Intervening on “Problem” Areas and their Inhabitants
The Socio-Political and Security Logics behind Censuses in the Algiers Shantytowns, 1941-1962

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Abstract. This paper examines the different socio-political contexts in which, from 1941 onwards, public authorities in colonial Algiers 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 shifting respective weight attached to 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 their diverse uses.

Keywords. shantytowns, Algiers, census, enumeration, rehousing, colonial statistics, colonial policy, urban statistics, twentieth century


Mots-clés. bidonvilles, Alger, recensement, dénombrement, logement, statistique coloniale, politique coloniale, statistique urbaine, xx° siècle

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The 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 populations through their cultural and economic proximity to Europeans. At the same time, however, the economic logics of this systematically unequal society often translated into segregated residential spaces such as shantytowns. While the European population doubtless preferred this residential separation, it could also be used by anti-colonial critics to denounce the colonial situation. Moreover, there were fears that such spaces might shelter pro-independence activities or pose a public health problem. Since the authorities did not prioritise rehousing for the colonised Algerians until the 1950s, these were long-standing issues. Furthermore, at a time of political ferment, the relatively mobile urban population 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 their occupants emerged as important aspects of colonial governmentality from 1941 onwards, as the shantytown inhabitants became both “objects of knowledge and sites of intervention”.

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, revealing priorities that shifted 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 attached to such motivations for collecting statistics on shantytowns and their inhabitants, alongside the type and quality of the information thus 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 a population. This bio-power needed predictive information alongside responsive measures. Different policies often required distinct types of information. Rehousing, for example, where planned, needed the most detailed statistics on families and incomes, while migration control involved collecting data to see how long people had been

1. For comparable colonial contexts, see (for example) studies on Casablanca (J. House, 2012; J.-L. Cohen & M. Eleb, 2004) and New Delhi (S. Legg, 2007).
in Algiers and whether they were “gainfully” employed. Where rehousing or migration control were not central, however, simply counting the shacks or their inhabitants, or indeed merely recording 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. In many cases, recensement consisted of a simple enumeration of people and shacks.

Figure 1. *Map of shantytowns of central Algiers, 1954*


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

The period studied begins in 1941, when Algerian Muslims were still colonial subjects under an authoritarian Vichy regime. Political incorporation via greater civic rights was implemented after 1944-1947, accompanied by inclusive socioeconomic and welfare measures. However, the Algerians certainly remained subject to political and socio-economic inequality, 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 colonised population. The Algerians' residential trajectories were thus significantly constrained, and this explains 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).

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 rehousing needs, but also aimed to contain shantytown growth, remove the jobless urban poor, and better control in-migration. All such aims proved unsuccessful, and shantytowns continued to grow apace between 1942 and 1957, the period covered in the second section. 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 an ongoing (albeit half-hearted) containment policy. From the late 1940s onwards, alongside 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.


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, located in Aix-en-Provence), Département d’Alger, Préfecture, Administration des indigènes, 101/10.
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.\(^a\) Much relevant documentation (including city council documents) was found in the archives of the colonial Prefecture of Algiers and of the central colonial administration held at the Algiers Prefecture (Wilāya) Archives (henceforth AWA), Algerian National Archives (henceforth ANA) and ANOM. The army’s SAU archives are also a rich information source.

For Algiers, none of the key archival material on shantytowns at the ANOM, nor the many debates at the Algiers city council, and likewise no 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 Pelletier,\(^b\) but the records for 1954 were destroyed in a fire.

Detailed Algiers city council housing agency archives (Office public d’habitations 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 to early-to-mid 1950s, most of which appear to be stored at the AWA, are unfortunately not accessible, 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, including humanitarian workers such as Marie-Renée Chéné and, from the late 1940s onwards, architects such as Roland Simounet with his 1953 study of Mahieddine.\(^c\) This author’s oral history interviews, conducted in the Mahieddine shantytown between 2012 and 2017, similarly provide more bottom-up perspectives.

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\(^a\) R. Desclôtres, J.-C. Reverdy & C. Desclôtres, 1961, refer (p. 86) to a municipal census of shantytowns undertaken in 1938: this confirms what Mayor Rozis stated at a meeting on 13 March 1941, referring to municipal
This range or “mix” of actors changed again from 1957 onwards especially, during the war of independence. This evolution is analysed in the 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 not only to the municipality and housing agencies but also to the army’s Sections administratives urbaines (Urban administrative units, SAU) that had a dual role of reform and repression. The intervention of city-level authorities and non-official actors decreased as a result.

In order to counter “spatial unintelligibility” in colonial cities, the authorities elaborated an information-seeking plan to move from what James C. Scott calls “illegible” and opaque “nonstate spaces” such as shantytowns – which, like Mahieddine, might nonetheless be located close to the central districts of the colonial capital – and to make these areas into (more) “legible” and “transparent” state spaces.\(^7\) However, the colonial administration itself admitted difficulties in making the colonial population “legible” through census-taking and the production of “urban order” where there was deemed to be “disorder”.\(^8\) Shantytowns were considered more challenging to assess than other urban areas:\(^9\) 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 disenabled) the production of “colonial knowledge” at local level.\(^10\) We observe an interesting shift in colonial governance in Algeria.

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\(^7\) J. C. Scott, 1998, pp. 55, 76-83.
\(^8\) On these themes, see also S. Legg, 2007.
from an approach that had been highly de-individualised, dealing with collective entities such as “tribes”, to much more individualised ways of “managing” people (and territory). Statistics produced on the shanty towns 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 arose initially from self-imposed financial stringencies (lack of regional development, inadequate rehousing in the cities) that created scores of continually-growing informal settlements across the city. In later years, the tensions inherent between reformist and repressive policies, undertaken simultaneously as part of counter-insurgency operations, generated, amongst other consequences, a further urbanising push which, historically, the State and local authorities were ill-equipped to manage, as we shall see in the first two sections.

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 shanty towns in Algiers inspired intervention as never before. However, the chronologies of problematisation and of intervention were not necessarily simultaneous: shanty towns had in fact been stigmatised from the late 1920s onwards, due to fear among Europeans about public health (informed by hygienist logics), urban growth, land and property speculation, rogue landlordism, and aesthetic “faults”. 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 dynamics. Due to their perceived “invasion” of the city, shanty town 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, Casablanca.

During the Popular Front (1936-1938), political attention was drawn to the terrible material conditions in which growing numbers of Algerian Muslims lived. However, while publicly stating that alleviative measures would be taken, right-wing Mayor Albin Rozis, who came to power in 1935, had so far achieved little. Such inaction on the rehousing question had generated considerable criticism.\footnote{See Annexe du Bulletin municipal officiel de la ville d’Alger (henceforth BMOVA), 5-20 February 1939, council meeting of 23 December 1938, pp. 506-529, especially pp. 513-514, 524. On housing policy during this period, see B. Aïche, 2014.} 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 changed in 1941? Early in that year, despite widespread censorship and persecution of the political opposition, the Vichy regime in Algeria felt insecure due to a critical socio-economic situation and growing Algerian nationalist feeling. Crucially, however, Italian and German propaganda had internationalised the shantytown issue in order 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).\footnote{ANOM, Alger 10I/10, Le problème des «bidonvilles». Commission du 13 mars 1941.} This threat motivated the Vichy leadership, with the Delegate General for the French Government in (colonial) Africa, Maxime Weygand, being keen to improve housing.\footnote{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, pp. 33-35, 106-117, 346-354.} 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 (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 1940.\footnote{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 (1er mars 1941).}

Rozis henceforth sought to prioritise policy targeting shantytowns,\footnote{J. Cantier, 2002, p. 109; ANOM, 10I/10; 10I/9.} and in his correspondence with the Vichy colonial administration he requested state financial support for rehousing initiatives. In Rozis’ view, the lack of sufficient central funding explained why the shantytown question had not been addressed heretofore. While not without foundation, this argument also served to deflect responsibility for the lack of priority given to the shantytown issue at local level, arguably due to the precedence granted to Europeans for access to housing, and to the rehousing needs in the run-down Casbah...
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 served to address a new, multi-stranded policy on housing for the colonised and thereby re-establish colonial control. The key idea was to make shantytowns disappear and, as a tool of governance, the census therefore played a key role. This objective was to be achieved by building new estates to rehouse those shantytown dwellers considered as deserving. The containment/destruction of informal settlements was to be facilitated via a meaningful regulatory framework involving increased surveillance of shack-building, later detailed in a series of decrees in 1941-1942 that, in effect, criminalised informal settlements and introduced fines. Forced returns of jobless rural in-migrants and measures to prevent rural-urban migration in the first place were also envisaged.

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, the place of birth of the head of household (and at times other family members), their occupation, overall household incomes, amount of rent paid, and duration of residence in Algiers and in that specific shantytown. Under the special “Comments” column, the most frequent remark stated that the head of household was propriétai re (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. Presenting the housing programme to the city council meeting only weeks later, on 4 April 1941, Mayor Rozis said that his proposals were based on 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 him to observe that “categories needed to be created for rehousing purposes, to be linked to

20. See ANOM, 10I/9.
21. 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.
22. ANOM, 10I/10, Gubaternatorial decree of 13 September 1941, Algiers municipal decrees of 28 October and 28 November 1941.
23. 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) ”. Alongside the two largest shantytowns, Mahieddine (1,820 inhabitants) and El-Kettar (762), the 1941 census showed that seven of the remaining 14 shanty towns had fewer than 100 inhabitants.

The question of incomes 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, which 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 “undeserving” group. Rozis pointed to internal migrants who were unable to find jobs and who then further swelled the ranks of those 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 active. Shantytown residents might also be considered undeserving due to their recent arrival in the city: the 1930s had seen political reluctance on the part of Algiers politicians like Rozis to rehouse any new arrivals, who were not seen as their welfare responsibility.

The head of Algiers social housing (OPHBMVA) told the Algiers Prefect that knowing the make-up of family groups, their resources, length of stay in Algiers, previous place of residence 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”. Furthermore, it will provide an accurate picture of the rehousing problem.”

Among the “undeserving” elements of the shantytown community, Rozis, basing himself on the census results, also singled out men who formed

24. “…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)”. Annexexe BMOVA, 5-20 April 1941, minutes of 4 April 1941 city council debates, pp. 177-180, for this and all subsequent references from Rozis’ speech.

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

26. For example, see Rozis’ speech in Annexexe BMOVA 5-20 November 1936, minutes of 10 September 1936 city council debates, p. 262.

27. “…mesures de police nécessaires à l’éviction et au refoulement des indésirables. De plus, elle situera exactement le problème du recasement”. ANOM, 10I/10, Président OBMVA to Algiers Prefect, 17 March 1941.
“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 shantytown issue: the aim of forcibly sending the “undesirable” elements back to their home regions. However, prior to 1954, these men, albeit difficult to identify, 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 the date when residents started living in a 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%) 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 migration trajectories and residential strategies.

It is not straightforward to assess how many people were excluded from the census, which, for Mahieddine, Algiers’ largest shantytown, identified 186 houses (units often containing several or multiple shacks), 456 families and 1,820 people. 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), and the local police chief estimated the total population there at 2,500 people, based on his knowledge of this informal settlement.

One can imagine that the census staff did little to reassure the inhabitants or encourage full responses, despite the assurances given to Mayor Rozis that the shantytown residents had willingly provided the requested information. For alongside social workers and administrative personnel, these units comprised surveillants (overseers) from the city’s Public Health Office (PHO) with responsibility for shack destruction, along with six police officers who acted (mainly) as interpreters, and their presence may well have generated some fear.

28. “…une masse d’indésirables sans profession avouable, sans famille qui, la nuit venue, s’entassent dans les baraques et échappent aux investigations”.

29. 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.

30. 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.

31. ANOM, 10I/9, Head of Census to Rozis, Recensement des bidonvilles. Compte rendu des opérations, 19 March 1941.
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 there were no extensive shanty towns in Clos-Salembier before 1945, the area already had some small informal settlements as early as 1932.\(^{32}\) 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 shanty towns were surveyed in only six days.\(^{33}\) Even for Mahieddine, the data on household income is often missing, and the names of certain well-established shantytown families, whose presence unquestionably dated back to the 1930s, are absent from the census. Furthermore, the census did not assess suburban shanty towns in Hussein-Dey and Maison-Carrée (today El-Harrâch), beyond the city limits. We know, however, that one latterly sizeable shantytown, Bérardi-Boub’sila, in Hussein-Dey, had been founded in 1926.\(^{34}\) Thus, while Weygand had, on paper, instigated the first ever colony-wide drive on shanty towns, the census arguably revealed that its main focus was clearly central Algiers, France’s showcase imperial capital. This was, after all, in line with the overall political aim and purpose of the census – to deflect both internal and (especially) external criticism of the informal housing issue that was so visible in the city.\(^{35}\) 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 found in the elaboration of quantitative (and qualitative) data prior to social intervention.\(^{36}\) At the same time, the 1941 census addressed much wider (international) concerns about the housing crisis in Algiers that had brought shantytowns onto the political agenda in previously unseen ways.

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

During the period 1942-1957, as in the previous one, shanty towns often exemplify the tension between the colonial desire to control the city and the financial stringencies and political priorities that ultimately disenabled such policies. Indeed, many of the council’s objectives in 1941 for rehousing, shantytown containment and forced returns were not fulfilled, for multiple...

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\(^{33}\) ANOM, 10I/9, Head of Census to Rozis, Recensement des bidonvilles. Compte rendu des opérations, 19 March 1941.


\(^{35}\) See ANOM, 10I/10, Le problème des « Bidonvilles ». Commission du 13 mars 1941, p. 3, on these priorities.

\(^{36}\) A. DESROSIÈRES, 1993.
reasons. Rehousing soon fell victim to financial wrangling, wartime lack of building materials, and other housing priorities (notably improvement of unfit 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, shantytown eradication was largely impossible. Containment was also quite limited, and 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 shacks without the requisite rehousing first being available, and this situation continued into the 1950s. A policy of laissez-faire or partial tolerance of shantytowns was the norm, alongside non-compliance with official monitoring and surveillance measures when 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 in their resistance against forced shack destructions.

How does the information collected on shantytowns and their inhabitants reflect the authorities’ increasing disquiet at the inexorable growth of shantytowns in Algiers? This section examines the efforts made to assess this growth, initially through the focus on counting the number of shantytowns, shacks and their inhabitants, and on locating new shantytowns. Since large scale rehousing programmes were not seriously envisaged until 1953, containment 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 containment.

As previously, the focus here is on the Mahieddine informal settlement within its wider urban context (Figure 1) to illustrate the chronology and, at times, very approximate measurement of shantytown growth. While the March 1941 census estimated the population in Mahieddine at 1,820 (minus
some single men), by January 1942 this figure had grown to 2,174 according to the PHO.\textsuperscript{40} 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) became more prominent in the statistical trail. In July 1942, 831 buildings were counted in Mahieddine, including commercial premises.\textsuperscript{41} The city council undertook a further count in summer 1945 which identified 1,079 shacks containing 879 families and 3,241 inhabitants in Mahieddine (as opposed to the 1,820 residents in March 1941).\textsuperscript{42} These figures were challenged by left-wing newspaper \textit{Alger républicain} which, since its creation in 1938, had taken a critical interest in shantytowns as symbols of the colonial inequality that it accused the city council of reinforcing, rather than addressing.\textsuperscript{43} The newspaper’s edition of 24 May 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 10,000.\textsuperscript{44} For the political opposition, however, shantytowns probably had greater iconographical than statistical value.\textsuperscript{45}

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 coefficient in relation to the number of dwellings identified. For the larger shantytowns, such as Mahieddine (and three others), the study did not even attempt to count the housing units since the number of shacks there was judged “excessivement important” (exceedingly high) (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 counted in 1941.\textsuperscript{46} This imprecise study arguably shows

\textsuperscript{40} G. TORRES, 1953, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{41} ANOM, 101/10 OPHBM Alger, Gestion des bidonvilles. Compte rendu de la réunion de la Commission de Gestion du 23 juillet 1942.
\textsuperscript{42} FLC, R2 – 143-201-2.
\textsuperscript{43} See the series of articles in \textit{Alger républicain} by L. JEAN-DARROUY, 26-31 October and 1-3 November 1938.
\textsuperscript{44} A letter (ANOM, 101/10) from the OPHBMVA President to the Prefecture on 7 April 1944 estimated that there were 1,200 families in Mahieddine and El-Kettar combined, making \textit{Alger républicain}’s figure of 6,150 residents plausible.
\textsuperscript{45} See, for example, the PPA-MTLD newspaper \textit{L’Algérie libre}, with its front-page photo of Mahieddine (5 February 1954, no. 97, pp. 1-2).
\textsuperscript{46} ANOM, Algérie, Gouverneurs généraux, Cabinet des Gouverneurs généraux, 9CAB/115, Dossier habitations à bon marché, Mairie d’Alger, Direction des Services techniques, \textit{Emplacements des bidonvilles de la ville d’Alger. Positions relevées le 5 février 1947}.
that the council’s main aim at this point was to locate the informal settlements, since pressure on land was increasing: a detailed map indicating shantytown location accompanied these statistics.

**Figure 2. Location of informal settlements in Algiers as of 5 February 1947 (extract), according to the Technical Services Department of Algiers City Council**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions relevées</th>
<th>Nombre approximatif des gourbis</th>
<th>Obse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extrémité rue André Compan terrain Pagès</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En contrebas du Ch. de l'Afn Zeboudja terrain Gandillot</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrain Vernier en contrebas de la boucle Galliéni</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrains Lapierler</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propriété Mahieddine Ch.Fontaine Bleue</td>
<td>Non dénombré</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rue de l’Usine Talus vers l’aval</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rue de l’Usine Talus vers l’amont</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrain vague entre la rue Ben Sédira et la rue Cheik El Hamal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talus rue El-Mossoli</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrière sous la Villa Sésini</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrain en amont du Bvd Cervantès</td>
<td>Grand nombre intercalé entre des constructions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talus sous le terrain El-Mansili près de la Villa Sésini</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talus sous le terrain El-Mansili surplombant la grotte Cervantès</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrain El-Mansali en aval du chemin de Behagie</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrain El-Mansali en amont du chemin Behagie (nomades)</td>
<td>2 tentes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talus sous le Fort des Arcades</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemin Laurent Pichat vers l’aval côté gauche</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemin Laurent Pichat vers l’aval côté droit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using municipal statistics that are no longer available, trainee civil servant Jean-Claude Isnard stated in 1949 that there were 5,000 inhabitants in Mahieddine, living in 1,016 shacks. Judging the growth of Mahieddine, El-Kettar (1,100 people) and Carrières (500 people) shantytowns (the latter situated in Belcourt) to be a source for concern, 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 living in shantytowns, although, given the mobility of this population, he believed these figures to be imprecise.47

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 shacks.48 Social geographer Georges Torres, however, who conducted very detailed research on Mahieddine in 1953, stated that the real number could be as high as 15,000.49 For the council and housing agencies, there was no incentive to undertake a detailed census of this specific shantytown’s inhabitants, since the possibility of rehousing any 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.

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 and Ancienne Préfecture districts.50 With the housing problem worsening, in January 1952 Gazagne told the Algerian Assembly that more than 30,000 people lived in the Algiers shantytowns.51 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 have provided grounds for rehousing many “deserving”

47. J.-C. Isnard, 1949, p. 6.
48. FLC, R2-145-201-4; R2-10-18/131-2.
49. G. Torres, 1953, p. 121.
50. A staunch defender of European interests in Algeria, Gazagne, close to the Radical Party, was a retired former high-ranking civil servant. He had been involved in the political surveillance of Algerians in Paris, the persecution of Jews during Vichy, and covering up the wide-scale repression of Algerians in North-Eastern Algeria in 1945.
shantytown residents, a category whose numbers Gazagne sought at all costs to minimise by denying most of them any legitimate place in the city.\(^{52}\)

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 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.\(^{53}\) 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.\(^{54}\) On 11 May 1953, just after entering office, Chevallier told the Algiers city council meeting that there were 40,000 people in the Algiers shantytowns, a figure that Torres considered plausible and that represented 25% of the local Algerian population.\(^{55}\) This showed the relative inaction of Chevallier’s predecessor, Gazagne. In alarmist tones, the authors of the “classic” contemporary study on Algiers shantytowns recorded that their number had grown from 16 in 1941 to 58 in 1947. By 1953, they said, 90 such sites had been identified, and 120 by 1955.\(^{56}\)

There were nonetheless two exceptions to the public authorities’ inability or reluctance to record accurate shantytown population statistics. Fatal fires, rockfalls or mudslides that often affected shantytowns called for emergency rehousing – and therefore information on each family – obtained under the watchful eye of the PCA or PPA-MTLD.\(^{57}\) Similarly, detailed censuses would be conducted when the land on which (small) shantytowns were situated was needed for public building projects, and where rehousing for shack dwellers

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\(^{52}\) See *Annexe BMOVA* no. 3, January 1949, minutes of 14 January 1949 council debates, p. 106; November 1951, no. 11, minutes of 19 October 1951 council debates, p. 324.

\(^{53}\) Chevallier’s political trajectory had taken him from the far right in the 1930s to Free French activities in the USA during World War Two. After having been close to the Radical Party in the late 1940s, Chevallier became an Independent in 1952. A former Member of Parliament, and government minister during 1954-1955, his power as mayor was undermined by the army’s increased role during the “Battle of Algiers” (1957). Chevallier belonged to the group of liberal Europeans seeking to reduce inequality between Europeans and Algerians. See Z. Çeylik, 1997; *J. House*, 2018a, pp. 147-150; *S. Henni*, 2017, pp. 160-164.

\(^{54}\) One of the most prominent French architects of his generation, Pouillon understood the necessity of producing inexpensive but decent-quality housing under time pressure in the period of post-1945 reconstruction, hence the contract for Chevallier’s ambitious plans in Algiers that resulted in large estates such as Diar El-Mahçoul and Climat de France. See *J. House*, 2018a, p. 149.

\(^{55}\) G. Torres, 1953, p. 30.

\(^{56}\) R. Desclôtres, J.-C. Réverdy & C. Desclôtres, 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 landslide in the Maison Cabanier shantytown; 1K/478, Urbanisme et logement, on the 18 October 1951 landslide in the Carrières shantytown.
was envisaged. In 1949, when shacks on land required for school-building raised the issue of rehousing (or shack transfer) in the El-Biar district of Algiers, 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 employed.\footnote{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.}

During this period, however, there was another, entirely different context for intervention in the shantytowns, as non-state actors—humanitarian volunteers for education, infrastructural improvement, medical and social work—were starting to work in these areas. For example, Marie-Renée Chéné undertook humanitarian work for the Swiss-based International Civil Service organization in the suburban Boub’sila-Bérardi shantytown. Chéné described her methods in 1955, after nearly five years in the area, and 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 a nurse and social worker, certainly helped. As Chéné put it: “Ce n’était pas l’enquêteuse, mais l’amie que l’on recevait” (it was a friend and not a census officer whom they had in their homes). At weekends, heads of households would drop off further documentation for her, their cooperation being helped by the fact that most people hoped to be rehoused nearby.\footnote{M.-R. CHÉNÉ, 1963, p. 9. Such European women often had closer contact with shantytown residents than their male counterparts. On Chéné, see P. COUETTE, 2012.}

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 rehousing initiatives. In a study of shantytowns conducted in 1957, the AUPO’s statistics were accompanied by a highly detailed map and aerial photographs offering a panoptical view 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 which stated that 30,447 people were living 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 coefficients for these previous underestimations, 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 living in shantytowns in the close Algiers suburbs. This gave an overall figure of 106,000 in the greater Algiers urban area. For Mahieddine, the January 1955 study used by the AUPO
gave figures of 9,000 people (minus single men) living in 2,292 shacks.\textsuperscript{60} By Chevallier’s own admission, these figures were too low: in January 1957, he publicly declared that Mahieddine contained some 12,000 people.\textsuperscript{61}

A further indication of 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 there, a figure that was probably more realistic.\textsuperscript{62} In October 1958, however, the Algiers social housing agency (now called OPHLMVA) had estimated this figure at 10,000.\textsuperscript{63} 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, and 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 affected the types of information that were collected to devise policies for targeting it. Whereas the police in Algiers were not involved in census taking, the police in Oran took part in shantytown containment and planned forced returns by locating shantytowns and then carrying out evening raids (termed “rafles”) explicitly targeting the “floating population” as part of the surveillance of the mobile poor. The numbers of people living at targeted addresses, and their administrative or judicial status were determined during these operations. Particular targets in this respect were people sought by the police or courts, and often included women suspected of sex work, and Moroccan migrants.

While different types of information were sought by two main groups (police, city council), this 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 like a raid, as described above. This process also reduced the numbers of people deemed worthy of rehousing, since the total number of new homes available was much smaller than the number of families needing new accommodation. The second stage,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{60} The author warmly thanks sociologist and urbanist Rachid Sidi Boumedine for making 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).
  \item \textsuperscript{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.
  \item \textsuperscript{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.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} AWA, 5K85, OPHLMVA, Extrait du Registre des délibérations du Conseil d’administration, 13 October 1958.
\end{itemize}
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 vet families for their “morality”, then inform the city council, thereby excluding from rehousing certain families who nonetheless met the income criteria for renting a new home. In a sense, this circulation of information between police and council authorities in Oran, undertaken as Algeria was moving into a war situation, was an initial sign of 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 shall see in the final section.

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

As the war of independence intensified, the context in which statistics on the shantytowns of Algiers were produced shifted once again, notably with the French army’s fight to crush the underground urban guerrillas of the well-established National Liberation Front (FLN) and National Algerian Movement (MNA) (“Battle of Algiers, 1957”). This militarisation of intervention on shantytowns and their inhabitants forms the essential backdrop to the remaining discussion. This 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 spatialised 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, shantytowns posed specific problems for army officers, who saw them as areas through which operatives and supplies transited, and from which armed attacks could be launched. 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 often interrupted by the question of new arrivals from the countryside (see below) that continued until 1962. Official reaction to the mass pro-independence

64. ANOM, Cabinet du Préfet d’Oran, Oran //2591, Bidonvilles d’Oran.
protests of 10-12 December 1960 in which shantytown residents featured prominently saw a return to the more alarmist pre-1957 representations.\textsuperscript{66}

Urban counter-insurgency had both reformist and repressive strands: reform in the shantytowns specifically consisted of rehousing, with the pursuit of 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 provide.\textsuperscript{67} This welfare or population assistance, explicitly a form of psychological warfare, was handled primarily by 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 by gaining the trust of the local population, and more directly: the census now also had political and security uses, in addition to its previous rehousing and, potentially, regulatory objectives.\textsuperscript{68} These developments were taking place as people from rural areas found refuge in the cities. Urban spaces like shantytowns thus became 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 thus became a key tool to politically control urban populations by making them potentially “transparent”. As the head of Clos-Salembier SAU 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 this is where the lengthy census work came in).\textsuperscript{69} One of the major figures of counterinsurgency, 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 (\textit{la conquête de la population}), since the identity 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 (\textit{chefs de famille}), who were responsible for the people who lived in the house and for declaring any newcomers, to the heads of several houses (\textit{chef de groupes})

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} On December 1960, see G. Mathias, 2003; J. House, 2018b.
\item \textsuperscript{67} See N. MacMaster, 2009, pp. 215, 301-303.
\item \textsuperscript{68} S. Henni, 2017, pp. 149-160; G. Mathias, 2003.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
de maisons) situated around a courtyard, for example. At the summit of the structure were the sub-district heads (chefs d’ilots), often drawn from the shantytown’s social elite of shopkeepers and war veterans. Eight such subdistricts existed in Mahieddine, for example, representing around 1,250 people in each. In theory, each inhabitant had a codified census certificate identifying them by urban district, sub-district, group of houses and household. 

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 adults. The census measures in his “Shantytowns Operation” involved establishing a record card (fiche de contrôle) for each of the above-mentioned spatial subdivisions. On 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 inaccurate forms. With an estimated increase in single men in the Mahieddine SAU area from 500 in 1957 to 2,000 in September 1961, some individuals could evade population control. Furthermore, while the attempted political control of the shantytowns led to the amassing of considerable data – in Clos-Salember, where at least 20,000 people were probably living in shantytowns, SAU officers claimed to hold 30,000 record cards – the possible surfeit of information may have proved difficult to process swiftly.

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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).
72. These observations are based on the author’s 40 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-Salember, Rapport sur le moral, 12 December 1961, p. 3.
The French authorities’ efforts to make the shantytown and other “dangerous” areas more “legible” stemmed in part from the problem of mobility into, out of, and within Algiers, as both FLN and MNA deliberately linked their 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 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 problematic due to the considerable war-time population displacements. 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, the vast Challe Plan, a French military operation conducted in the countryside between February 1959 and April 1961, increased migration towards Algiers. These military strategies, along with internecine nationalist violence (FLN/MNA), generated considerable flight to the towns and, especially, to the largest cities. 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-Carrée more than doubled between 1958 and 1960. In nearby Hussein-Dey, the shantytown population in Boub'sila/Béardri grew from 5,400 in 1955 to an estimated 12,000 in 1960.

These expanded or newer shantytowns were considered problematic since they compromised rehousing policy, constituted a security risk and worsened an already difficult socioeconomic 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 recorded 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 security threat. 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 to deliver the administrative papers needed to

75. Fabien Sacriste 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 (F. SACRISTE, 2015, p. 100).
76. ANOM, Sections administratives urbaines, 2SAS 65, Maison-Carrée, Chef de la SAU de Maison-Carrée, report of 23 January 1960.
78. See, for example, ANOM, 2SAS 59, Clos-Salembier, Annexe au rapport du mois de juillet 1959 : Afflux des populations étrangères dans le Grand Algérian pour la période du 1er juillet 1959 au 24 juillet 1959.
stay in Algiers (city), were used to reject many arrivals. A final, interesting development was the specific targeting of Kabyles who were considered a political and socioeconomic 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 ordered a census of Kabyle families. In fact, some 7,830 people from the Greater Kabylia region had already been identified in a census conducted in Clos-Salembier in late 1958. In reality, however, for a variety of legal, logistical, operational and psychological reasons, the SAU authorities never sought to forcibly return many Kabyle migrants.

As already stated, this wider identification of the population was not undertaken solely for repressive purposes, since the State also pursued reform through rehousing. Yet, as 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 to receive 17.3% of the 15 billion franc budget for 1958, a figure second only to education. Archival documents refer to two different censuses of shantytown populations in 1957. The first – already described above – was conducted as part of an overt security surveillance strategy. At the same time, however, a second census was at least planned by the city council to inform its rehousing policy facilitated by the SAU, the aim being to detail the inhabitants’ origins and their employment possibilities. 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) with a view to better estimating who deserved rehousing, and what form, size and quality such rehousing would take.

When the SAU started to operate, in early 1957, as part of this revived rehousing drive, these units inherited the municipality’s unreliable 1955

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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.
84. AWA, SK85, 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).
figures, hence the need for more accurate data. However, in the chaos of war, it is unclear whether the SAU was 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 25,000.\(^{86}\) In suburban Maison-Carrée, one document from June 1961 mentioned “[p]lus de 15 000 personnes recensées en bidonville” (“more than 15,000 people enumerated in shacks”).\(^{87}\) However, the monthly report for the same period talks instead of 12,000-13,000 people in these shantytowns.\(^{88}\)

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, and by the central colonial and military authorities in order to portray 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 potentially wider political use.\(^{89}\) 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 Plan.\(^{90}\)

### Conclusion

This article has underlined the different political contexts and the shifting range and combination of logics driving the production of statistics on shantytowns and their inhabitants during decolonisation, 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,

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86. ANOM, 2SAS 59, Monographie du Quartier Clos-Salembier, undated (May 1960).
87. ANOM, 2SAS 65, SAU de Maison-Carrée, Passage des consignes, 5 June 1961.
89. On these aspects, see J. House, 2018a, pp. 150-155.
or the number of families to rehouse. Other priorities, however, linked shantytowns to much wider concerns (security, internal migration) that often still contained strong spatialised 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 the 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 enumeration often produced, at best, a mere 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 “legible” from the outside, thus revealing the fragilities of colonial power.

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