



HAL
open science

Local knowledge production in colonial situations: government sciences as producers of differentiation in Lyon

Fatiha Belmessous

► **To cite this version:**

Fatiha Belmessous. Local knowledge production in colonial situations: government sciences as producers of differentiation in Lyon. Springer VS. Lokale Wissenregime der Migration. Akteurinnen, Praxen, Ordnungen, 2023, 978-3-658-42506-7. hal-04959973

HAL Id: hal-04959973

<https://hal.science/hal-04959973v1>

Submitted on 21 Feb 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Fatiha Belmessous: Local knowledge production in colonial situations: government sciences as producers of differentiation in Lyon (France), 1950–1970

Abstract: The paper analyses the production of knowledge and its mobilisation in public action towards the *Algerians* in the Lyon metropolitan area, during a problematic historical sequence of French history—colonialism and its legacy following the decolonization. It aims at highlighting the forms of domination and governance imposed by the State services and its street-level bureaucrats on the *Muslim* populations. Through a large corpus based on the archived sources coming from the French Interior Ministry (services of the Prefect), I try to demonstrate the relationships between knowledge and power, illustrated in the field of housing and urban policy and revealing the rejection and/or exclusion experienced by these populations, setting up a systemic discrimination.

Keywords: Algeria, French colonialism, Muslim population, Lyon, housing, discrimination

Introduction

Tracing the history of knowledge about *Muslim*¹ populations from Algeria that was produced and used by the politico-administrative system in France in the period 1950–1970 raises several lines of inquiry for the historian. First is the need to examine the context in which this knowledge was elaborated, within a problematic historical sequence of French history—colonialism and its legacy following the decolonization. Secondly, following Michel Foucault's analysis about the exercise of power and mainly his works on governmentality of the State (1994) permits to determine concrete practices and instruments of public action toward these populations considered as different. Using governmentality as a framework means considering both specific mechanisms of government and forms of knowledge into the colonial phenomenon by exploring what Michel Foucault referred to as the “boomerang effect [of colonization] on the mechanisms of power in the West” (Foucault 1997). This approach assumes an understanding of the working of the institutions that produced the knowledge, in the present case the bureaucratic apparatus in metropolitan France, but equally of the ‘common sense’ that guided its intentions (Stoler 2009), that is the ideology of French colonialism. The inclusion of this administrative system within the colonial relationship is considered not only as a historical moment, but also as constituting an authentic historical object in its own right given that within public action the *Muslim* populations were treated separately, administered by services

¹ The French colonial administration used the term *Muslim* to denote the populations subjected to the Code de l'indigénat (Native Code). P. Weil (2005, p.98) points out that it does not have “a purely religious meaning but on the contrary describes the totality of individuals of Muslim origins who, not having been given citizen rights, have necessarily kept their personal Muslim status, without it being possible to distinguish whether they belong to the Mohammedan cult or not”. From 1947, the *indigènes musulmans* (*indigenous Muslims*) became citizens, though to distinguish them from the rest of the French population, the colonial administration created the category of ‘French Muslims’ in Algeria.

All the expressions designating the populations come from administrative documents. Italics are used here to emphasize that this categorization belongs to the colonial mode of designation.

created specifically for the purpose. In this regard, my contribution is at the crossing of the sciences of government (Foucault 1975; Lascoumes and Le Galès 2004; Kaluszynski and Payre 2013) and the (post)colonial fact (Lazarus 2004; Bertrand 2006; Smouts 2007; Stoler and Cooper 2013).

The research presented here analyses this historical sequence to produce a genealogy of how forms of domination and governance were imposed on the *Muslim* populations in the Lyon metropolitan area. In this dimension the production of knowledge and its mobilisation in public action can be analysed at the local level in the action of the services with responsibility for management and control. For this reason, the corpus assembled for analysis is based on the archived sources² contained in boxes from the administrative services of the French Interior Ministry at the Archives of the Rhône Department. The archives are those of a service set up during this colonial sequence with the specific objective of managing *Muslim* populations—the Service of Muslim Affairs and Social Action³ (deposit reference 248W)—and the archives of the Cabinet du Préfet (deposit reference 437W)⁴.

Because archival materials communicate little of the atmosphere and “thick bureaucratic texture of a prefecture” (Ihl et al. 2003, p20), the question arises of how to make the everyday work of these services visible. Correspondence with branches of the central administration is plentiful, as are administrative reports, but the classic methods of ethnography (participant observation, in-depth interviews) cannot be employed. For this reason, I have included in the corpus other documents such as studies and articles written by associative organisations, and have treated them as authentic sources since they are frequently referred to in the administrative documents. The items concerned are published materials by the INED and the AMANA⁵, public and private bodies respectively, recognized for their expertise with regard to the ‘*Muslim* question’ and favoured sources of information for all public officials working in regulatory programmes for the *Muslims*. With this varied corpus it is possible to reveal the complexity of the question raised by the integration of *Muslim* populations in the Lyon metropolitan area and the multiple policy instruments developed to address the problem (Cefaï 1996).

Part one focuses on the public policy instruments in the colonial context of metropolitan France. The settings in which knowledge was produced (administrations, associations) and the sites where power

² Since the ‘territory of the historian’ is the archive (in the present case the Archives of the Rhône Department), it becomes fundamental to examine the place of production of the knowledge elaborated by the representatives of the colonial domination.

³ In 1965, this service was replaced by the Migrant Liaison and Promotion Service, deposit reference 759W.

⁴ As the most senior representative of the French State, the Prefect of the Rhone was a key actor in the conduct of public policy.

⁵ Part One includes detailed presentations of these various bodies (boxes 1 and 2): National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED) and Moral Assistance and Support for North-Africans (AMANA)

was exercised (the housing field), are studied to explain the ideological contradictions (colonial and economic) to which the local actors were subjected. Part two shows that even when the Algerians had become nationals of a sovereign state, practices inherited from colonialism persisted and the sciences of government promoted scientific studies to legitimate what amounted to a postcolonial⁶ mode of governance. The relationship between knowledge and power is illustrated in the fields of housing and urban policy, revealing the rejection and/or exclusion experienced by the populations, setting up a systemic discrimination.

Part One: Production of knowledge to quantify and control *Muslim* populations

From the standpoint of scientific study, *Muslim* migration transposed to metropolitan France a question that was unresolved in the colonial context, that of assimilation (Saada 2001). The principle of assimilation of the *Muslim* populations was central to the colonial project and its 'civilizing mission' (Lyons 2013), and was what justified that they be granted French nationality (by the *senatus-consulte* of 14 July 1865) but not full citizenship (Blévis 2003). French lawmakers had considered that their 'cultural differences', attributed to their religion, were an obstacle to their full assimilation and thus justified deforming the law.

When the *Muslim* populations moved to metropolitan France, they were considered to be immigrants.⁷ As such responsibility for them came under the general immigration policy, defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that owed as much to differentialism and racial hierarchies as to liberal and egalitarian principles (Weil 2005). Unlike other immigrants, the Algerians left a 'colonial situation' that did not end when they reached the other side of the Mediterranean.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, however, the combination of labour requirements for economic reconstruction in mainland France and slow domestic population growth forced the French government to modify these principles. On 20 September 1947, a new organic statute for Algeria was promulgated that granted Algerian *Muslims* citizenship rights as well as freedom of movement to mainland France. With these new legal provisions, it was necessary to rethink the administrative control of the populations to make it compatible with the principle of their incorporation in ordinary law. But the distinctions used to describe them reveal, by implication, the particular interpretation that continued to be given to the notion of citizenship. As individuals they were now defined by a

⁶ I use the term postcolonial to question the legacy and continuity of relations of domination, beyond the end of colonialism as a historical period.

⁷ In the discussions about the entry and residence of foreigners, no distinction was made between the Algerians and other North African nationals. They were included in the foreign workforce at large. This was consistent with the economic and demographic logic prevailing in the colonial context.

specific juridical status (*Français musulmans d'Algérie* or *French Muslims from Algeria – FMA*)⁸; as a group they were defined by the new statute for Algeria of September 1947.

According to the terms in use at the time, they were citizens with restricted rights,⁹ a status which defined a 'paradoxical' citizenship (Spire 2003). These labels perpetuated the logic of the very colonial categories they were supposed to do away with. Thus citizenship was intended not only to give new rights to the *indigènes musulmans*, but above all to tie them to membership of the French state, at the bottom of a hierarchy shaped by multiple relations of dominance, not least of which was a colonialism with many different forms (Stoler and Cooper 2013).

The transposing of these categorizations appears clearly in the division of responsibilities between the two administrations that supervised this population, the Interior Ministry (IM) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS)¹⁰. The same modes of thought were prevalent in a 'sphere of expertise' composed of researchers and Catholic associations and that took an active role in debates. This sphere facilitated interchange between officials, employers, social workers, who by refusing to support either the cause of Algerian independence or the status quo of the colonial situation, contributed to the emergence of a '*Muslim problem*'.

Expert knowledge on Muslim integration: French citizenship in debate

After 1947, there was no legal foundation for the '*Muslim question*' to be identified as a problem per se. However, to understand the ways of thinking and methodological assumptions that lay behind the surveys conducted by the associations in the decades that followed, we need to examine the discussions that took place in the sphere of expertise regarding the wisdom of granting Algerian *Muslims* full citizenship rights.

At the Direction de la Population of which INED (box 1) formed the "intellectual" arm, Alfred Sauvy¹¹ was critical of the new regime, preferring to keep a restricted form of citizenship under a new

⁸ The 'Muslim' personal status was not recognized in metropolitan France. In the 1954 census, however, the statistical services devised an original counting rule (imported from Algeria) to distinguish native Algerians. The category of 'Muslims originating from Algeria' brought together the 'persons born in Algeria and whose surname and first name are both Arab or Berber sounding', while the category of 'French-born originating from Algeria' comprised those with 'a Christian or Jewish first name' (Simon 1998). Use of the expression *French Muslims from Algeria (FMA)* derives from this administrative classification, hence our use of italics.

⁹ Colonial domination was paradoxical in that the *Algerian natives* had to be naturalized in order to obtain the rights linked to nationality, such as citizenship. The paradox denotes an equality granted by the authorities to favour the perpetuation of colonial domination and political inequality. This citizenship was thus akin to a nationality disconnected from all the political and social rights of men from metropolitan France (Blévis 2001).

¹⁰ The IM had responsibility for "Algerian questions", while for the MLSS it was "workforce questions" (Viet 1998).

¹¹ Alfred Sauvy was in charge of the general secretariat for the family and population, a body that contributed to interministerial coordination on immigration questions. Louis Chevalier held positions in various

name—‘citizens of Empire’—so as to maintain the distinction vis-à-vis the ‘*français de souche*’ (native-born French people). Sauvy legitimized this position by referring to the “dangers of a continuous immigration of North Africans that risked happening because of the granting of French citizenship to indigenous populations in North Africa”¹². Faced with the new juridical provision, however, Sauvy instructed the organization to consult “specialists of Arab questions [to] enlighten it about the problem of assimilating North Africans” (Escafré-Dublet and Kesztenbaum 2011).

Box 1: INED – National Institute of Demographic Studies

Set up by executive order on 24 October 1945, the Institute came under the Ministry of Public Health and Population and had the task of advancing knowledge and policy on population. It produced material for the public at large and supplied information to guide the action of policy-makers. Research was conducted by a cross-disciplinary team and the results published in the journal *Population* (in article form) and in the series *Travaux et Documents*.

The populationist approach of the supervising ministry influenced INED’s early publications, which argued for the necessity of “controlling migration from Algeria and encouraging ‘ethnically desirable’ foreigners to settle in France” (Spire 2003, p. 113).

The first title in the *Travaux et Documents* series (1947) was on “the North African demographic problem”. In it the historian Louis Chevalier, who was hostile to Algerian immigration, defended a biologicistic approach to migrants.

An INED publication of 1947¹³ contained a text written in 1943 that called for departures from Algeria to be subject to strict economic, health, and police regulations.

“We must avoid an influx to metropolitan France of undesirable elements who have contributed too much to a particular North African reputation. In our view, North African workers should be grouped together, hired on contracts of six months or a year, and returned to the country of origin at the end of this period, so avoiding a damaging break from the birth environment, and housed and fed, and placed under the supervision of former officers and NCOs of the Tirailleurs or Spahis. Regulating emigration will probably come up against the demagogy of certain European and native milieux. The blood tax paid by the Muslims in the present war will certainly not go unmentioned in the debate.” (Sanson 1947, p. 192-193)

interministerial committees dealing with ‘North African questions’. Sauvy had worked in the Haut Comité de la Population under the Third Republic and the Vichy regime. It was then that he encountered Chevalier in the networks formed around the Fondation Française pour l’Étude des Problèmes Humains (Fondation Alexis Carrel). This structure was charged to conduct surveys, produce statistics, collect documentation on human problems, and explore any practical solutions for the physiological, mental and social improvement of the population. See Weil, 1995.

¹² Sauvy as most scientists favored “dissemination of a more politically and scientifically palatable definition of race, and few could be fairly described as ‘racist’ by postwar standards” (Brattain 2007, p.1388).

¹³ Like all the studies published in this *Cahier de l’INED*, this text was based on work done at the Fondation Alexis Carrel in 1943.

Even the contribution made by *Muslims* in the global conflict is presented as a pretext that might serve the interests of those favouring admission to full citizenship.

The INED volume also contains a text based on a study conducted in 1944 by Louis Chevalier. For this author the immigration of 'Africans' in the inter-war years was regrettable, and he advises "looking for immigrants with an 'ethnic type' already represented in the 'French mosaic'"¹⁴. Alfred Sauvy argued in favour of selecting foreigners according to their origin and he put North Africans at the bottom of a 'scale of desirability' based on a North-South division.

However, these theoreticians of 'selective immigration' were faced with a situation of *fait accompli* (the citizenship regime, free movement, and demographic losses in metropolitan France) they could do nothing to alter and that had the effect of shifting discussion to the question of assimilation. Louis Chevalier expressed his sense of puzzlement in these terms:

"With such a conclusion [the inassimilable character of a population marked by Islamic culture] at the end of this study, is there not a danger of undermining what was established earlier in the text [the necessity of an emigration that cannot be contained] and of stating the problem in unsolvable terms?" (Chevalier 1947, p. 209)

Yet if assimilation was considered essential, different 'experts' invested it with different meanings. Their views diverged depending notably on the context in which the surveys were conducted. Robert Montagne¹⁵, for example, strongly condemned mixed marriages and family immigration, on account of his attachment to the idea of preserving local communities in Algeria, which were a key point of anchorage for *Muslim* workers in France. For the ethnographer Montagne, it was an error for an immigrant's community of origin to be diluted in some ill-defined French community.

The AMANA association, through its publication ESNA (box 2), came out in favour of family immigration, warning about the dangers of unmarried status for male workers whose assimilation in the host society would be compromised. Within the organisation itself, however, there was a division between advocates of strict controls on *Muslim* emigration in order to facilitate the 'adaptation' of those already settled in metropolitan France, and others who shared Sauvy's view on the need to implement an economic policy that would allow full use of the human potential represented by the *Muslims*. This position clearly reflected the "republican civilizing" project (Reynaud-Paligot 2015) that was premised on a number of contradictory hypotheses such as the superiority of French culture and the perfectibility of man. But if the *indigenous Muslims* were considered too primitive to govern

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Director of several administrative and scientific institutions in the French colonial environment and author of a survey commissioned by the IM in 1952 on Algerian emigration.

themselves, they were nonetheless capable of being raised up, hence the necessity of forcibly inculcating them with a work ethic (Conklin 1997).

Box 2: ESNA – North African Social Studies

In late 1947, Father Jacques Ghys, a missionary monk back from Tunisia, founded an association, AMANA—Moral Assistance and Support for North-Africans. In 1951, he set up with Dr Barthe, chief physician the SSFNA (North-African Family Social Service) to support the first *Muslim* families arriving in metropolitan France. Within the association they set up the ESNA (North African Social Studies) and published material directed at officials and associations working with North African migrants.

From 1950, the ESNA established two specific publications: the weekly *Documents nord-africains* (a selection of articles from the French and international press), and the bi-monthly *Les Cahiers nord-africains*. The latter published feature articles popularizing research in the human sciences, personal accounts by social workers, officials, etc.

The stated aims of the ESNA included influencing professional practices and spreading knowledge drawn from other sources. The editorial team of *Cahiers nord-africains* repeatedly called for “social action to be independent of politics” (*CNA*, 3, March 1950, p. 7), and proclaimed its own independence from the public authorities, but it did nevertheless seek to facilitate “political decision-making” (*CNA*, 43–44, January-February 1955, p. 8). To this end it developed close contacts in high-level public administration and business, both through intellectual and personal exchanges, and through large purchases of documentation that seems then to have been widely distributed in government departments.

Clear from the debates on migration is the centrality to the ‘*Muslim* question’ of the colonial ideology and its paradoxes, which left the field open for contradictory stances. Thus, the geographical mobility of the *Muslims*, driven by the insecurity of the market for unskilled labour and by the pursuit of higher wages, was explained in terms of cultural particularities and linked to the supposed nomadism of a section of the *Algerian* population. These preconceptions about the ontological ‘instability’ of this workforce persisted despite numerous examples that showed them to be groundless.¹⁶ For the political power, however, confronted by the demographic and economic realities, the challenge was to move beyond these positions and formulate workable policies. It then fell to the local public officials to manage the problem on a daily basis and respond to the massive arrivals of *Muslims* that was now the reality.

The Interior Ministry central to colonial action at the local level

In 1952, the Interior Ministry (IM) set up a Service des Affaires Musulmanes et d’Action Sociale – SAMAS (Department of Muslim Affairs and Social Action), which was to prove a game changer for the ‘*Muslim* problem’, through the new dimension the service brought to the conduct of public policy. The service was run by a Conseiller Technique des Affaires Musulmanes – CTAM (Technical Counsellor for Muslim Affairs), who was assigned to the Prefect of the Rhône to implement a new local-level policy—Muslim social action (box 3). It is important to note that this administrative agent

¹⁶ 248W92. Rapport provisoire sur l’émigration des Musulmans d’Algérie en France, August 1954.

belonged to the administrative corps of Algerian civil servants, that is, actors with experience of working in Algeria within the *communes-mixtes*¹⁷ (Mussard 2015).

Box 3: The Technical Counsellor for Muslim Affairs — an official specialized in *Muslim* questions

By a decree of 27/12/1951, the Governor-General of Algeria (at the request of the IM) assigned four administrators from the civil service of Algeria, as Counsellors for Muslim Social Affairs for the 2nd, 6th, 8th and 9th administrative and military regions (Lyon was in the 8th region). According to circular no 54, staff management was handled by the administrative office of the Government General of Algeria: this meant that the official was in fact loaned to the metropolitan administrations to organize moral, material and social help for the *Muslim* population of North African origin. That the salary of these agents came out of Algeria's budget was a tangible indication of the contribution that the Algerian community was expected to make towards solving a problem with worrying implications. "It is clearly understood that these civil servants have an essentially social policy task and that serious harm would result should they be given police surveillance or intelligence work liable to cast doubt on the humanitarian character of their action" (437W107, Circular of IM, no. 54, 1 February 1952). Until 1959, the organization of Muslim Affairs and Social Action was supervised jointly by the IM and the Government-General of Algeria. This changed with the creation of the SAT¹⁸, when the service was put entirely under the control of the IM.

The professional training and background of the Counsellor for Muslim Affairs in the Rhône¹⁹ reinforced the perception of *Muslims* as a special population,²⁰ that other administrations could not work with unless they had acquired an understanding of its 'particularities' and what differentiated it from *native French* people.

"This is a delicate task that on the one hand requires a complete knowledge of Algerian institutions, the tribal and family structures, the traditions and customs of the Algerian

¹⁷ The *commune-mixte*, a territorial division introduced in 1868, gave a spatial translation of the colonial project: the *Muslim* populations were considered incapable of administering themselves and so were put with the European *colons*.

¹⁸ In Lyon, the Sections Administratives Techniques (SAT, Technical Administration Sections) were established in November 1960 and were the transposition to metropolitan France of the military surveillance method used in Algeria, the Sections Administratives Spécialisées (SAS). These were small military units given responsibility for controlling the *Muslim* population with the aim of "protecting the Muslim population from the political influence and material constraints of the antinational organizations". The officials in charge of the units were also agents with professional backgrounds in the administrative services of Algeria and were put under the direct authority of the Prefect of the Rhône and, by extension, of the CTAM.

¹⁹ The CTAM of the Rhône was born on 22 July 1916 in Algeria. He studied law in metropolitan France and got a degree from the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques (administrative section). He spoke fluent German and dialectal Arabic, that he also read and wrote. In January 1941 he was appointed administrator of a *commune-mixte*, initially as assistant administrator from 1941 to 1946, then as chief administrator until 1951, when he was appointed to Lyon.

²⁰ In 1952 there were four counsellors in metropolitan France, of which one in the Rhône. In 1962, there were 34.

population, and on the other calls for a detailed analysis of the host society and the way of life of migrants".²¹

The counsellor gradually became an indispensable figure in action for *Muslim* migrants²², overshadowing the role even of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

In the administration of the Rhône department, the counsellor took part in all the official bodies involved in the daily life of the *FMA*, received all information relating to them, and commissioned studies to foster their integration into French society. Within the Prefecture he contributed to the work of the Departmental Commission on North African questions presided by the Prefect since its creation in 1949, and he attended the meetings of the Departmental Direction of Labour liaising with the Social Controllers of North African labour introduced in 1952²³.

At the Departmental Direction of Health and Population, the counsellor handled questions on subjects ranging from diagnosis of 'social illnesses and health promotion' to mixed marriages and housekeeping courses. He also developed close ties with the Interprofessional Committee of Lyon that brought together representatives from the sectors of metalworking, chemicals, and construction (the firms employing North African workers). Finally, he monitored all the non-public voluntary associations, notably the *Maison de l'Afrique du Nord* (North Africa Center) that he described as a "magnificent achievement due to the initiative of Madame Massenet²⁴, and whose organization and medico-social operation deserve to serve as examples for the whole country"²⁵.

"Excellent results have been obtained thanks to the Association *La Maison de l'Afrique du Nord*, thanks to the spirit and effort within this charitable body of a mixed team of French Muslims and native French motivated by a shared ideal and a taste for action"²⁶.

In a report to the IM, the CTAM defined the associations as the "instruments of the social action undertaken in favour of Algerian workers" and added that he intended to "exercise a technical financial supervision at once flexible but effective to control their activities"²⁷.

²¹ Circular no. 383 – IM – Bureau des affaires sociales musulmanes en métropole (Muslim Social Affairs Office in Metropolitan France). 9 September 1957.

²² Letters in 437W107 mention various requests from within the administration (police training college, social workers) and from private associations (Rotary Club of Lyon, housing agencies) asking the CTAM for training, lectures, introductory courses on working with North African people.

²³ Their multiple tasks included giving career guidance and finding positions for workers, listing job vacancies, and setting up and running accommodation centres for employees, apprenticeship centres, training courses.

²⁴ Madame Massenet was the wife of the Prefect of the Rhône, Pierre Massenet (1949–1957)

²⁵ 437W107. Note of G. Martin to the Secretary General of the Governor of Algeria. 3 May 1953.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ 248W10. Monthly report. February 1958

Under the terms of the circular defining his mission, the counsellor had to supply the IM with quarterly statements on the situation of the *Muslims*. Clear from these reports is his pivotal role in the conduct of public action and his extensive relations with a range of administrations. He wrote up periodic surveys based on information gathering and enumerations and that gave what amounted to an overview of “numbers, origin, movements, membership of ethnic, religious, trade union, and political groups”. These reports had a two-fold objective: produce a list of residential addresses and “modify the mentality of Algerian immigration”.

To produce these statistics the counsellor needed information gathered from the administration as well as from business leaders²⁸ and voluntary associations. It was therefore essential that he cultivates good relations with local actors while at the same time increasing his expertise in respect of the *Muslim* populations, since he was the only actor to centralize all the information collected. Not only did he present himself as the sole expert qualified in respect of ‘Muslim social action’, but more important, he had the recognition of other professionals, thus bestowing legitimacy on the conduct of public policy. In practice he imposed a discriminatory treatment of the *FMA*, by making their enumeration systematic and by requiring all the local actors to differentiate them from other social groups.

Notwithstanding denials about the true nature of the war, the Algerian conflict was extended to metropolitan France, as evidenced by the introduction of military practices and the deployment of civil servants to carry out systematic checks on the *FMA* and surveillance of their places of residence²⁹. The Algerian war, together with the growth of migration flows and the multiplication of *bidonvilles* (shanty towns) on the fringes of cities, encouraged the IM to place “the social problem of the accommodation of Algerian workers living in France at the forefront of government concerns”.³⁰ Analysis of the housing field was henceforth a relevant dimension in the CTAM’s two-pronged mission—continue the civilizing work of colonization, and keep the activities of the *FMA* under observation.

Housing issue—a window of opportunity satisfying colonial and military principles

²⁸ 248W251 lists numerous letters of reply from companies (Rhône Poulenc, Saint Gobain, Berliet, Société normande de produits chimiques, Rhodiaceta, etc.) for the years 1959–1961.

²⁹ When the military surveillance of the SAT was established in 1960, information was collected directly by the police force. 248W92. Situation of the main living neighbourhoods of the Muslim population (secteur de la S.A.T. Nord, S.A.T. Ouest et S.A.T. Sud) – March 1962.

³⁰ 248W253. Meeting minutes on the accomodation situation of French Muslim workers in the Rhône Department. 8 November 1955.

From the early 1950s, the CTAM and local associations³¹ played a key role in the identification and especially in the construction of the problem of housing for *Muslims*. These actors were present in the field from professional interest³² and from a concern to organize and control this population.

The private institutions received support, notably financial, from the IM and formed in effect an ‘arm of the administration’. Their aim was to encourage the integration of *Muslim* migrants, to serve both social and colonial goals. On the one hand it involved developing structures to encourage their access to social welfare services intended in theory for all French citizens, through efforts to reduce the obstacles of bureaucracy, language, and social distance; on the other it was about bolstering the cohesion of the Union Française³³ in the face of the challenge to the colonial order from the independence movements³⁴.

Our knowledge of housing conditions for the *FMA* comes from the reports prepared at regular intervals by the CTAM and from the surveys conducted nationally by INED and in Lyon itself by the SSFNA³⁵. As noted earlier, these reports were based on questionnaires sent out to businessmen and to the associations working with *Muslims*.

What do these documents tell us? They supply us with information on the ‘housing conditions’ of the *FMA*, enumerating and briefly describing their places of residence and signalling any potential policing policy problems.

Thus the 1955 report presents a snapshot view of the situation. The number of ‘North Africans in work’ was found to have risen sharply (from 8,600 in 1952 to 10,750 in 1955) and the persistence of this situation in the current troubled climate pointed to serious problems ahead.

“Some insalubrious houses are over-crowded; the hostels and company campsites are full; the disorderly occupation of two shacks at La Croix Rouse is regularly the subject of press articles; decisions by the administration or courts for closing substandard houses cannot, for

³¹ In the Lyon metropolitan area, the CTAM was in contact with many organizations of which only two (Centre de la Part Dieu and Maison de l’Afrique du Nord) worked exclusively with *Muslims*.

³² In his early years, the CTAM was ‘in competition’ with the MLSS controllers. To legitimate his knowledge and his role in the administration, he mobilized the associations that were closest to the populations in a field of expertise remote from the MLSS actors—housing.

³³ Name under the Fourth Republic for the political organization of France and the French colonial empire.

³⁴ They also had the broader aim of ‘civilizing’ the *Muslims*, that is to say, of ‘bringing them into modernity’ understood as synonymous with western civilization, in a continuation of the action of the Christian missionaries in Africa. See Conklin 1997.

³⁵ In 1957 the SSFNA conducted a large-scale survey in Lyon on 755 families selected ‘at random’. The methodology was questionable and it is noteworthy that the CTAM of the Rhône makes no reference to this work. I have preferred simply to indicate its existence.

the time being at least, be enforced on grounds of public order; and a few workers are unable to find anywhere to live for financial reasons.”³⁶

So when the IM put the question of workers’ housing on its agenda it was because of the need to give a fresh impetus to social action. A first response came in 1956 with the setting up of the Sonacotral,³⁷ a public-private corporation charged with “funding, constructing and equipping residential accommodation for French Muslims of Algerian origin working in metropolitan France, and for their families.” Creation of the Sonacotral further strengthened the role of the CTAM,³⁸ since the IM attributed him financial authority for implementing the structure³⁹.

It is important to emphasize the administrative direction exercised by the IM. In the particular context of Muslim social action, it is revealing of the presuppositions of inferiority regarding the *Algerian* population⁴⁰ already observed in juridical documents.

For example, the circular issued on 16 December 1958 relative to the hostel users referred explicitly to the assimilation theme. Under the heading “admission of native metropolitan or foreign workers to the accommodation hostels built for French workers of Algerian origin”⁴¹, the document stresses the advantages of encouraging cohabitation between the “native Algerian French workers and native metropolitan and foreign workers”. The reasons advanced include the need to “break up the groups of Muslim communities” and the human instincts of the *Muslims* who seek to recreate “a tribal atmosphere”.⁴² The text proposes modifying the statutes of the Sonacotral to allow an “intermixing” of different “ethnic categories”. In preparation for this the IM asked all the CTAMs to suggest “occupancy percentage[s] of the hostels for each category of worker”, based on actual examples, with a view to making “social life function harmoniously”

- “50% of Muslims and 50% of French, excluding all foreigners (Seine-Maritime Department).

This parity appears indispensable to create the balance necessary for a harmonious life in

³⁶ 248W91. Memo about the emigrants’ French Muslim citizens coming from Algeria. 20 June 1955.

³⁷ Société Nationale de Construction pour les Travailleurs Algériens – Building State Company for Algerians Workers

³⁸ 437W112. The CTAM co-ordinated all the administrative and technical aspects of these constructions from 1958, and acted as intermediary between the Sonacotral’s services in Paris and the local representatives, by submitting subsidy applications to the Rhône Department and to the Social Security and Family Allowance offices.

³⁹ The Fonds d’Action Sociale – FAS (Social Action Funding) for *Muslim* workers and their families was set up in 1958. Its funding came in part from the national system of family allowances, since workers’ families that had stayed in Algeria received only part of the allowances, resulting in a surplus (Math 1993).

⁴⁰ Within the administration this term gradually replaced *Muslim*, although its content was identical.

⁴¹ 248W252. Circular of the IM to the Prefect of the Rhône. 16 December 1958.

⁴² *Ibid.*

such a community, where none of the ethnic groups present must have the feeling of being inferior to the other.”

- “20–50% of metropolitans and foreigners (Bouches-du-Rhône Department), so they do not feel too isolated and in order to ensure some emulation between the two groups that will be seen in the upkeep of the premises, evening classes, and leisure activities.”
- “75% of Europeans and never below 40% (Haute-Garonne Department), to facilitate the evolution of the Muslims.”
- “A maximum of 30% of Muslims (Gard Department), so as to lose them in the mass, otherwise they will recreate the tribal atmosphere we want to suppress.”
- “2/3 Muslims, 1/3 Europeans (Gironde Department)”.

From these documents it can be seen that the IM’s involvement in housing was not concerned explicitly with improving the housing conditions of *Algerians*, but embodied a colonizing stance that was inherent to the conduct of public action as a whole. The introduction of reasoning based on proportions, though presented as means of finding a ‘social balance’, amounted ultimately to an ethnicization or even racialization of the groups, an approach associated with specific percentages.

Further support for the ‘civilizing’ dimension was contained in the actual statutes of the Sonacotral, which presented the agency as a learning environment for the *FMA*, both to prepare for integration into the national community and to root out separatist ideas.

“Social order – The main advantage it is credited with is of favouring an evolution of the Muslims towards integration into our economic and social life by effectively combatting the turning in on themselves that naturally occurs when they are grouped together [...]

Political order – Admitting native European workers among the Muslims may have the effect of counteracting FLN propaganda.”⁴³

But building of worker hostels was at a low level and failed to match the growth of families. The CTAM of the Rhône alerted the IM, which issued a circular with the initial aim of gathering information on the housing of “Algerian workers’ families”.⁴⁴

“Muslim families face well-nigh impossible accommodation problems: housed in furnished rooms and lodgings, crowded into dilapidated or substandard rooms of small size, housed in attics, cellars, wooden shacks, disused carriages and caravans.”⁴⁵

⁴³ 248W252. Note of the IM to the Muslim Affairs and Social Action. Regarding the potential admission of native French workers and foreigners in the *foyers* (workers’ accommodation) of French workers from Algeria. 6 March 1959. FLN is the acronym of the National Liberation Front of Algeria.

⁴⁴ 248W251. Circular no. 242

To avoid what he saw as possible segregation, the CTAM of the Rhône refused to let the Sonacotral fund a “particular programme to build housing for Muslim families”, recommending that this be done by the department’s social housing organisations and by private businesses, which could “allocate [*Muslim* families] a normal percentage of housing units.” However, faced with increasing movements of families from Algeria to metropolitan France,⁴⁶ the IM took up the idea of creating an “HLM [public housing] organization within the Sonacotral framework to contribute to the general building effort.”⁴⁷ In 1960 the Sonacotral set up a social housing subsidiary, the Logirel,⁴⁸ an initiative that formed the second component of social welfare for *Muslims*.

“The main aim of the Logirel HLM company is to house Muslim families, though to avoid any segregation there is of course no question of housing exclusively Muslim families in ‘Logirel’ buildings. On the contrary, for each scheme, certain proportions of Muslim families and metropolitan families are planned, so as to work with the HLM companies and organizations in each region to get the best possible mix.”⁴⁹

The statutes of the Logirel, like those of the Sonacotral, also point up the ambiguity of responding to the housing problems of the *FMA* while at the same time emphasising the limits on numbers.

For example, the CTAM of the Rhône presented the difficulties *Muslims* experienced in obtaining social housing as a structural given:

“To begin with naturally there is the difference in ways of life. Rightly or wrongly, families of metropolitan origin are apprehensive about having Muslim families for neighbours.

Then, it must be remembered that the needs of metropolitan families are far from being met. Those who have signed up to be allocated housing would have difficulty accepting that priority be given at their expense to Muslim families that have not been waiting as long.”⁵⁰

Behind the terminology of ‘mixing’ and ‘blending together’ can be found the perennial question of the assimilation of the *Muslims*. In juridical terms they were full citizens, yet their ‘degree of

⁴⁵ 248W172. Letter from the Prefect of the Rhône – Housing problem of Muslim families. 26 September 1956

⁴⁶ A memorandum on the housing problem of *Muslim* families emphasizes that this “family immigration is explained by considerations of an economic order (the advantages of metropolitan social legislation, notably in the areas of social security and family allowances) and of a psychological order (wish to settle in France to escape certain political, social, or religious constraints in Algeria). 248W251. Prefecture of the Rhône. 12 November 1958.

⁴⁷ 248W251. Answer to Circular no. 242. 12 May 1958.

⁴⁸ Logement et Gestion Immobilière pour la REgion Lyonnaise, a subsidiary of the Sonacotral. Its mission was to facilitate the construction of housing for foreign families attributed to the Sonacotral (which was not entitled to HLM loans and so could not offer low rents) and ‘tolerated’ up to 15% of foreign families in its blocks of flats.

⁴⁹ 248W251. Prefecture of the Rhône. Letter to the director of the Sonacotral. 7 June 1961.

⁵⁰ 248W251. Letter from the Prefect of the Rhône. Housing problem of Muslim families. 26 September 1956.

assimilability', their capacity to assimilate, to fit in, was repeatedly called into question, thereby revealing the persistence of a racial ideology in contradiction with egalitarian principles. The idea of not adapting to 'French norms'—a term excluded from official texts—was an important element in racialized categorization.

In this colonial and separatist context, an analysis of social action for Muslims in the field of housing reveals the political ambiguities of the French government. How could giving Muslims access to decent housing be reconciled with the political situation? Above all, how to move beyond widely held views about ways of life too different from the norms and that made it necessary to set thresholds of acceptance to render the populations invisible in society? These questions were never addressed directly, thus leaving the ethno-racial representations virtually unchallenged.

The administrative supervision of the *Algerians* changed again as a result of Algerian independence in 1962 and decolonization. Since they were considered henceforth as temporary immigrants, the simple solution was for them to 'go back home'. Yet this 'new' immigration became a reality and a public problem for the IM. For although further economic immigration and family reunification were suspended by decree in 1974, the question of integration by *Muslim Algerians* re-emerged in public debate, this time through the experience of their children, the so-called 'second generation'.⁵¹

Part Two: Systemic discrimination in action: scientific works as legitimate tools

In the 1960s and 1970s, the administrative approach to the *Algerians* was reoriented, with in particular a perceptible change linked to their designation. They went from a statute of French with restricted citizenship (*FMA*) to a new one of *Algerian*, thus becoming nationals of another state without ever having migrated. While this new classification made little difference at the level of practice, the discourse of written forms now became less constrained. From the standpoint of policy, their affairs were now exclusively part of immigration policy, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the measures introduced in 1964, for example, migrant populations were openly differentiated on ethnic lines: entry from European countries was made easier than that from Third World countries, notably the former colonies⁵². It remained to find the right balance between economic imperatives and the rules of proportionality to 'support the social life' of those already settled in France, especially families.

⁵¹ This notion is used to denote 'children of Maghrebin immigrants'. Labelling them thus confirms the break from the 'previous generation'—that of their parents, which is never referred to as the 'first generation'. For Sayad (1994), this means erasing family histories to focus instead exclusively on the question of integration into French society.

⁵² The French government adopted specific measures towards *Algerians* by establishing quotas on Algerian tourists from 1966 and restricting entry of Algerian families in 1967.

The IM was again where this problem became a crucial issue. From a bureaucratic standpoint, the SAMAS was formally abolished in 1965⁵³, but its work was continued by a new administrative service—the Service de Liaison et de Promotion des Migrants – SLPM (Migrant Liaison and Promotion Department). In addition, colonial administrative practices were retained or indeed reinforced, and the principles of ethnic differentiation were repeatedly applied. The field of urban policy and the question of access to housing again witnessed an ‘ethnicization of social questions’, the formulation of social processes determined by the origin (real or supposed) of the population, leading to a rejection of North African and specifically Algerian populations, on account of the impossibility of their assimilation and the hostile reactions to their arrival from *native French* inhabitants. These representations were legitimized using the surveys and knowledge produced by research organizations like INED.

The ‘threshold of tolerance’ instrument: the legacy of the ‘civilizing mission’

This period saw the growing importance of a paradigm associated with reasoning in terms of proportions: thresholds and quotas were deployed in public debate primarily with the aim of limiting the residential implantation of *Maghrebin* populations. Behind what was presented as a self-evident sociological fact was the idea that beyond a certain proportion of foreigners in a population, social problems appear. The resulting tensions led to, for example, the withdrawal of children from schools where the high proportion of foreign pupils was causing underperformance, frictions with neighbours due to major cultural differences, and over-conspicuous practices in respect of dress or food preparation (Belmessous 2013). In 1970 the SLPM’s national director expressed this differentialist approach in the device of quotas, thus making a correlation between the proportion of foreigners and cultural differences:

“In a primary school class, having more than 20% of foreign children, slows the progress of all the pupils. In a hospital department, coexistence becomes problematic when foreigners make up more than 30% of patients. In a block of flats, it is unwise to introduce more than 10–15% of foreign families if they are unused to living in modern housing conditions.”⁵⁴

On its own, however, the scale of *Maghrebin* immigration does not explain the focusing of attention on these groups. The idea that interethnic cohabitation required a particular ‘mix’ owed much to the work of the INED. In the 1950s the institute had conducted sample surveys on public opinion in order

⁵³ Despite the closure of the service, its staff members were redeployed as policy officers in the SLPM, where their knowledge of the *Algerian* populations and their experience were judged necessary for a successful implementation of the government’s immigration policy.

⁵⁴ Communication of Michel Massenet to the Académie des Sciences morales et politiques, in *Vivre en France*, 8, 1970, quoted by Rudder-Paurd 1980, p3.

to evaluate conditions for the reception of immigrants by the national population. Underpinning this scientific inquiry, the central question was: how can immigrants, and particularly Algerians, mix together with the French population?

In 1970 the institute conducted a new survey of opinion on the attitude of the French towards immigrants (Girard et al. 1971). Examination of the questions asked reveals the biased way in which the problem is stated, in particular the emphasis given to the 'French/immigrant cohabitation':

"In your view, in a place with roughly 5,000 inhabitants, how many could be foreigners before you would say there are too many?"

"And in a block of one hundred apartments, how many could be allocated to foreigners before you would say there are too many?"

"In a school, how many foreign pupils do you think a class can have before it is disrupted or slowed down?"

"If you had a child in a class of 30 pupils that included foreigners, how many foreign pupils could there be before you moved your child to a different school?"

Beyond a certain 'threshold', attitudes of rejection appeared among the French, leading at times to racism. Although this survey was widely criticised by university sociologists,⁵⁵ notably for imposing the idea of threshold through the way the questions were formulated, it nonetheless helped to spread the notion and gave credibility to the idea that 'the immigration of Algerians is a problem'.

In 1972, a 'migrations' working committee comprising demographers from INED, representatives from the ministries concerned and academics, selected 'migrants from North Africa' as its study topic. The reasons for this choice were set out in the first published work (Girard 1977). There was the rise in the number of migrants, but more importantly it was "the particularly large cultural, linguistic and religious distance separating them from French people and that amplifies in a way the difficulties encountered by all immigrants in a foreign land" that justified this research orientation. INED now instigated studies on the "schooling of children with a different mother tongue, and who are immersed in a culture completely different from that of French children", in the Lyon metropolitan area in particular (INED 1977).

The gradual exclusion of Algerians within Lyon metropolis

Following this lead the Prefect of the Rhône issued a circular to municipal authorities in the Lyon metropolitan area on "limiting entry by foreign families" (15 June 1970). The document marked on a

⁵⁵ Articles published in the special issue of *Sociologie du Sud-est*, 1975.

map the neighbourhoods they were not allowed to move into due to “an over-concentration of immigrants in certain neighbourhoods.” No ethnic group was directly concerned, since “discriminatory measures [that would] apply the rule only to Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian families”⁵⁶ were prohibited by law, but in practice the exclusion did target North Africans as attests the same memorandum from the IM on excluding the families of North African workers.

“In these districts, the proportion of foreign pupils in the schools often exceeds 50% which creates numerous problems [...] An examination of your [the Prefect’s] report leads me to think that the increase in the density of the population in certain districts is due, in part, to the construction in a few communes of new housing blocks in which most of the dwellings are allocated to immigrants.”⁵⁷

The circular forbade admitting any new families arriving directly from their country of origin whose housing was in the recruitment zone of schools in which “the proportion of foreign children exceeds 45%” (Figure 1). Although possessing no statistical study, the minister denied giving expression to the familiar grievances of local representatives and some residents.⁵⁸ In fact he too based his position on the INED opinion surveys.

“By asking you to approve them [these measures], I consider that they will partially satisfy local representatives, appease the protesting parents, go some way to reassure public opinion, and bolster morale in the social services.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ 759W261. Letter of the IM to the Prefect of the Rhône-Alpes region. On the admission of North-African workers’ families in France, 26 May 1970.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

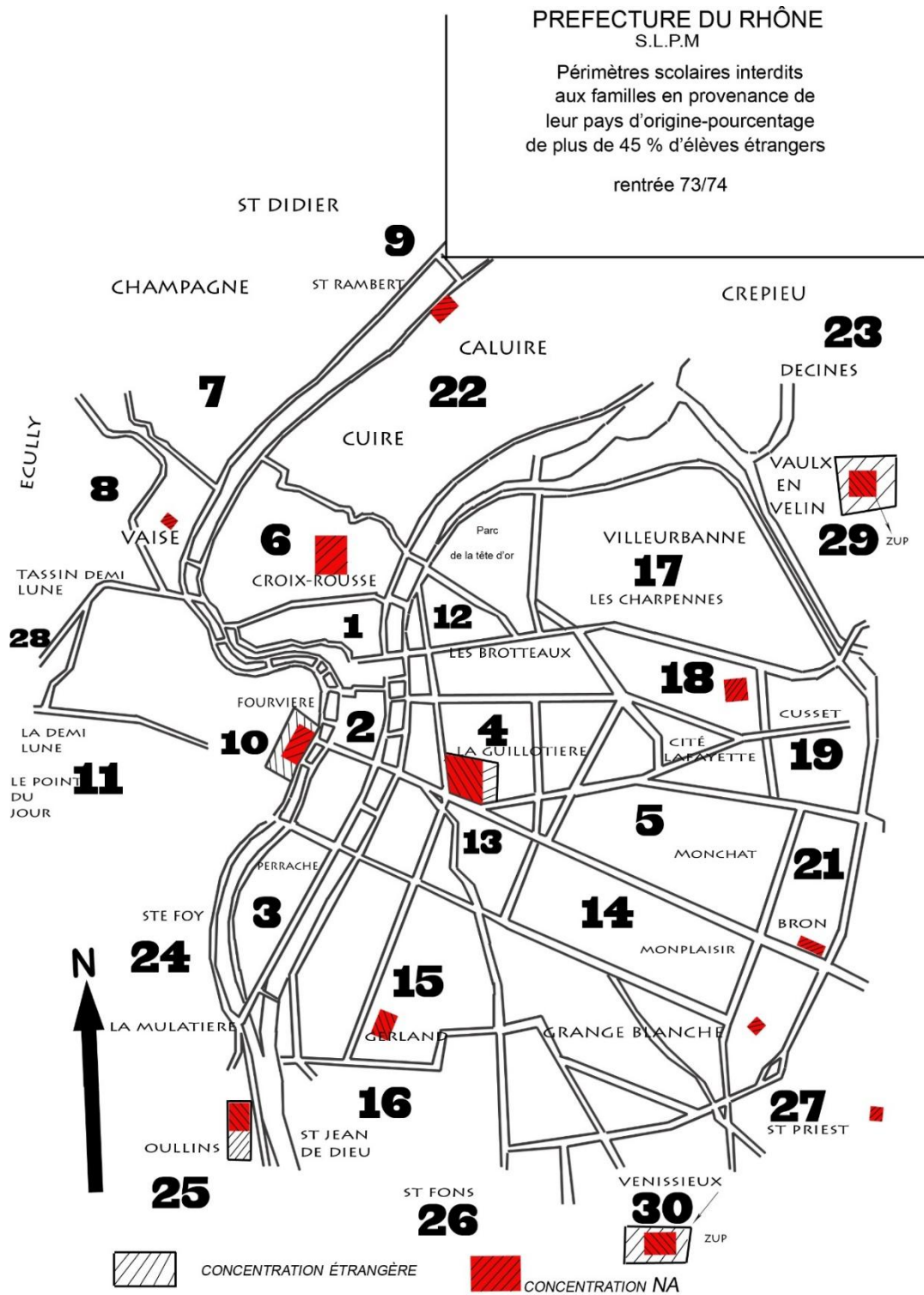


Figure 1: Admission to France of families of Algerian and other North African workers. 759W261 – Transcribed from the document accompanying the circular⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Document consulted by special permission: the title, caption, sectors, and annotations are reproduced exactly as the originals: School recruitment zones forbidden to families arriving from their country of origin—percentage of foreign pupils over 45% (School year 73/74). Key: Foreign concentration / North African concentration

An analysis of this map prompts a number of comments. The ‘concentration of North African children’ appears to be observed in the parts of the city known for the types of housing that were available to immigrants, essentially the geography of transitional or emergency housing and of older housing. First of all, the city centre districts of La Croix-Rousse (no. 6 on the map), La Guillotière (no. 14), and Saint-Jean/Fourvière (no. 10) corresponded to substandard private accommodation (tenements, rent rooms). The districts of Oullins (no. 25), Caluire (no. 22), and Gerland (no. 15) contained more *cités de transit*, temporary accommodation for those waiting for social housing. In the south-east of the Lyon agglomeration, at Vénissieux (no. 30), Saint-Priest (no. 27), Grange-Blanche, Bron (no. 21), and Vaulx-en-Valin (no. 29), there were recent blocks of *Habitations à Loyer Modéré* (HLM, public housing), while at Villeurbanne (no. 18) it was more likely to be small blocks of social housing (Olivier de Serres) built in the 1950s.

Although this map in no way gives concrete form to the question of the ‘concentration’ of these immigrant families, it is important as an archival document, in that it forms the first element in the ‘immigrant problem’ paradigm, the pseudo-objective existence of a spatial concentration. Yet the document would be contradicted by an INED study published in 1977 on the number of foreign children in schools in Lyon. Conducted by geographers from Lyon in the city’s schools, this study played down the ‘proportion of Maghrebin children’, putting it at 22% in primary schools and 23% in nursery schools. Furthermore, in the districts where their absolute numbers were higher this was explained by the ageing of the ‘local’ population as young families moved out to social housing or suburban residential areas. Finally, the Olivier de Serres district of Villeurbanne was unique in having proportions above 45%, an exceptional situation caused largely by the workforce of a single private company, Simon. Despite its detail and statistical basis, however, this study was not distributed in the prefectural services, where priority was instead given to the INED opinion surveys.

Unprecedented in restricting the freedom of immigrant families to settle in the Lyon agglomeration, the circular of 15 June 1970 prompted strong reactions from religious leaders and associations⁶¹, The liaison group, which brought together eleven associations involved with immigrant workers was unhappy with the ban measures and criticised the fact that the services of the Prefecture did not attack the underlying causes of the situation (the difficulty foreigners faced in obtaining social housing) but focused instead on the concentration of foreigners in certain neighbourhoods.

It is noteworthy that while these associations advocated stronger public action for an ambitious housing policy, they never challenged the xenophobic atmosphere that existed with regard to

⁶¹ 759W262. Letter of the Liaison Committee of Rhône organizations of the arrival of foreign workers to the Prime Minister, 19 November 1970.

foreigners. For them, the explanation lay with the lack of good housing conditions for French people themselves and with the “deterioration of relations between French and foreigners”⁶². They confirmed the comments by the Prefect about the upsurge in French complaints about foreigners and expressions of animosity towards them, and the growth in reports from foreign workers denouncing the ‘racism’ of French people.

Nor was there criticism for the idea of school areas with a ‘concentration of foreigners’, a state of affairs the group of associations also confirmed.

“Some of our organizations already have lists of blocks, dwellings, streets, and neighbourhoods, where petitions, letters, approaches to managers or owners have resulted in the departure of this or that foreign family or of single workers, in both central Lyon and the urban area.”⁶³

The Prefect was forced to reply to these criticisms by issuing a new circular in November 1970.⁶⁴ The exclusion of immigrant families had two objectives: first, the desire to “avoid the creation within the urban fabric of Lyon of full-blown ‘medinas’ [the historic quartier in Maghreb cities] out of bounds to social workers and even to the police”⁶⁵, and second the need to respond to the resentment of the French towards the foreigners.

“These complaints, often in the form of petitions with hundreds of signatures, [...], came from people whose peace and quiet has been troubled or who have suffered damage and at times assault from foreign children or teens. In some cases, those signing were so exasperated that they threatened to take the law into their own hands if no action was taken.

“The grievances come from French parents alarmed about their children’s education. Some of these parents have taken their children out of their neighbourhood school and moved them to other, usually private, schools”⁶⁶.

In this instance the fears are directly linked to the behaviour of children from immigrant families, which the circular presents as an ‘unbiased observation’. The main point made in the circular concerns the acceptable number of foreigners in a neighbourhood, referred to as the “proportion of foreign families it is sociologically recommended not to exceed in any given place in order to

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ 759W262. Letter from the Liaison Committee of Rhône organizations of the arrival of foreign workers to the Prime Minister, 19 November 1970.

⁶⁴ 759W261. Circular no. 3110, 30 November 1970. Control of the Admission of Foreign Families.

⁶⁵ 759W261. Letters from the Prefect, M. Moulins, to the pasteur and cardinal of Lyon, 31 August 1970.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

maintain harmonious relations between communities with sometimes contrasting ways of life". Although the expression 'threshold of tolerance' is not actually used, the idea of a 'quantitative threshold' appears to have been present, since the Prefect points out that nationally "the percentage used is 15% but [...] it can reach 20%". Later in the text, it is emphasized that the ban applies to the neighbourhoods where "the proportion of foreign children equals or exceeds 45% of pupils in the schools", a higher figure than the "critical threshold beyond which educational problems occur" and that sociologists set at 30% (Marié 1975).

The November 1970 circular omitted all reference to the ban and exclusion and instead put the emphasis on the existing regulations and on the difficult cohabitation between French and immigrants. It also made much of the fact that the measures could be likened to an 'educative social action' that would improve the welfare of immigrant families thanks to "resettlement conditions [that were] materially and psychologically the most favourable possible"⁶⁷. In reality, the circular officially sanctioned the idea that Algerians and North Africans in general, were considered an inferior group and a threat to the national community.

This dualist representation of the 'North African problem' was observed in two other spheres of public policy implemented by the Prefect services: the rehousing of people following slum clearance operations, and the allocation of social housing tenancies. The operation of these systems in practice reveals two conflicting objectives: the regulation of priority populations for rehousing, and the recommendation of quotas for foreign populations. While immigrants are not mentioned in the legislation itself, they are referred to openly in the associated circulars and reports.

The distribution of Algerians into the urban space: another segregative tool

The decree issued by the Ministry for Infrastructure on 5 August 1971 set out the conditions for the allocation of HLM housing to families with priority status. They were to make up 10% in new HLMs and 20% in vacant existing ones. In addition, the administration published circulars giving details of the practical application that included "recommendations" for up to "15–20% of people coming from substandard housing, and of foreigners in particular [...] to avoid producing adverse reactions".⁶⁸ Although the recommendation was not specifically directed at 'North Africans', that designation appears extensively in the reports in the Prefectoral archives on the occupants of substandard housing.

The administrative map showing the areas closed to immigrant children 'arriving from their country of origin' can be compared with the guidelines drawn up in the preparation of the Seventh Plan and

⁶⁷ 759W261. Circular no. 3110, 30 November 1970. Control of the Admission of Foreign Families.

⁶⁸ Circular no. 497, 19 October 1973.

with the Prefectoral 'directives' of 1974. These documents legitimated the spatial segregation of immigrant households and their 'rejection' from some parts of the city, as the passage quoted below makes clear:

"The inner cities must be subject to measures devised to avoid the segregation that takes hold when an old neighbourhood is colonized by a foreign population little concerned about amenities and looking to save on rent. [...] [...]

When a certain proportion of occupants is exceeded, the native population abandons the blocks of flats affected and ghettos begin to form, particularly at Lyon where some residential sectors have 60–100% of foreigners, mainly North Africans.

[...] Prevention needs to be considered at the level of immigration itself. For it is clear that an excessive concentration produces maladjustment and eventually delinquency."⁶⁹

As regards the allocation of social housing, the question became a political problem once immigrants gradually gained access to the public rented housing sector. Using as example the minutes of meetings on the changing population of Lyon, we find that the Prefect's services urged the HLM organizations to apply the 15% rule—"with 5% Maghrebins"⁷⁰—when accepting foreign families for housing in new projects and vacant dwellings alike⁷¹.

During 1973, the Prefect attempted through a series of letters and meetings to persuade the HLM organizations to accept a quantitative norm for accepting foreigners.

"In a recent meeting on social welfare management in the large housing developments, it was noted that some HLM programmes included particularly high percentages of foreign families. Thus in the ZUP (Urban Priority Zone) of Vaux-en-Velin, for 350 dwellings allocated, there are 26% of foreign households, of which 13% are Maghrebins, corresponding to a foreign population of 36%, since 47% of children are of foreign nationality, 29% of them Maghrebins.

It is of course possible that this housing development is not representative of the ZUP as a whole. It has become clear nonetheless that only by strictly respecting the percentages admitted to date can these families be expected or encouraged to adapt."⁷²

⁶⁹ 759W259. Preparation of the Seventh Plan. Replies from HLM organizations to the questionnaire from Prefect, 1974.

⁷⁰ 759W259. Letter from Prefect to the HLM organizations, 27 March 1973.

⁷¹ 759W259. Letter from Prefect to the HLM public office of Villeurbanne, 12 December 1974

⁷² 759W259. Letter from Prefect to HLM organizations, 27 March 1973.

A memorandum of December 1974 gives a synthesis of the results obtained for each public housing organization and records the recommendations made for the population rehoused in vacant dwellings.

“It would seem desirable that your proposals for the allocation of apartments falling vacant be applied in priority to dwellings in the housing structures with the lowest percentages of foreign families. In my view it is now time:

- To replace foreign families who move out by French families in the structures where foreigners make up more than 25%
- Not to put any more foreign families into structures where they make up more than 15% of occupants.”⁷³

This alarmist discourse got the backing of all the actors involved in housing, even though in reality the immigrant presence appears to have been extremely modest.⁷⁴

The synthesis produced by the SLPM on the situation in 1974 for the housing of immigrant families in the Rhône department well reflects the difficulties the authorities faced in finding a solution to the problem of ‘making immigrants invisible in the city’. Under a double constraint from statutory obligations (to rehouse people following the demolition of shanty towns and slum properties) and the ‘quotas of acceptability’ introduced for foreign families in neighbourhoods, the public services were once again confronted by an intractable dilemma.

“If it is decided that only 5% of a public housing programme can be assigned to families from the Maghreb, for the Rhône department 40,000 HLM dwellings would have to be provided for the least-favoured social classes in order to clear the backlog in rehousing this category of foreigners [...]. In reality, the problem of rehousing North African families will never be entirely solved, even with an end to all further family immigration, without investment by the central government and understanding from the French people.”⁷⁵

⁷³ 759W259. Letter from Prefect to the director of the public HLM office of Villeurbanne, 12 December 1974.

⁷⁴ Given the difficulty of finding reliable and comparable figures we have used the results of a survey by the Cellule Economique Rhône-Alpes – CERA (Rhône-Alpes Economic Department) to obtain an image of the spatial distribution in the department (INED, 1977). For example, the Logirel company created in 1960 to house ‘Muslim families’, accommodated 355 Maghrebins (out of 842 foreigners, or 39%) in 1973, against 197 at the end of 1970, equivalent to an increase of 170% in three years. The HLM office of the Rhône accommodated 596 Algerian families, 102 Tunisian families, and 39 Moroccan families. The same CERA survey shows that on 31 December 1973, of 3,702 foreign families involved, 1,150 were accommodated at Vénissieux, 249 at Villeurbanne, 224 at Bron, and 91 at Meyzieu, equivalent to 46% in these four communes of the eastern suburbs of Lyon. The town of Vénissieux alone had 31% of the foreigners of the greater Lyon urban area. This ‘concentration of foreign families’ affected mainly a few communes in the east of the Lyon region.

⁷⁵ 759W259. SLPM. Housing Foreign Families in the Rhône Department. Situation on 31 December 1974. The quotations that follow all come from this document.

The report flags up the danger that results from exceeding the “norms set by sociologists”, namely “exodus by French and European foreign families” and inevitable housing vacancies. Yet the social housing organizations could not leave dwellings empty, so “the only group that will then accept these flats are the North African foreign customers.” Faced with this powerlessness of the public housing agencies, the question of thresholds was raised again with regard to the private housing organizations, which were not “required to respect the abovementioned percentages” and that the prefectural services criticized for accepting “these families with ease”. Here too the same kinds of arguments are deployed: the thefts and criminal activities that the *Muslims* were accused of in the 1950s had given way to the formation of ghettos where juvenile delinquency flourished.

The ‘maximum threshold’ for admitting foreign families to social housing (15% of which 5% Maghrebins) was not the subject of any discussion between the housing agencies, indicating the extent to which discriminatory thinking had been accepted and institutionalized as a norm. Systematic recourse to statistics—real or invented—by street-level administrators and by public services gave this tool the status of an ‘empirical truth’. The quantitative value of such a threshold was in reality insignificant compared with the ideological message the notion conveyed: that residential grouping of these minority populations made them the focal point for hostile reactions. In addition, as Véronique de Rudder-Paurd (1980) has shown, the notion of threshold has the particularity of setting a limit below which racism is banned yet above which it is apparently legitimate.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the links between the production of knowledge and the exercise of governance during a critical historical period—the colonial period and its continuities—in a local setting—the Lyon metropolitan area—is an opportunity to renew the frameworks used for the analysis of bureaucratic administration. This comes first through the practice of a ‘history by omission’, that is examining ordinary services (the numerous administrative services of the IM), remote from national-level authorities and political and ideological concerns. This particular history from below shows the wide variety of tools of governance available to local administrators. The main focus of public social action during this historical sequence was the integration of *Muslim* populations (designated successively as *French Muslims from Algeria*, *Algerians*, *North Africans*, and lastly *Maghrebins*) in the metropolitan area. The actors involved were responsible for counting, monitoring, and managing these populations, and for organizing their spatial distribution within the urban territory. The knowledge produced to implement this public action legitimated a colonial ideology that, although premised on racial assumptions, encountered different stances among the actors. But all involved—whether

catholic voluntary associations, research institutes, or the administrations (Interior, Foreign and Labour ministries)—shared one idea in common, that the integration of these populations into French society was problematic and required a specific treatment.

It is for this reason that the reconstitution of the historical process behind the definition and application of this differential treatment requires more than a simple factual description of how codification was accepted; for it concerns the invention through established norms of the marginalisation and even exclusion of these populations. Basing the approach on archival materials has made possible a historical analysis of the cognitive and practical categories that informed the bureaucratic work, the primary objective of which remained maintaining law and order. Not until 1980 was a stop put, officially at least, to this ‘discriminatory policy’ and its ‘failings’, to use the Rhône Prefect’s own words:

“Not only is there no law allowing discrimination against foreigners and French nationals in the allocation of HLM housing, but such discrimination constitutes a breach of the law of 1 July 1972 on racism. I have just been reminded of this fact by the administration.”⁷⁶

The Prefect went on to set out ‘new rules’ for the allocation of housing, provisions that in fact marked a direct continuation of the history we have documented: they imposed increasing “everywhere the proportion of foreign families when it was below 15%, while maintaining it for percentages from 15 to 20%, and reducing it for percentages above 20%”. So, although the ‘threshold of tolerance’ was indeed placed higher, the principle of segregation, even the making of “ghettos with quotas” (Weil 2005, p. 375) continued to develop in the institutions of public action. Writing the history of institutionalized intolerance remains a work in progress.

List of abbreviation

AMANA: Moral Assistance and Support for North-African (association)

CTAM: Technical Counsellor for Muslim Affairs (SAMAS manager)

ESNA: North-African Social Studies (publication)

FAS: Social Action Funding (State Department)

FMA: French Muslim of Algeria

HLM: Public Housing for low-income People

⁷⁶ 759W262. Note of Prefect on the housing of foreign families. 14 January 1980.

IM: Interior Ministry

INED: National Institute of Demographic Studies

Logirel: Housing and Building Management for the Lyon region (Housing Company for Algerian Families)

MLSS: Ministry of Labour and Social Security

SAMAS: Department of Muslim Affairs and Social Action

SLPM: Migrant Liaison and Promotion Department)

SSFNA: North-African Family Social Service (association)

SONACOTRAL: Building State Company for Algerian Workers

References

- Belmessous, Fatiha. 2013. Du « seuil de tolérance » à la « mixité sociale » : répartition et mise à l'écart des immigrés dans l'agglomération lyonnaise (1970-1990). *Belgeo* (3). <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/11540>
- Bertand, Romain. 2006. Vérités d'empire(s). La question des continuités du colonial au prisme de l'histoire impériale comparée. <https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01065656>
- Blévis, Laure. 2001. Les avatars de la citoyenneté en Algérie coloniale ou les paradoxes d'une catégorisation. *Droit & Société*. 48(2): 557-581.
- Brattain, Michelle. 2007. Race, racism, and Antiracism : UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public. *The American Historical Review*. 112(5): 1386-1413.
- Cefaï, Daniel. 1996. La construction des problèmes publics. Définitions de situations dans des arènes publiques. *Réseaux*. 75(1): 43-66.
- Chevalier, Louis. 1947, Le problème démographique nord-africain. *Travaux et Documents* (6).
- Chevalier, Louis eds. 1947. Documents sur l'immigration. *Travaux et Documents* (2).
- Conklin, Alice. L. 1997. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1885-1930*. Stanford: University Press.
- Escafré-Dublet, Angeline and Lionel Kesztenbaum. 2011. Mesurer l'intégration des immigrés. Genèse et histoire des enquêtes Girard-Stoetzel, 1945-1953. *Genèses* 84: 93-112.
- Foucault, Michel. 1975. Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison. Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, Michel. 1994. *Dits et écrits III*. Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, Michel. 1997. *Il faut défendre la société*. Paris: Seuil.

Gastaut, Yvan. 1999. La volte-face de la politique française d'immigration durant les Trente Glorieuses. *Cahiers de l'URMIS* (5): 15-25.

Girard, Alain, Yves Charbit and Marie-Laure Lamy. 1974, Attitude des Français à l'égard de l'immigration étrangère. Nouvelle enquête d'opinion, *Population* (6): 1015-1089.

Ihl, Olivier, Martine Kaluzynski and Gilles Pollet, eds. 2003. *Les sciences du gouvernement*. Paris: Economica.

Kaluzynski Martine and Renaud Payre, eds. 2013. *Savoirs de gouvernement*. Paris: Economica.

Lascombes Pierre and Patrick Le Galès, eds. 2004. *Gouverner par les instruments*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Lazarus, Neil. 2004. *Penser le postcolonial, une introduction critique*. Paris: Amsterdam.

Lyons, Amelie. H. 2013. *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole: Algerian Families and the French Welfare State during Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University.

Marie, Michel. 1975. Quelques réflexions sur le concept de seuil de tolérance aux immigrés : ce que l'on fait dire aux sociologues. *Sociologie du Sud-Est* 5-6: 39-50.

Math, Antoine. 1993. Les allocations familiales et l'Algérie coloniale : à l'origine du FAS et de son financement par les régimes de prestations familiales. *Recherches et Prévisions. Revue de la CNAF* 53: 35-44.

Merle, Isabelle. 2004. De la « légalisation » de la violence en contexte colonial. Le régime de l'indigénat en question. *Politix* 66: 137-162.

Mussard, Christine. 2015. Réinventer la commune ? Genèse de la commune mixte, une structure administrative inédite dans l'Algérie coloniale. *Histoire@Politique* 27(3): 93-108.

Reynaud-Paligot, Carole. 2015. *La République raciale (1860-1930). Paradigme social et idéologie républicaine*. Paris: PUF.

de Rudder-Paurd, Véronique. 1980. La tolérance s'arrête au seuil. *Pluriel* 21: 3-13.

Saada, Emmanuelle. 2001. La situation coloniale vue d'ailleurs : regards croisés transatlantiques. *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* (110): 31-52.

Sanson, Robert. 1947. Les travailleurs nord-africains de la région parisienne. *Documents sur l'immigration. Travaux et documents* (2)

Sayad, Abdelmalek. 1994, Le mode de génération des générations « immigrées ». *L'Homme et la Société* (111-112): 155-174.

Sibeud Emmanuelle. 2007. Du postcolonialisme au questionnement postcolonial : pour un transfert critique. *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 54 (4): 142-155.

Simon, Patrick. 1998. Nationalité et origine dans la statistique française. Les catégories ambiguës. *Population* (3): 541-568.

Smouts, Marie-Christine. eds. 2007. *La situation postcoloniale*. Paris: FNSP.

Lokale Wissensregime der Migration. Akteur*innen, Praxen, Ordnungen
Hrsg. Jan Lange, Manuel Liebig, Charlotte Rächle
Gesamtmanuskript, Stand 22.06.2022

Spire, Alexis. 2003. Semblables et pourtant différents. La citoyenneté paradoxale des « Français musulmans d'Algérie » en métropole. *Genèses* 53 (4): 48-68

Spire, Alexis. 2005. *Etrangers à la carte. L'administration de l'immigration en France (1945-1975)*. Paris: Grasset.

Stoler, Ann L. 2009. *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stoler, Ann. L., Frederic Cooper. 2013. *Repenser le colonialisme*. Paris: Payot.

Viet, Vincent. 1998. *La France immigrée. Construction d'une politique (1914-1997)*. Paris: Fayard.

Weil, Patrick. 2005. *La France et ses étrangers. L'aventure d'une politique d'immigration (1938-1981)*. Paris: Folio-Histoire.

Belmessous, Fatiha is a senior researcher in social history at the Laboratoire Environnement, Ville, Société (University of Lyon/École Nationale des Travaux Publics de l'État [ENTPE]). Her research focuses on categorisation in urban and housing policies as well as on the racialization of the city, since the end of the 19th century (creation of the State-Nation model). Since 2011, she has received research grants from the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region and from the Institute of Human Sciences of Lyon, working frequently in Barcelona (Spain).