiers) to Algiers Prefect, *Au sujet de l'expulsion éventuelle de 2.500 indigènes vivant dans les baraques de la Campagne Mahieddine*, 30 July 1941.

One can imagine that the census staff may not have reassured the inhabitants or encouraged full responses, despite the assurances given to Mayor Rozis that the shantytown residents had willingly provided the necessary information³³. For alongside social workers and administrative personnel, these units comprised « *surveillants* » (overseers) from the city's Public Health Office (PHO) that had responsibility for shack destruction, along with six police officers who (mainly) acted as interpreters, which may well have induced some fear.

Beyond the question of the single men who proved difficult to track down, Rozis did not mention that the census had other sizeable gaps. Indeed, most obviously, it missed out entire informal settlements, for example those in Clos-Salembier. While Clos-Salembier would only see extensive shantytowns after 1945, this area already had small shantytowns as early as 1932³⁴. The omission of Clos-Salembier arguably suggests the haste - hardly conducive to accuracy - with which the census operation was undertaken. Indeed, the rest of the city's 15 shantytowns were surveyed in only six days³⁵. Even for Mahieddine, the data on household income is often missing, and there are names of well-established shantytown families, whose presence on site unquestionably dated back to the 1930s, that are absent from the census. Furthermore, the census did not assess suburban shantytowns in Hussein-Dey and Maison-Carrée (today El-Harrāch), beyond the city limits. We know, however, that one, latterly sizeable shantytown, Bérardi-Boub'sila, in Hussein-Dey, had been founded in 1926³⁶. Thus while Weygand had, on paper, instigated the first ever colony-wide drive on shantytowns, the census arguably revealed its main focus clearly as central Algiers, France's show-case imperial capital. This was, after all, in line with the overall political aim and use of the census – to deflect both internal and (especially) external criticism of the informal housing issue that was so visible in the city³⁷. The 1941 census provides a clear case of statistics, of questionable reliability, being used by politicians to establish a distinction for rehousing between the « deserving » and « undeserving » poor – an aim and outcome often

³³ ANOM, 10I/9, Head of Census to Rozis, *Recensement des bidonvilles. Compte-rendu des opérations*, 19 March 1941.

³⁴ ANOM, Algérie. Département d'Alger, Police et maintien de l'ordre, 1F/443, Affaires concernant les comités de quartier, 1930-1946, Président du Syndicat d'Initiative du Plateau de Mustapha to Algiers Prefect, 15 January 1932.

³⁵ ANOM, 10I/9, Head of Census to Rozis, *Recensement des bidonvilles. Compte-rendu des opérations*, 19 March 1941.

³⁶ M.-R. Chéné, 1963, p. 16-24.

³⁷ See ANOM, 10I/10, *Le problème des "Bidonvilles". Commission du 13 mars 1941*, p. 3, on these priorities.

found in the elaboration of quantitative (and qualitative) data prior to social intervention.³⁸ At the same time, the 1941 census addressed much wider (international) concerns at the housing crisis in Algiers that had brought shantytowns onto the political agenda in previously unseen ways.

2. Abandoning the idea of close statistical control, 1942-1957?

In this section, as in the previous one, shantytowns often exemplified the tension between the colonial desire to control the city and the financial stringencies and political priorities that ultimately disabled such policies. Indeed, many of the council's objectives in 1941 of rehousing, shantytown containment, and forced returns were not fulfilled, for multiple reasons. Rehousing soon fell victim to financial wrangling, wartime lack of building materials, and other re-housing priorities (notably insalubrious housing). Forced returns were never widely implemented since, during 1939-1945 especially, sending people back to the countryside would have condemned them to starvation. Given the lack of rehousing, little shantytown eradication was possible. But containment was quite limited, also: the Algiers council's ambitious new regulatory framework of 1941-42 was only partially applied; in an initially more liberal post-Vichy political context, the city council decided in January 1944 that it could not destroy many new shacks without the requisite rehousing first being available, a situation that continued into the 1950s³⁹. A policy of *laissez-faire* or partial tolerance of shantytowns was the norm, often combined with non-compliance in the face of official monitoring and surveillance when shantytown residents and the nationalist Algerian People's Party – Mouvement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (*Parti du Peuple algérien – Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés démocratiques*, (PPA-MTLD)) or Algerian Communist Party (*Parti communiste algérien*, PCA) supported shantytown dwellers to resist forced shack destructions⁴⁰.

This section analyses how we can interpret the use of information collected on shantytowns and their inhabitants to read the authorities' increasing disquiet at this inexorable shantytown growth in Algiers. This section therefore focusses on efforts to assess this growth through the

³⁸ A. Desrosières, 1993.

³⁹ ANOM, 10I/10, Note from Secrétaire général of Algiers Prefecture to Algiers Prefect, 26 October 1945; *Annexe BMOVA*, minutes of council debates of 28 January 1944, p. 37-38.

⁴⁰ City council services nonetheless destroyed 741 shacks between 1947 and 1952 (G. Torres, 1953, p. 20).

period's initial focus on counting the number of shantytowns, shacks and their inhabitants, and on locating new shantytowns. Since largescale rehousing programmes were not seriously envisaged until 1953, it was containment that was the main official logic driving statistical collection before then. An archival trail duly records some of the activities of the city's anti-slum committee (*Comité de lutte contre le taudis*), created in 1945, and some of the interventions of the Algiers OPHBMVA, the city council's Public Health Office (PHO) and other municipal services, which all produced statistics on the shantytowns: the OPHBMVA was interested in rehousing, and the council services such as PHO in surveillance and containment⁴¹.

As previously, the focus here is on the Mahieddine informal settlement within its wider urban context (*see Figure 1*) to illustrate the chronology and at times very approximate measurement of shantytown growth. If the March 1941 census estimated the population in Mahieddine at 1 820 (minus some single men), by January 1942, this figure had then grown to 2 174 according to the PHO⁴². In 1941-1942, the PHO undertook a further city-wide count (finding 5,066 people) and enumerated all shacks across Algiers, locating 811 in Mahieddine that were then numbered for purposes of surveillance and rent collection as per the new 1941-1942 surveillance measures. As this regulatory framework was established, counting the number of shacks, alongside the estimated number of inhabitants, consequently became more prominent in the statistical trail. In July 1942, there were found to be 831 buildings in Mahieddine, including commercial premises.⁴³ The city council undertook a further count in summer 1945 which found there to be 1 079 shacks containing 879 families and 3 241 inhabitants in Mahieddine (as opposed to the 1 820 residents in March 1941)⁴⁴. These figures were challenged by left-wing newspaper *Alger républicain* which, since its creation in 1938, had taken a critical interest in shantytowns as symbols of colonial inequality that it felt the city council was reinforcing, rather than addressing⁴⁵. The newspaper's edition of 24 May

⁴¹ From 1942, the OPHBMVA was appointed by the municipality as administrative overseer of Algiers' two largest shantytowns, Mahieddine and El-Kettar, when the land on which they were built was placed under sequester. In these two shantytowns, the OPHBMVA's role therefore blended rehousing and surveillance logics.

⁴² G. Torres, 1953, p.14.

⁴³ ANOM, 10I/10 OPHBM Alger, *Gestion des bidonvilles. Compte-rendu de la réunion de la Commission de Gestion du 23 juillet 1942*.

⁴⁴ FLC, R2 – 143-201-2.

⁴⁵ See the series of articles in *Alger républicain* by L. Jean-Darrouy, 26-31 October and 1-3 November 1938.

1945 stated (without quoting its sources) that the city's two largest shantytowns, Mahieddine and El-Kettar, had 6 150 inhabitants between them and that the city-wide figure for Algiers was now 10 000⁴⁶. For the political opposition, however, shantytowns probably had greater iconographical than statistical value.⁴⁷

A further city-wide study of shantytowns was undertaken by the council's Technical Services Department in February 1947. However, there was no attempt to estimate the population, even by using a co-efficient in relation to the number of dwellings identified. For the larger shantytowns, such as Mahieddine (and three others), the study did not even try and count the housing units, since the number of shacks there was judged « excessivement important » (« exceedingly high ») (*see Figure 2*). Apparently, no attempt was made to obtain more accurate information from the OPHBMVA office that was tracking the illicit building of new shacks in Mahieddine and El-Kettar. Nonetheless, this 1947 council study located some 58 informal settlements as opposed to the 16 in 1941⁴⁸. This imprecise study arguably shows that, for the council at this point, the main aim was to locate the informal settlements, since pressure on land was becoming greater: a detailed map indicating shantytown location accompanied these statistics.

Trainee civil servant Jean-Claude Isnard, using municipal statistics no longer available, stated in 1949 that there were 5 000 inhabitants in Mahieddine, living in 1 016 shacks. Judging Mahieddine, El-Kettar (1 100 people) and Carrières (500 people) shantytowns (the latter situated in Belcourt) to be a source for concern, growth-wise, he pointed out that Mahieddine had increased from 1 000 to 5 000 inhabitants in ten years. Across the city, Isnard judged, there were probably between 20 000 and 25 000 people in shantytowns but he thought the figures to be imprecise, due to the highly mobile shantytown population⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ A letter (ANOM, 10I/10) from the OPHBMVA President to the Prefecture on 7 April 1944 estimated there to be 1 200 families in Mahieddine and El-Kettar combined, making *Alger républicain*'s figure of 6 150 plausible.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the PPA-MTLD newspaper *L'Algérie libre*, with its front-page photo of Mahieddine (5 February 1954, no.97, p. 1-2).

⁴⁸ ANOM, Algérie, Gouverneurs généraux, Cabinet des Gouverneurs généraux, 9CAB/115, Dossier habitations à bon marché, Mairie d'Alger, Direction des Services techniques, *Emplacements des bidonvilles de la Ville d'Alger. Positions relevées le 5 février 1947*.

⁴⁹ J.-C. Isnard, 1949, p. 6.

Indeed, by the early 1950s, Mahieddine seems to have hit a critical population mass, henceforth defying any accurate estimations where these were attempted. A study in 1952 by the PHO which, along with the OPHBMVA, oversaw questions of shantytown containment, gave figures of some 7 200 inhabitants in 1 650 shacks⁵⁰. Social geographer Georges Torres, however, who conducted very detailed research on Mahieddine in 1953, stated that the real number could be as high as 15 000⁵¹. For the council and housing agencies, however, there was no incentive to undertake a detailed census of this specific shantytown's inhabitants, since the possibility of any rehousing of the Mahieddine inhabitants had been compromised by the cost and procedural difficulties involved in the council's attempts to purchase the land there. In a sense, such was the extension of shantytowns between 1942 and 1957 that the figures for residents and shacks appear to have become so approximate as to be empirically meaningless. However, the regular estimations carried out signify a fear of loss of control that permeates the public archive.

Right-wing mayor Pierre-René Gazagne's term in office (1947-1953) scarcely addressed the rehousing issue for shantytowns, focussing instead – as Rozis had done in practice – on the housing needs of his mostly-European electorate and on the reconstruction of the rundown central Marine Quarter (Ancienne Préfecture). With the housing problem worsening, in January 1952 Gazagne had told the Algerian Assembly that more than 30 000 people lived in the Algiers shantytowns⁵². Like former mayor Rozis, Gazagne maintained that the city council had no responsibility for rehousing shantytown residents, given that most were migrants. This stance omitted that some of these families had arrived in the 1920s: a detailed census including statistics on date of arrival in the city could therefore have provided grounds for rehousing many « deserving » shantytown residents, a category whose numbers Gazagne sought at all costs to minimise by denying most shantytown residents any legitimate place in the city⁵³.

On the other hand, Gazagne's successor, Jacques Chevallier (mayor 1953-1958), elaborated ambitious plans to provide social housing. Chevallier was a self-styled « eradicator » of shantytowns and wanted to turn Algiers into a « welfare arena » and hence

⁵⁰ FLC, R2-145-201-4; R2-10-18/131-2.

⁵¹ G. Torres, 1953, p. 121.

⁵² G. Torres, 1953, p. 30.

⁵³ See *Annexe BMOVA* No.3, January 1949, minutes of 14 January 1949 council debates, p. 106; November 1951, No.11, minutes of 19 Octobre 1951 council debates, p. 324.

maintain Algeria as French in the face of increasing Algerian nationalist pressure. His liberal credentials even allowed him to initially co-opt PPA-MTLD city councillors to work with him. Chevallier's realisations, notably through the collaboration of noted architect Fernand Pouillon, aimed to address the shantytown 'problem' full-on and reap the political benefits.⁵⁴ Chevallier told the Algiers city council meeting on 11 May 1953, just after entering office, that there were 40 000 people in the Algiers shantytowns, a figure that Torres considered plausible and that represented 25% of the local Algerian population⁵⁵. This showed the relative inaction of Chevallier's predecessor, Gazagne. In alarmist tones, the authors of the « classic » contemporary study on Algiers shantytowns, recorded growth from the 16 shantytowns in 1941 to 58 in 1947. By 1953, they said, 90 such sites had been identified, then 120 by 1955⁵⁶.

There were nonetheless two exceptions to the public authorities' inability or reluctance to record shantytown population statistics with any accuracy. Often fatal fires, rockfalls or mudslides affecting shantytowns called for emergency rehousing – and therefore information on each family – undertaken under the watchful eye of the PCA or PPA-MTLD⁵⁷. Similarly, detailed censuses would take place when the land on which (small) shantytowns were situated was needed for public building projects, and where rehousing for those living in shacks was envisaged. In 1949 in the El-Biar district of Algiers, when shacks on land needed for school-building raised the issue of rehousing (or shack transfer), a census was undertaken, after which the administrators in charge had to recognise that most of the 27 heads of household had been in Algiers for several years and were employed⁵⁸.

During this period, however, there was another, entirely different context for intervention in the shantytowns, as these areas became sites on which non-state actors intervened – humanitarian volunteers for education, infrastructural improvement, medical and

⁵⁴ On Chevallier, see Z. Çeylik, 1997 ; J. House, 2018, p. 147-150; S. Henni, 2017, p. 160-164.

⁵⁵ G. Torres, 1953, p. 30.

⁵⁶ R. Descloîtres, J.-C. Reverdy & C. Descloîtres, 1961, p. 86.

⁵⁷ See ANOM, Préfecture d'Alger, Cabinet du Préfet d'Alger, 1K/495, Secours, on the 9 June 1951 fire at Mahieddine and (same series) 1K/952, Dossier Éboulements et glissements de terrain for 23 January 1952 mudslide in the Maison Cabanier shantytown; 1K/478, Urbanisme et logement, on the 18 October 1951 landslide in the Carrières shantytown.

⁵⁸ See ANOM, 10I/10, *Note pour M le Préfet (Cabinet). Objet : Au sujet de l'expulsion des occupants du bidonville implanté sur le terrain de l'École du Climat de France (El Biar)*, 28 November 1949.

social work. For example, Marie-Renée Chéné undertook work for the Swiss-based International Civil Service organization in the suburban Boub'sila-Bérardi shantytown. Chéné described her methods in 1955, after nearly 5 years in the area, and that produced a census as the basis for a rich study of the shantytown's 1 100 families (5 166 people). Having subdivided the area into smaller units, and named the streets and alleys, she then spent seven months going from dwelling to dwelling. Being well-known locally as nurse and social worker, certainly helped - as Chéné put it: « (c)e n'était pas l'enquêtrice, mais l'amie que l'on recevait » (« it was a friend and not a census officer who was being received »). At weekends, heads of households would drop off further documentation for her, cooperation helped by the fact that most people were hoping to be rehoused nearby⁵⁹.

The attentive work of other actors is also worth considering. The Algiers Urban Planning Office (AUPO), made up of urbanists, architects and social analysts, advised Chevallier on his re-housing initiatives. Producing a study of shantytowns in 1957, the AUPO's statistics were accompanied by a highly detailed map and aerial photographs offering a panoptical gaze of the city's informal housing. The AUPO study included succinct analysis of the reasons for rural-urban migration, using statistics (gathered in January 1955) from the Algiers council's Shantytowns Department stating that 30 447 people lived in the city's 120 shantytowns at that point. This figure was an underestimation, and the AUPO, using more a sophisticated method that included calculations based on co-efficients for these previous under-estimations, and that also took into account predicted population growth and in-migration, stated that a more realistic figure for 1957 was 60 000. An additional 46 000 people, it estimated, were in shantytowns in the close Algiers suburbs. This gave an overall figure of 106 000 in the greater Algiers urban area. For Mahieddine, the figures in the January 1955 study that the AUPO used were for an estimated 9 000 people (minus single

⁵⁹ M.-R. Chéné, 1963, p. 9. Such European women often had closer contact with shantytown residents than their male counterparts.

men) living in 2 292 shacks⁶⁰. By Chevallier's own admission, these figures were too low: in January 1957, he publicly declared that Mahieddine contained some 12 000 people⁶¹.

A further indication regarding Mahieddine's overall population came in mid-1957, when the head of the new SAU army unit, responsible for « pacification », stated that nearly 15 000 people lived in that shantytown, a figure that was probably more realistic⁶². In October 1958, however, the Algiers social housing agency (now called OPHLMVA) had estimated this figure at 10 000⁶³. Taken together, these documents suggest, unsurprisingly, that the larger the shantytown, the less feasible it was to assess its population with any degree of accuracy, but that the population statistics for *any* shantytown were to be used with caution.

Finally if we look briefly at Algeria's second city, Oran, we see again how the ways in which a group was constructed as a problem by the colonial authorities impacted on the types of information that were collected to enable policy towards it. Whereas in Algiers, the police did not undertake census, in Oran, shantytown containment and planned forced returns involved police locating shantytowns and then carrying out evening raids (termed « *rafles* ») explicitly targeting the « floating population » as part of the surveillance of the mobile poor: such operations assessed the numbers of people at addresses, and their administrative or judicial status. Particular targets in this respect were people sought by the police or courts, often including women suspected of sex work, and Moroccan migrants.

While different types of information were sought by two main groups (police, city council), such information clearly circulated between them. In 1954-1955, for example, eradication and rehousing (or shack transfer) typically involved a well-established two-step process, starting with what the police termed a « *recensement* » (census), but which was more

⁶⁰ The author thanks Rachid Sidi Boumedine for having made available this unpublished AUPO study, *Les Bidonvilles. L'immigration musulmane à Alger et dans l'agglomération algéroise*, 1957. The AUPO also considered that the 1954 general census had underestimated the city's shantytown population (AWA, Administration et comptabilité départementale. Bidonvilles, 5K84, Ville d'Alger, Cabinet du Maire, Agence d'urbanisme de la Ville d'Alger, *Bidonvilles d'Alger. Programme de recasement pour le Clos-Salembier*, 19 March 1957).

⁶¹ AWA, Administration et comptabilité départementale. Bidonvilles, 5K85, Préfecture d'Alger, Bureau du Plan, *Réunion d'information et de travail du lundi 21 janvier 1957*.

⁶² AWA, Travaux d'initiative communale, 4L136, SAU de la Cité Mahieddine, *Travaux d'intérêt communal. Demande d'ouverture de crédits. Exposé général*, undated but 1957.

⁶³ AWA, 5K85, OPHLMVA, *Extrait du Registre des délibérations du Conseil d'Administration*, 13 October 1958.

like a raid as previously described. This process also reduced the numbers of people deemed worthy of rehousing, since the total of new flats available was much less than the number of families needing new accommodation. The second stage, involving the establishment of a family information card, was undertaken by city council employees for the purpose of potential rehousing, and sought detailed information on family members. This second statistical collection was usually done on the basis of self-presentation, conveniently ensuring that some families would not attend. On the basis of both operations (police and council), the police might then vet families for their « morality », then informing the city council: this process then excluded some families from rehousing who nonetheless met the incomes criteria to rent a new home⁶⁴. In a sense, this circulation of information between police and council authorities in Oran, undertaken as Algeria was moving into a war situation, anticipated on the growing security imperative that would dominate in Algiers, especially from 1956-1957 onwards, as the conflict came increasingly to centre upon that city, as we see in the final section.

3. Census, containment and rehousing under the security imperative (1957-1962).

In Algiers, with the intensification of the war of independence, the context in which statistics on the shantytowns were produced then shifted again, notably with the French army's fight to crush well-established National Liberation Front (FLN) and National Algerian Movement (MNA) underground urban guerrillas (« Battle of Algiers », 1957). This militarisation of intervention on shantytowns and their inhabitants forms the essential backdrop to the remaining discussion. Such intervention removed virtually all non-state actors such as humanitarian workers since they were henceforth considered as potentially pro-FLN.

The security threat was overtly spatialized during this period: shantytowns were now explicitly reframed within the security imperative under the term « pacification » that dominated the existing and ongoing statistical needs of rehousing, shack containment and possible forced returns. While not the only majority-Algerian areas to be figured in this way, in army officers' minds, shantytowns posed specific problems since considered to be areas through which operatives and supplies transited, and from which armed attacks could be

⁶⁴ ANOM, Cabinet du Préfet d'Oran, Oran //2591, Bidonvilles d'Oran.

launched⁶⁵. More precisely, the military's discourse can be divided into a period of mounting fears until 1957, insistence on the supposed victory brought by the « Battle of Algiers », followed by a more triumphant discourse that was often interrupted by the question of new arrivals from the countryside (see below) that continued until 1962. Official reaction to the mass pro-independence protests of 10-12 December 1960 in which shantytown residents featured prominently saw a return to the more alarmist pre-1957 representations.⁶⁶

Urban counter-insurgency had both reformist and repressive strands: reform in the shantytowns specifically consisted of rehousing, and therefore continued earlier projects, but now also included infrastructural improvements, plus a raft of measures across education, training, women's rights and sport that only the State, as opposed to city authorities, could provide⁶⁷. This welfare or population assistance, explicitly a form of psychological warfare, was primarily the role of the SAU units that became operational in early 1957 and whose crucial mission therefore combined civilian and military, reformist and repressive logics. The SAU formed an interface between the local population, housing and other civilian agencies as well as military units. At the same time, the SAU's role was to gather vital intelligence, both through indirect means via gaining the trust of the local population, and more directly: census now also had political and security uses, in addition to, as previously, rehousing and, potentially, regulatory objectives⁶⁸. As this final section shows, these developments were taking place as people from rural areas found refuge in the cites, making urban spaces like shantytowns seemingly even less « legible », at the very moment when the French military wanted, on the contrary, to open up these historically « under-administered » areas to unprecedented surveillance and greater State presence more generally.

The census hence became a key tool to politically control urban populations by making them potentially « transparent ». As the Clos-Salembier SAU head put it, summarising his method: « (à) cette masse anonyme, il faut d'abord donner un nom et c'est le long travail de recensement de la population » (« this anonymous mass first needed names giving to them, and the lengthy census work came in here »)⁶⁹. One of the major figures of

⁶⁵ See ANOM, Préfecture d'Alger, Cabinet du Préfet d'Alger, 1K/670, Maintien de l'ordre Alger 1956-1958, Prefecture of Algiers communiqué of 30 September 1956.

⁶⁶ On December 1960s, see G. Mathias, 2003 ; J. House, 2018a.

⁶⁷ See N. MacMaster, 2009, p. 215, 301-3.

⁶⁸ S. Henni, 2017, p. 149-160 ; G. Mathias, 2003.

⁶⁹ Archives nationales (Pierrefitte), 20000002/161, Premier ministre, organismes rattachés directement, Centre des hautes études sur l'Afrique et l'Asie moderne (1929-1968), C.

counter-insurgency, Roger Trinquier, who served in Algiers under general Massu, summarised tactics during the « Battle of Algiers » in his classic text on urban counter-guerrilla operations. For Trinquier (like Massu), the census was the necessary first step to dominating urban residents (« *la conquête de la population* »), since the identity, number and size of the population determined the military's organisation of a pyramidal structure designed to stop infiltration by political opponents. This structure went up from heads of household (« *chefs de famille* »), who were responsible for who lived in the house and for declaring any newcomers, to the head of several houses (« *chef de groupes de maisons* ») situated around a courtyard, for example. At the head of the structure were the sub-district heads (« *chefs d'îlots* »), often drawn from the shantytown's social elite of shopkeepers and war veterans. Eight such sub-districts existed in Mahieddine, for example, representing around 1 250 people in each. In theory, each inhabitant would have a codified census certificate identifying them by urban district, sub-district, group of houses and household⁷⁰.

In February 1957, Massu had instigated such a system through a census operation, « base de toute action politico-militaire efficace » (« the basis for any efficient political and military intervention ») as he explained to the Algiers Prefect, one which would ideally be undertaken alongside the obligatory extension of identity cards to all adults⁷¹. The census measures in his « Shantytowns Operation » involved establishing a record card (« *fiche de contrôle* ») for each of the spatial subdivisions previously mentioned. For each household record card, the « nuclear » family plus any other residents had to be mentioned along with, for men, their job, age and geographical origin (the latter to facilitate checks with military staff in the countryside). This was not just war *in* the shantytown, but a war *on* it, too.

However, the new population monitoring system was also open to subversion, since (for example) the man appointed overall head of the sub-districts in Mahieddine shantytown appears to have played a double game. Using this position of authority, and his job running a combined café and hostel where many single men resided, he both hid FLN male operatives transiting through the shantytown and housed other FLN men who passed themselves off as dockers. Other sub-district heads, probably under FLN pressure, knowingly signed off

Courbon, *Les bidonvilles et leur résorption : perspectives de promotion humaine. L'expérience du Clos-Salembier*, March 1960, p. 12.

⁷⁰ R. Trinquier, 2008, p. 25, 26-28. See also S. Henni, 2017, p. 150-153.

⁷¹ AWA, 5K85, *Recensement des FMA du Département d'Alger*, 17 February 1957. The specifics of the operation were outlined in Massu's *Opération Bidonville*, 17 February 1957 (also AWA, 5K85).

inaccurate forms⁷². With an estimated increase in single men in the Mahieddine urban area from 500 in 1957 to 2 000 in September 1961, some individuals could evade population control⁷³. Furthermore, if the attempted political control of the shantytowns led to the amassing of considerable data - in Clos-Salembier, where at least 20 000 people were probably in shantytowns, SAU officers claimed to hold 30 000 record cards – we can question a possible surfeit of information that proved difficult to swiftly process⁷⁴.

The French authorities' efforts to make the shantytown and other « dangerous » areas more « readable » stemmed in part from the problem of mobility into, out of, and within Algiers, as both FLN and MNA deliberately linked up urban and rural activities. This issue inspired further initiatives to identify the shantytown population designed to dovetail with the census record card system. In this case, however, shantytowns were mostly being treated as part of the wider urban fabric, since all districts were, to an extent, affected by this issue. Attempts to count residents of informal settlements, already difficult in peace time, became more difficult due to the considerable war-time population displacements. The vast Challe Plan, a French military operation conducted in the countryside between February 1959 and April 1961, increased migration towards Algiers, in addition to the longer-standing army policy of forcibly regrouping rural Algerians into camps, declaring no-go zones in the countryside and destroying villages. These military strategies, along with people fleeing internecine nationalist violence (FLN / MNA) generated considerable flight to the towns and, especially, to the largest cities.⁷⁵ Often without work, these displaced people in Algiers tended to congregate in the suburbs, where surveillance was initially less strict than in the central city. For example, according to the local SAU, the shantytown population of Maison-

⁷² These observations are based on the author's forty interviews with former residents of Mahieddine shantytown, 2012-2017.

⁷³ ANOM, Sections administratives urbaines, 2SAS 64, SAU de Mahieddine, Mahieddine SAU report of 20 September 1961. These figures include the Mahieddine shantytown, but also cover other nearby urban areas within that SAU's remit.

⁷⁴ ANOM, Sections administratives urbaines, 2SAS 59, SAU du Clos-Salembier, *Rapport sur le moral*, 12 December 1961, p.3.

⁷⁵ F. Sacriste (2015, p. 100) estimates that 1 200 000 Algerians left the countryside between 1954 and 1962, in addition to the 2 350 000 people forcibly regrouped in rural zones by the French army.

Carrée more than doubled between 1958 and 1960⁷⁶. Shantytown residents in Boub'sila / Bérardi, in nearby Hussein-Dey, grew from 5 400 in 1955 to an estimated 12 000 in 1960⁷⁷.

These expanded or newer shantytowns were considered problematic since they compromised rehousing policy, constituted a security risk and worsened an already difficult socio-economic situation. One response was for the SAU to try and keep track of the numbers of new arrivals across Algiers. In addition to the existing record card system, from summer 1959 onwards, SAU units therefore had to record mobility through monthly population movement charts that listed the region from where the families originated, with a separate column for the much-feared single men, considered an exceptional political threat⁷⁸. Further measures were employed to limit new in-migration. Specifically, the criteria governing the necessary declaration of any new resident to the SAU, and the possibility of refusing the administrative papers needed to stay in Algiers (city), were used to reject many arrivals⁷⁹. A final, interesting development was the specific targeting of Kabyles who were considered a political and socio-economic problem. Leading civilian officials in Algiers in May 1960 wanted to have as many Kabyles as possible sent back to Kabylia and, before this could happen, they wanted a census undertaken on Kabyle families⁸⁰. In fact, there had already been a census undertaken (in Clos-Salembier at least) in late 1958 that had identified some 7 830 people from the Greater Kabylia region⁸¹. In reality, however, the SAU authorities never sought to forcibly return many of those from Kabylia, for a variety of legal, logistical, operational and psychological reasons⁸².

As already stated, this wider identification of the population was not solely for repressive purposes, since the State also pursued reform through rehousing. Yet, as

⁷⁶ ANOM, Sections administratives urbaines, 2SAS 65, Maison-Carrée, Chef de la SAU de Maison-Carrée, report of 23 January 1960.

⁷⁷ M.-R. Chéné, 1963, p. 89, 141. See also S. Henni, 2017, p. 153-155.

⁷⁸ See, for example, ANOM, 2SAS 59, Clos-Salembier, *Annexe au rapport du mois de juillet 1959 : Afflux des populations étrangères dans le Grand Alger pour la période du 1^{er} juillet 1959 au 24 juillet 1959*.

⁷⁹ See ANOM, Alger, Préfecture, Affaires algériennes, 2SAS 8, Sections administratives urbaines.

⁸⁰ ANOM 2SAS 59, SAU du Clos-Salembier, Préfet (Inspecteur général régional d'Alger) to Préfet d'Alger, *Retour des populations kabyles sur leur commune d'origine*, 5 May 1960.

⁸¹ ANOM, 2SAS 59, SAU du Clos-Salembier, *Recensement de la population d'origine kabyle*, 23 December 1958.

⁸² ANOM 2SAS 59, Chef de la SAU du Clos-Salembier, *Rapport sur les populations kabyles du Clos-Salembier*, 22 June 1960.

previously, state actors encountered multiple problems in gathering meaningful statistical data for rehousing. The SAU liaised with the local population and the rehousing agencies, and its archives show how the initiatives planned under Mayor Chevallier then continued on a grander scale under the highly ambitious Constantine Plan (1958-1962) – itself a vast statistical enterprise - aiming at profound economic and social reforms within which housing was allocated 17.3% of the 15 billion franc budget for 1958, a figure second only to education.⁸³ Archival documents refer to two different censuses of shantytown populations in 1957. The first – and that we have already seen – was conducted within an overt logic of security surveillance. At the same time, however, a second census was at least planned by the city council to inform its rehousing policy that the SAU facilitated: this was to detail where the inhabitants were from and their employment possibilities⁸⁴. This census was accompanied by wider sociological studies (« *enquêtes sociologiques* ») that the SAU seems to have undertaken to assess Algerians' standards of living (especially in the shantytowns) to better estimate who deserved rehousing and what form, size and quality such rehousing would take⁸⁵.

When the SAU started to operate, in early 1957, as part of this revived rehousing drive, these units inherited the municipality's unreliable 1955 figures, hence the need for more accurate data. However, in the chaos of war, it is unclear whether the SAU were ever able to fully catch up on these earlier approximations. For example, some of the SAU units were never sure how many people were in the shantytowns over which they had responsibility. In Clos-Salembier, a district where the SAU was arguably very active, one report from 1960 cites a figure of 21 200 in that area's shantytowns, only to say a few pages later that it was 25 000⁸⁶. In suburban Maison-Carrée, one document from June 1961 mentioned « (p)lus de 15.000 personnes recensées en Bidonville » (« more than 15 000

⁸³ Z. Çelik, 1997, p. 120-121. See also D. Lefevre, 2005, p. 366-425.

⁸⁴ AWA, 5K85, Préfecture d'Alger, Bureau du Plan, *Réunion d'information et de travail du lundi 21 janvier 1957*, summary of intervention by Secrétaire Général de la Préfecture (undated).

⁸⁵ AWA, SK85, 2^e Bureau, Zone Nord Algérois / secteur Alger Sahel, *Fiche à l'attention de M. le Général Massu. Objet : Enquêtes sociologiques*, 27 March 1957.

⁸⁶ ANOM, 2SAS 59, *Monographie du Quartier Clos-Salembier*, undated (May 1960).

people estimated to be living in shacks »)⁸⁷. However, the monthly report for the same period talks instead of 12 000-13 000 people in these shantytowns⁸⁸.

From 1957, the number of shacks is seldom mentioned in internal correspondence (SAU, council, OPHLMVA), presumably because their density increased so sharply during the war that it became almost impossible to enumerate them. Instead, of prime interest in the internal correspondence between these agencies was the overall number of people awaiting rehousing. In the external media war, on the other hand, waged by the local council, central colonial as well as military authorities in order to show France as the benevolent ruler in the face of the FLN's skilled lobbying on the international stage, what mattered most was the total number of people rehoused and the number of units under construction, both statistics having a potential wider political use⁸⁹. According to the central SAU officers, however, by July 1961 there were 150 000 people living in central and suburban shantytowns in Algiers, despite the very real rehousing efforts of Chevallier and the Constantine Plan⁹⁰.

Conclusion

This article has underlined the different political contexts and shifting range and combination of logics within which statistics on shantytowns and their inhabitants were produced during decolonization, while also highlighting the multiple uses to which such statistics were put (containment, rehousing, migration control / forced returns, political surveillance and repression) and the variety of actors involved. Shantytown inhabitants crossed the paths of the interventionist colonial state's and city council's information-gathering apparatus through a variety of categorisations and problematisations, some of which singled them out due to housing type (shack) in need of destruction, or the number of families to rehouse. Other priorities, however, linked shantytowns to much wider concerns (security, internal migration) that often still contained strong spatialized dimensions.

As the war of independence took hold, military logics of repression and reform became paramount. In the shantytowns, the census became a key tool of political and military control, alongside its existing and continuing use for rehousing and containment. The military, however, still faced the same problem that beset their civilian counterparts: given

⁸⁷ ANOM, 2SAS 65, SAU de Maison-Carrée, *Passage des consignes*, 5 June 1961.

⁸⁸ ANOM, 2SAS 65, SAU de Maison-Carrée, report of 20 June 1961.

⁸⁹ On these aspects, see House 2018, p. 150-155.

⁹⁰ ANOM, Algérie, Sections administratives urbaines, 2SAS 52, Échelon de liaison d'Alger, *Rapport au sujet des populations des bidonvilles*, 21 July 1961, p. 1.

rates of population mobility and attendant shantytown growth, and, at times, active non-compliance by Algerians, even the simplest forms of population censuses, surveys and counting often produced at best a snapshot of an ever-changing situation. We can also question the seriousness with which some information-gathering operations were undertaken by the local authorities before 1954. Estimations of how many people lived in the shantytowns might be empirically problematic and, as we have seen, at times virtually meaningless. However, the context in which these statistics were produced, and the many contemporary discussions held about them, provide a fascinating window onto the complex realities of the urban colonial relation and the difficulties Europeans experienced in making all of the urban population « readable » from the outside, thus revealing the fragilities of colonial power.

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Iconography

Figure 1

Map of shantytowns of central Algiers, 1954.

Source: adapted by Laurent Eisler from R. Descloîtres, J.-C. Reverdy & C. Descloîtres, 1961, p. 45. Copyright held by Jim House.

Figure 2

Location of informal settlements in Algiers as of 5 February 1947 (extract), according to the Technical Services Department of Algiers City Council.

Source: Archives nationales d'outre-mer (France), 9CAB/115. Algérie. Gouverneurs généraux. Cabinet des Gouverneurs généraux. Dossier habitations à bon marché.